

Gambling with your savings

Anna Pha

After trying for eight years the Howard Government got its "Choice of Fund" superannuation legislation through the Senate last week, putting the retirement savings of millions of workers at greater risk. This was made possible when the Australian Democrats capitulated and did a deal with the Government. The new legislation paves the way for an assault on the major industry funds and will give employers a stronger hand in pressuring workers to sign up with funds of their (the employer's) choice.

It may even give the employers the ultimate say.

There is more than \$565 billion in superannuation assets under management in Australia – more than the total savings in bank accounts.

Seven and a half million Australians have super savings in what are known as industry funds – not-for-profit funds – which charge lower fees and have so far provided their members with above average performance. Trade union representatives sit with employers on the boards of these funds.

Superannuation funds are one of the major sources of investment capital for use by the financial sector and industry. The largest funds hold huge bundles of shares in many of the largest corporations. The managers of these funds play an extremely powerful role in shaping the fortunes of companies, in deciding what projects go ahead, and the direction of economic development.

The big institutional investors can make or break smaller companies and have a dramatic effect on share prices and stock markets.

And of course they make huge profits out of the fees for managing people's savings, as well as all the under-the-counter commissions and other associated rackets.

This new legislation will open the field to greater competition, leading to higher risk-taking, crashes (workers' losing their savings),

take-overs and the eventual monopolisation of the sector by a handful of financial conglomerates.

Complex

Members of super schemes already have choices within their fund – each carrying a different degree of risk, such as what proportion of savings are invested in real estate, fixed term deposits, the stock market, derivatives (pure gambling) or overseas. Most workers do not exercise these choices – they leave it to their funds to decide.

Now workers are being told they have another choice: a choice of fund. Superannuation funds will be required to make certain disclosures about fees and other charges for each of their products in the coming year as a trade off for the introduction of choice of funds.

Any worker seriously thinking of exercising this new right to "choice of fund" faces a complex and confusing situation.

The performance of funds – as measured in percentage returns on savings – is cyclical reflecting the economic situation. There are fees and other charges to consider. It also depends on how long a worker will be in a fund.

For example, the difference between a fee of one and two percent over 30 years, all other things being equal, could make a difference of 20 percent in outcome – the difference between say \$200,000 and \$160,000. But all other things are not equal. There are so many factors to take into consideration. And if the period were over 10 not 30 years, the picture would be completely different. No one can tell in advance.

There are good years and bad years. The only certainty in the super casino is that individual workers' retirement savings are at risk. The fund managers and other parasites feeding off this super profit "industry" do not put their capital at risk.

The finance sector, the most



parasitic of all, is riddled with corruption and the risks become greater as funds compete for the highest immediate returns to attract customers.

Workers cannot make an informed choice. Any "choice of fund" will be illusory in practice.

Employer choice

Under the legislation, if a worker wants to choose a fund there is a set of procedures, including giving the employer written notice to that effect. The employer has two months to carry out the request. Not all categories of workers have a choice. The chosen fund must meet certain criteria, and employers may refuse a request in certain circumstances.

Employers will be required to provide certain groups of workers with a "standard choice form" on July 1, 2005, for completion before July 29.

The net effect of all the bureaucratic paperwork required is that no worker could, on their own, exercise that right unless the employer co-operated. The government's aim is

to facilitate the destruction of the industry funds and enable employers to choose which fund suits them – including their own corporate fund.

The real and secure alternative is a return to the age pension – fund-

ed under a progressive tax system during working life – with investments made in public infrastructure and services such as housing, utilities etc which generate ongoing income and meet social needs of the community. ✪

The hand-over in Iraq

The early hand-over of authority by the administrator of the US occupiers to the interim Prime Minister of Iraq is in recognition of the fact that the invasion and occupation have failed.

However, the claim that sovereignty has been restored, that power has been handed to Iraqi authorities and that the occupation has ended, is not yet reality. None-the-less this step provides new opportunities to the Iraqi people and their worldwide supporters to intensify the struggle for these objectives.

The occupation will only end when all occupying troops are removed.

Sovereignty will only be fully restored when the economy is in the hands of the Iraqi people.

Power will only be in the hands of Iraqi authorities when a new government is democratically elected.

The Iraqi people need the support of every progressive activist from political parties, trade unions and community organisations to help bring the occupation to an end, to restore sovereignty and give the Iraqi people power in their country and over their lives.

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Blatant vote buying

The Howard Government, notorious for its lies about the Iraq war, has extended its immorality to every aspect of its domestic policy making as well. Faced with widespread criticism and opposition, it has launched an unprecedented propaganda campaign to boost its stocks and win votes. It is using hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money for the direct benefit of the Liberal Party. The TV and newspaper advertisements range from its "anti-terror" campaign to its so-called energy, health and water policies.

In what must be the height of cynicism it ran an advertisement in *The Daily Telegraph* headed "ATTENTION employees in the building and construction industry" inviting workers in the industry to phone up WageLine to ascertain whether they are receiving their correct entitlements.

The ads were inserted by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and come from the same government that has attempted in every way to encourage employers to attacks workers' wages and conditions. It has levelled its most serious attacks and ferocious anti-union laws on building industry workers and their union – the CFMEU.

Perhaps the sting is in the tail of the advertisement about workers' entitlements. At the same time it invites readers to contact the Building Industry Taskforce to report "unlawful behaviour" in the building and construction industry! In the Government's view "unlawful behaviour" relates most specifically to militant trade unionism, not the criminal behaviour of employers.

For some time the Government has been circulating another piece of blatant and lying propaganda called "Strengthening Medicare", when its intentions are the direct opposite. It presents the establishment of a "safety net" as an advance and a good reform whereas a fully-funded Medicare has no need of a safety net.

The Government's energy policy is another scandalous sham. Far from leading to a lessening of pollution caused by carbon gas emissions when coal and oil are burned it will substantially increase emissions. It has lowered the excise duty paid on these fuels. Already the NSW State Labor Government has decided to buy a new fleet of buses – all diesel powered. The reason: because the excise on diesel fuel has been lowered.

This policy decision has a direct political objective – to win the votes of farmers in marginal country electorates. It has nothing to do with the protection of the environment or reducing the danger of global warming. If farmers fall for this blatant vote buying the long-term consequences for them may well be the prolongation of drought conditions which have already had devastating consequences in the last few years.

Consistent with the government's attempts to militarise Australian society, Howard and other Liberal Party candidates are continually posing with Australian troops in "photo-ops" for the media. Howard is using the armed forces to achieve his political objectives – such as the war in Iraq and in the Solomon Islands. His aim is to turn the armed forces into a political arm of the Liberal Party.

Then there is the policy being trumpeted regarding water. It is a policy that has also unfortunately been subscribed to by State Labor Party governments. It can only have been agreed to by environmental illiterates. In effect, the agreement privatises water and will inevitably bring with it massive corruption in the buying and selling of water rights. But it will not add anything to the cleaning up of Australia's few rivers and its severely limited water resources.

On another front Howard is attempting to impose his conservative and authoritarian outlook by forcing schools to provide a flagpole and to "salute" the flag on pain of being deprived on school funding for other purposes.

Even the president of the RSL, Major-General Bill Crews favoured encouragement and persuasion rather than linking it with a threat to withhold funding.

This flood of Liberal Party policies and the use of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money to win votes for the Liberal Party indicates desperation as Howard and his mentor George Bush continue to face massive rejection of their war policies and their attacks on everything progressive that has ever been won by the people of their countries.

There is only one answer – Out with the Howard Government!

PRESS FUND

Bertold Brecht's famous 1927 play, *The Beggars Opera*, depicted (among other things) the terrible plight of impoverished turn-of-the-century Londoners. We can appreciate how they felt! The Press Fund has so far received considerably less than it needs to reach its yearly target of \$14,000, and we're feeling decidedly poor. In fact, in order to reach that target we'll need an average of \$334 per week in contributions until our last day of publication in December. So please, if you possibly can, send us a contribution for the next issue! We acknowledge with gratitude the contribution of the following this week:

B Appleton \$20, J Ayres \$50, B B \$20, Steve Cooper \$10, Harriott \$5, J R \$120, Ray Scott \$25.

This week's total: \$250. Progressive total \$5660.

Survey's grim findings on Indigenous health

Jodi Hoffmann

Aboriginal people will continue to endure poor health and disadvantage unless a major shift in focus toward early child development is undertaken.

This recommendation has emerged from the first of five volumes of the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS), released in Perth in June.

This ground-breaking report is the most comprehensive survey

experience with other countries' Indigenous health records, Professor Wilkes said that the report highlighted how as a nation we have fallen behind Canada, New Zealand and the United States in narrowing the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations over the past 30 years.

The report has called for a national strategy to break the cycles of Aboriginal poor health – a strategy that looks beyond health to the resources needed for healthy child development.

surround children with to actually make a difference to their whole of life chances. We would like this to actually be the blueprint for an Aboriginal strategy for improving child and young health", Professor Stanley said.

Third World

"Some of the problems we've highlighted in this report in relation to alcohol, smoking, cultural value and otitis media (ear infections) – even just those four, you could see results within a very short time. We're talking within a year."

The WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey has found that the recurrent infections that pose a major health risk to our children are compatible with Third World countries.

Heather D'Antoine, a survey steering committee member and Kutunga Network manager, said that many of those infections had long-term consequences.

"There's no doubt that ear infections are at epidemic rates, with 18 percent of Aboriginal children suffering from recurrent problems. In fact, in children aged 0-4 years, the rate is four times higher than what the World Health Organisation classifies as a serious health problem. What we are seeing is really alarming and a massive public health issue", she said.

She said that there were serious implications for language development and learning given that for those suffering from recurring ear infections, 69 percent, have had at least one episode that has ruptured an eardrum, and 30 percent have abnormal hearing.

She also noted that recurring chest, skin and gastro-intestinal infections worsened as the isolation increased.

"These infections can have a big impact on the child's health and development. It is particularly distressing when we know how many of these recurring infections are preventable with appropriate treatment and environmental measures", Ms D'Antoine said.

"We don't need to wait to make improvements in Aboriginal child health. It's about getting important health messages across in a culturally appropriate way."

Professor Wilkes said: "Many of the problems faced by our children can have life-long consequences, yet a lot of these problems are preventable. We need to look at all the things it takes for children to grow healthy and happy. It's not a quick medical fix but means looking at their total environment and experiences so that they can have a fair start to life."

Four more volumes of findings will be released over the next 18 months and will be used nationally to develop strategies to improve outcomes for Aboriginal families.

Koori Mail, June 2004 (abridged)
The WAACHS is available from www.ichr.ruwa.edu.au

"There's no doubt that ear infections are at epidemic rates, with 18 percent of Aboriginal children suffering from recurrent problems."

undertaken of Indigenous children and aims to unravel the complexities associated with our higher mortality and illness rates compared with non-Indigenous Australians.

It follows five years of planning and over two years in the field which saw 130 surveying staff (more than half being Aboriginal) knocking on more than 130,000 doors throughout the State.

Designed to build a store of knowledge from which preventative strategies can be developed, to promote and maintain the healthy development and social, emotional, academic and vocational well-being of Aboriginal children, the survey included interviews with 11,300 family members, 2000 families and more than 3000 teachers, and involved one in five of all Aboriginal children in WA.

Central to the completion of this report was the expertise included within the steering committee, comprising senior Aboriginal people from a diversity of backgrounds and organisations and led by Nyoongar man Ted Wilkes.

Involved within Indigenous health for many years, Associate Professor Wilkes saw the compiling of the report as an important step in addressing the perception that the problem was too big to fix.

No more excuses

"This document means there can be no more excuses", he said.

Although Professor Wilkes acknowledges that many of the issues are well known by Aboriginal people as a day-to-day reality, he believes the report provides a wider framework in which to tackle the issues.

"Aboriginal people have heard the alarm bells ringing for years. This survey gives us the evidence we need for new strategies that look at the issue from a different direction to break the cycle of poor health – and that means we have to find ways to give our children a better start in life", he said.

Comparing the Australian

These include:

- The physical environment (housing, clean water, sanitation and nutrition)
- The levels of family income available to support children
- The creation of human and psychological capital within the family (education and parenting skills)
- The social capital available to individuals (cultural heritage and traditions, safer communities).

Action within the health care system to improve outcomes would include:

- Improving nutritional knowledge and access to affordable nutritious food
- Improving rates of contact of Aboriginal families and children with health services
- Improving the availability of maternal health services and supports
- Reducing the rate of early teenage pregnancy
- Reducing rate of tobacco, alcohol and other drug use – particularly by pregnant women
- Reducing the rates of childhood infectious diseases.

The report has highlighted many of the factors that are adverse to healthy development, such as 13 percent of Indigenous children are born prematurely (general population 8 percent), 21 percent have poor growth in-utero (general population 13 percent), 11 percent are born to mothers under age 17 compared with two percent of the general population, and that 49 percent of mothers of Aboriginal children used tobacco during pregnancy, compared with 22 percent of the general population.

Fiona Stanley, director of the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and former Australian of the Year said, "It highlights some incredibly important results as to how to actually break the cycle of Aboriginal disadvantage by focusing on pregnancy and early childhood, particularly in relation to the kind of environments you need to

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The nation's water privatised

Peter Mac

State and federal leaders at last week's Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in Canberra have for the first time in Australia's history agreed to hand over a huge proportion of the nation's river water to business interests as private property.

The agreement will at last increase the flow of the nation's biggest natural waterway, the Murray Darling river system. However, if this proves insufficient and more water needs to be allocated to saving the river environment – as is almost certain – the agricultural water owners will be compensated for 97 percent of their loss of profits by state and federal governments!

In short, the taxpayers will have to pay these agribusinesses millions of dollars as compensation for doing absolutely nothing with a natural resource that quite literally falls to them from the sky.

Western Australia was the only state that rejected the deal, because its few positive attributes were focused on extra water flow and remedial works funding for the Murray-Darling river system, rather than for the western rivers.

The agreement fails to seriously address the issue of appropriate water use. Much of the COAG meeting's discussion involved restrictions on the use of water by households. These are certainly necessary for those of our major cities whose water storage is under severe threat. (Sydney's main water storage, the Warragamba Dam, is now at a record low, with less than 48 percent of capacity.)

However, the Prime Minister Howard went further, proposing that these restrictions should become permanent, rather than a temporary expedient. This smacks of penalising households, which in point of fact account for a mere nine percent of our total water consumption. Even the combined consumption of the electricity, gas, mining and manufacturing industries only constitutes 13 percent.

The biggest consumer of water in Australia is agriculture, which accounts for 67 percent of the total. And the biggest individual water-consuming industries are those involving cultivation of cotton (11.7 percent) and rice (7.8 percent). Although these two industries consume almost 20 percent of the nation's water, and make huge profits, they employ only a fraction of the agricultural workforce, which in itself comprises only four percent of the national total.

So you might think that a sane water use policy would involve

phasing out these industries in favour of low water use agriculture. Not a bit of it! The "water summit" government leaders totally avoided such uncomfortable issues and instead decided to privatise our water resources, in the fond hope that the market will sort everything out.

It won't, of course. It will actually consolidate the position of the "water guzzlers". Among the biggest of these are the southern Queensland irrigators. They already have a huge infrastructure in place for drawing and holding water from the Bolonne River, which contributes to the Murray Darling system.

Under a water management plan to come into force later this year the water entitlements of the 40 biggest Balonne River irrigators will fall from 460 gigalitres to 380 gigalitres. This might seem like a big loss. However, the irrigators will still be entitled to an amount equivalent to 80 percent of the entire extra flow allocated to the Murray Darling system under the agreement.

Moreover, the amount of water these irrigators have been drawing is far in excess of their needs, since the bulk of it has gone to fill their massive water storage systems. The biggest irrigator, Cubbie Farm, is said to be able to hold 480 gigalitres (about the volume of Sydney Harbour). The right of these agribusinesses to hold so much water went totally unchallenged at the COAG meeting, and no one questioned whether highly irrigated crops such as rice or cotton should be grown in Australia at all.

The Balonne River irrigator conglomerates will be well-placed to ride out future droughts, and even to benefit from them since they will sell water to NSW farmers downstream, who thanks to the irrigators are now deprived of huge amounts of water.

The COAG agreement is just as cynical as the National Forests Agreement, which has handed over vast areas of our forests to the private sector, and the recently-announced national energy policy, which will provide massive financial assistance to the very industries that are polluting the atmosphere.

Whether the modest extra flow promised to the Murray Darling system will be sufficient to rectify its terrible environmental problems remains to be seen. But it is abundantly clear that the multinational agribusinesses are guaranteed to benefit from the agreement, and that it is the ordinary Australian people who will foot the bill.

Reference: Australian Bureau of Statistics *Water Account, Australia 2000-01* ☛



Irrigators have been drawing water far in excess of their needs

Rally in Adelaide joins calls for Iraqi sovereignty

Bob Briton

On the eve of the handover of extremely restricted powers to the interim government in Iraq, around 400 people from a wide range of opinion gathered in Adelaide to protest the loss of sovereignty and suffering that the ongoing occupation represents.

Rally MC Anne McMenamin pointed out that opposition to the occupation of Iraq was not restricted to the political left. She first called on former national president of the Liberal Party John Valder to address the crowd. He said that his comments were not being made on the spur of the moment – that his concerns about the Howard Government's "grovelling at Bush's feet" had been building for some time.

Mr Valder recommended that people show no mercy to Howard at the forthcoming elections, given that the PM has shown no compassion for the refugees languishing in detention, for the war dead in Iraq or for the situation of Australia's service men and women. He expressed his wish that one day Bush, Blair and Howard would face a suitable international tribunal for orchestrating what he pointed out was the invasion of Iraq.

Bill Hartley – former AMWU



Kurna elder – John Smith

Photo: Avante Media Australia

Media and Publicity Officer, Victorian ALP State Secretary and ALP National Executive member – traced the history of imposed political systems in the Middle East. He pointed out that nobody in the region is looking to the Iraqi "model" as inspiration for establishing new democratic structures in their countries. He, too, called on the voters of Australia to throw the Howard Government out for its role in the Iraqi tragedy.

Ruth Russell – the Adelaide activist that went to Baghdad as a human shield – spelled out the realities of the new Iraqi government. She said it could not make laws without reference to the occupying powers, it could not revoke laws made by those powers and it could not do anything about the 14 permanent US military bases being constructed on Iraqi territory.

Human Rights lawyer Michael Hourigan spoke of his experiences in Baghdad where 70 per cent unemployment, polluted water, destroyed services, uncontrolled crime and the humiliations of occupation are pushing people to desperate acts of resistance. He noted that the revelations about the

Abu Ghraib prison proved to be the final straw for many Iraqis.

Stehen Darley of the NOWAR coalition gave a detailed report about the privileged position of corporations with White House connections in the conspicuously profitable work of reconstructing Iraq. He startled many of the people attending the rally when he pointed out that one of the favoured contractors, Kellogg, Brown and Root Pty Ltd, now has its headquarters in Adelaide at 186 Greenhill Rd. KBR is a subsidiary of Halliburton, the corporation linked to plutocratic US Vice President Dick Cheney and is behind a number of big Australian infrastructure jobs like the Alice Springs to Darwin railway.

Kurna elder John Smith conveyed the sympathy of the Indigenous people for the trials of the Iraqi people.

During the demonstration a young Iraqi boy stood before the crowd with wires attached to his outstretched arms in a chilling reference to the notorious events at Abu Ghraib.

Rock band Inferno added their guitar driven rock message to the event. ☛

Pete's Corner



Freespirit severs "slavery" link

Months of union pressure have convinced the WA "slave labour" rort company, Freespirit, to cut ties with programs organised by the State's powerful Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIWA). "Freespirit will not get involved with any of these programs again", pledged the company's managing director, blaming the CCIWA for its involvement.

The decision followed Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) revelations that 29 skilled tradesmen had been imported from South Africa and paid effective rates as low as \$8.60 an hour.

The pipe fitters, welders and boilermakers walked off sites around WA two months ago to protest against their treatment.

One boilermaker said he was earning \$13 an hour at Port Hedland, after deductions, alongside Australians on \$44 an hour.

He likened his situation to "slavery".

The AMWU has been urging Freespirit to cease "exploitation" which Secretary Jock Ferguson said "undermined every agreement and every worker in Australia".

Freespirit managing director

Paul Rigby signalled his agreement, through public relations agency RHK, as lawyers for the labour hire outfit granted the union access to wage records.

But neither Rigby, nor anyone else from Freespirit, was available to answer claims that their press release was so full of inaccuracies it cast doubt on the company's real motivation.

AMWU organiser Steve McCartney took issue with Freespirit's assertion that the "company had attempted to be open and negotiate in good faith ..."

The truth, Mr McCartney said, was that for more than a month Freespirit refused to negotiate at all. It hired a law firm and a spin doctor and conducted all discussions through those agencies. It categorically refused to deal with the South Africans as a group.

As for the company's claim that "An audit has been conducted which found that the company had done nothing wrong", McCartney said an internal examination resulted in Freespirit offering individuals settlements of between \$900 and \$4000 a head. It subsequently demanded that every South African sign a new con-

tract seeking to indemnify Freespirit from any action arising from their employment in Australia.

"A number of tradesmen have been offered jobs with other people in Australia but none of them want to leave us - so we can't be doing too much wrong", claimed Rigby.

Steve McCartney said South Africans are hamstrung by immigration regulations that prevent them working for a minimum of 28 days while alternative sponsorships are processed. Even so, at least two of their number - Ronald Oliveira and Ian Potzeiter - have already accepted alternative sponsorships.

"Mr Rigby said Freespirit would honour all its obligations to the South African tradesmen ..."

The South Africans said they were promised their wives and children would be able to join them once they began employment in Australia. Mr McCartney said Freespirit is now tying applications for family visas to signing new contracts, including indemnities, with a wholly-owned Freespirit subsidiary.

No one from Freespirit, including Rigby, would comment on the statement. ☼



LABOUR NOTES

The Labor Council of NSW (NSWLC) and the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) have registered "strenuous objections" to NSW government moves to flog off public school cleaning contracts to the "lowest bidder". Recent campaigns have highlighted the exploitation of migrant women paid less than \$10 an hour. Secretary of the NSWLC John Robertson said the government's failure to insist school contractors retained existing workers, or even applied the award, was evidence that NSW Industrial Relations Minister John Della Bosca had embraced a "race to the bottom". "This Minister and his department are threatening the job security and earnings of some of the lowest paid people in NSW", Mr Robertson said. LHMU Secretary Annie Owens, said contractual "standards" had been spelled out at a meeting with senior departmental officials.

After years of undermining awards, union negotiated collective agreements and trade union representation as head of the Office of the Employment Advocate, Jonathon Hamberger has been appointed to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. In his job as Employment Advocate, one of Hamberger's main tasks was to promote individual work contracts (Australian Workplace Agreements - AWAs) as against collective bargaining. "As head of the Office of the Employment Advocate he has consistently approved AWAs in breach of the no-disadvantaged test. The direct result of this has been that the lowest paid and most vulnerable workers are being paid below award rates of pay", said Dave Kelly, Secretary of the WA Branch of the LHMU. No prizes for guessing what Hamberger's role will be on the Commission.

Cluttered desks, poor posture and hours spent in front of a computer are damaging the health of office staff, with increasing numbers suffering "Irritable Desk Syndrome", according to a report in the UK-based safety magazine *Hazard*. Researchers at NEC-Mitsubishi say that regular breaks and making desks more personal could reduce the symptoms of this condition. Their survey found 67 percent of office workers said that they are more tied to their desk than they were two years ago and around 40 percent said they were infuriated by too much clutter on their desks. The CPSU has been disappointed by Federal Government moves to abolish the country's peak safety body, the National Occupational Health and Safety Council (NOHSC). "The Federal Government is also moving to abolish the automatic role of unions to police this area", said Mr Browne. Private call centres have also been singled out for forcing workers to "grab whatever desk is available". The CPSU supported the report's call for workers to have regular breaks, but pressure from performance targets often stymied workers' ability to take such precautions.

Qantas crews to go offshore

Qantas appears to be spoiling for a fight after its announcement last week that it would shift 400 of its international flight crew positions offshore to London. The Flight Attendants' Association (FAAA) declared it would reject the move, which it said was intended to drive down wages and conditions of local employees.

The announcement was made "with no apologies at all" from CEO Geoff Dixon, who failed to rule out further off-shore hiring.

The FAAA described the move as a direct threat to the job security and working conditions of Australian staff, and announced they would fight the establishment of any new overseas bases with "all means available".

"Existing wages and conditions will come under threat as cheaper overseas labour provides an economic incentive for Qantas to drive down local wages and conditions and continue to shift more and more Australian jobs overseas.

"Of course with the constant threat of moving more jobs overseas the bargaining power of cabin crew is weakened."

Qantas said that they would offer the London jobs to Australian-based crew in the first instance, but if they could not fill the positions with Australian crew the jobs would be filled locally.

Qantas are yet to announce what salaries and conditions will be offered but the FAAA has warned staff considering the move that "although the offer may look initially attractive, it will need close scrutiny".

"We think Qantas are trying to soften the flight attendants by having reasonable terms and conditions in London. Over time we think those terms and conditions will erode", said Victoria Skinner, the FAAA's National Industrial Officer.

Qantas' desire to undercut Australian workers by setting up foreign bases is not new - it

already employs staff at bases in Auckland and Bangkok. The EBA covering its Australian workers expires in December this year, and the FAAA has flagged the hiring of foreign crew as a major issue in the next round of negotiations.

Over the term of the last EBA Qantas also set up its budget international offshoot "Australian Airlines" - seen as another attempt to undercut the conditions offered to its international flight crew.

Since the budget airline's launch in October 2002 the FAAA has been in constant - and very successful - battle with Qantas to ensure Australian Airlines' crew conditions are brought up to par with those of Qantas staff.

Remaining resolute in the face of industrial action, Mr Dixon stated: "They won't bring us to a standstill, that's a hypothetical".

He maintained that Qantas' relations with its international crew were still "very, very good". ☼

Six charged over ACT death

Six individuals and four firms charged over the ACT's "worst ever industrial accident" are in court as tough new safety laws came into force. Lawyers for the four companies concerned have asked for more time to respond to charges over the collapse of a jet hangar at Canberra Airport last year - the hangar that was used to house the Prime Minister's VIP jet.

The companies that have been charged face fines of several hundred thousand dollars for what the *Canberra Times* reported as the Territory's "worst ever industrial accident".

Unions have welcomed the investigation into the hangar collapse, which could have been much worse. There could have been more deaths, but for the fact that many of the workers on the site were at lunch when the accident happened.

"We welcome an inquiry to get to the bottom of what happened", said Glenn Parry, CFMEU Construction Division Assistant Secretary. "Not necessarily to see people get pinged but to find out why it happened so that it doesn't happen again.

The court proceedings got underway as new occupational health and safety laws came into effect in the ACT despite a loud campaign by local businesses and the Territory's Liberal opposition.

The new laws give unions "right of entry" into workplaces to ensure that safety conditions are up to scratch.

Even as the laws were being passed ACT unions came across a building site that has been labelled "an accident waiting to happen".

Scaffolding had been erected within centimetres of live power lines and a complete absence of

harnesses was accompanied by "fall traps everywhere".

Even the scaffolding had been erected with gaps in the planks.

"It highlights the need for unions to have access to these jobs", said Mr Parry. "It makes you wonder if [employers] are paying any notice to the new laws."

The CFMEU has welcomed the new laws, coming on the back of the ACT Government enacting industrial manslaughter legislation.

"There's been more discussion of safety issues since the industrial manslaughter laws came in than in the previous 30 years I've been in the ACT", Glenn Parry noted.

ACT WorkCover issued three prohibition notices for serious safety breaches at the site and seven improvement notices.

The trial of those charged in relation to the Canberra Airport hangar collapse is continuing. ☼

Vic Williams' 90th birthday bash!

Sheila Suttner

There was a grand turn-out of family, friends and fellow-activists, thinkers, poets and writers to celebrate the 90th birthday party to honour Comrade Victor Williams.

The occasion was rich with music, poetry, oratory - and good food and drink.

It took place in the premises of the Maritime Union of Australia, an appropriate venue in the light of Vic's 23 years on the wharf and as a member of the Waterside Workers' Federation.

Tributes were paid to him in that capacity by long-time comrade on the waterfront, Tom Orgles, and current Secretary of the MUA, Chris Cain.

The occasion opened with an acknowledgement of Aboriginal ownership of the land on which the celebration was taking place, in both word and song, the latter provided, magnificently, by the Working Voices Choir.

Not inappropriately, this was

followed by a stirring rendition of "The People's Flag" which brought all present to their feet, joining in the chorus.

Messages of good wishes were read from Dr Carmen Lawrence, (Member for Fremantle), Jo Vallentine (People for Nuclear Disarmament {WA}), (Hannah Middleton (President of the Communist Party of Australia), and Peter Symon (General Secretary of the CPA).

Joan Williams spoke of more than half-a-century of loving and creative partnership with Vic, "Soldier from the War Returning", as he described himself in a poem on their first encounter.

Her tribute to Vic as husband, father, comrade in many struggles, fellow-writer, left no-one present unmoved.

Tributes followed from those who have known and admired Vic in the Peace Movement, the Australia-Cuba Friendship Society (Diana McTiernan), The Fellowship of Australian Writers (Pattie Watts), the Greens (Kathy

Anketell), and the Communist Party of Australia {WA} (Sheila Suttner).

The speeches were interspersed with songs - to Vic's poems - by old comrades, Donno Wignall, and Ian and Brenda Conochie.

Michael Williams, the youngest of the Williams' offspring, spoke on behalf of the family, recalling amusing and moving anecdotes of growing up in an unusual but very loving environment.

As the birthday cake was cut and the champagne glasses were filled, Vic spoke of his life, his love, his family, his friends, the interests and challenges of his 90 years.

The formal party ended with the singing of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow", "Happy Birthday to You", several Hip, Hip Hoorays and a stirring rendition of "The Internationale".

Everybody hung around for at least half-an-hour, sharing memories, enjoying comradeship and nostalgia. A great occasion in every way, honouring a great comrade, in every way. ✪



Vic Williams

Labor succumbs

Peter Parker

Australia desperately needs to see the back of John Howard and his Coalition. And while Labor leader Mark Latham has been making lots of new friends lately they are not the people who will hand him victory in the next Federal election - the Australian public.

Latham landed his latest clutch of friends following his decision to support Howard's plans to lift the price of prescription medicines covered by the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme (PBS). The resulting 20 percent rise in the cost of prescription medicines will mean a rise of \$4.90 to \$28.60 per script for general patients and by 80 cents to \$4.60 for concession card holders.

So it is not a decision that will help Latham make friends amongst ordinary Australians.

However, the transnational drug companies, who already make super-profits on everyday medicine, will be more than happy with Latham - this gives them the perfect opportunity to argue for further price increases.

Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, could barely conceal his delight, announcing that "the Coalition absolutely welcomes the backflip by the opposition leader". And well they might. In the eyes of the majority of Australians this cost of living slug is not from Howard and Costello but from the Labor opposition only months - if not weeks - before a federal election.

On board for FTA

Latham also committed the ALP to supporting the Free-Trade Agreement (FTA) in the House of Representatives.

Although Labor members of a joint parliamentary committee refused to allow the Howard Government to fast-track legislation to see the FTA deal implemented by January 2005, they are only prevaricating and asking for more time to understand the implications from the FTA.

But what is there to consider? Rank and file trade unionists and Labor Party members know that the deal will be a disaster for Australia.

Delegates at Labor's recent Queensland conference correctly

pointed out that the FTA would mean "goodbye to local [media] content, goodbye to tens of thousands of local jobs, goodbye to a bright future for local industry".

The most popular policy announcement made by Mark Latham so far is his commitment to bring the Australian troops back from Iraq in time for Christmas. It struck a massive chord with ordinary Australians.

But Latham's promise wasn't popular with Bush and his coterie and the US President saw fit to intervene directly into Australian politics.

Here Latham had a clear opportunity to tell Bush that Australia is an independent country that won't be dictated to by an American President.

Instead Latham ran for cover. He left it to his Foreign Affairs spokesperson Kevin Rudd to assure Bush that the ALP fully supports Australia's ties to the USA.

And what's more it appears Bush's pressure is starting to pay off. The ALP now tells us that only some troops will be withdrawn and the Navy will continue patrols around Iraq.

The ALP does not have the policies that we desperately need to ensure a decent future for ordinary people.

Labor approved the \$4.90 increase for PBS on the grounds it will raise \$250 million per year to help deliver a "balanced budget".

Yet Labor could save 10 times as much by abolishing the disgusting \$2.5 billion subsidy the state pays to the private health insurance industry. This would be a massively popular policy. With \$2.5 billion we could ensure universal bulk-billing, public dental services, proper investment in health infrastructure, reduce the charge for medications - and still have millions left over to spend on education, public housing, public transport, aged care, other community services and the environment.

When talking about our children Latham waffles on about reading at bedtime and junk food advertisements.

Why don't we hear Labor committing to phasing out Federal funding of private education and

re-investing those billions of dollars back into the public education system for the benefit of all children?

Real jobs not McJobs

We know that in a few years there will be a massive shortage of qualified tradespeople - plumbers, electricians and builders.

Why doesn't Latham commit to our children's future by increasing funding for TAFE and higher education and abolishing fees? What about involving the trade unions in designing and monitoring new apprenticeship schemes that deliver real training, at decent rates of pay instead of the drudgery of McJobs?

Why doesn't Latham commit to preserve the jobs we have by rejecting the FTA? Why won't Latham commit to protecting Australian workers and defending their rights by categorically stating he will repeal every single piece of Howard's anti-worker and anti-trade union legislation?

He will not do so because the right-wing ALP leaders have shown time and again that they are incapable of adopting and fighting for decent and popular progressive policies.

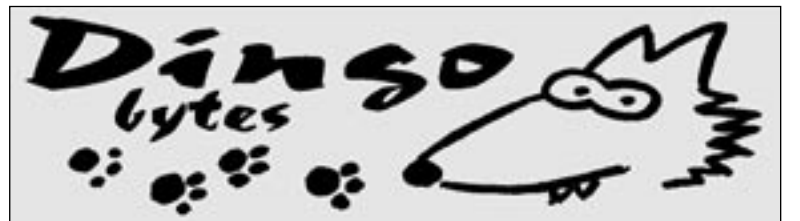
Whether it is a question of health, education, union rights, immigration, refugees, foreign policy, their strategy is to present a so called "small target".

The result is a pale imitation of the Liberal party that fools no-one. No wonder that Howard might actually win the election!

If the Liberals win another term of government the immediate blame for this will fall squarely on the cowardly ALP leaders who have failed to take the fight to the Howard Government.

It is imperative that we continue the struggle to build a left and progressive alternative to the Liberal and Labor Party pendulum which offers a genuine, pro-people alternative.

This means building the support for progressive and socialist policies that will solve the problems faced by the overwhelming majority of Australians, and most importantly, building the support for the Communist Party of Australia among working people. ✪



Ongoing cuts to mental health services at both state and federal level have marginalised people with mental illness. One area where these shortcomings manifest themselves is in the number of callers to mental health helplines. The national service, SANE, received 15,330 calls last year, up from 8,560 in 2002. Around 40 percent of the callers were people receiving no treatment at all. SANE's Barbara Hocking said the problem was added to by the growing case loads of mental health workers. "It's a fairly tragic reflection on our society when the only place people can turn for support is a telephone service", she noted.

Privatisation can only be done by stealth up to a certain point. Then the axe must come out. When the University of Sydney last month decided to give its undergraduate nursing course the chop in 2005, it came as a shock to the dean of nursing. Professor Jocalyn Lawler was only told of the plan on the day it was handed to the federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson. The coup by university management - Professor Lawler called it "a process conducted in an environment of secrecy" - will also see the dismantling of a new bachelor of nursing in Indigenous health. The 850 undergraduate nursing places are to be farmed out to various other institutions. Many will simply disappear and the Indigenous and other unique courses will certainly not survive away from the much larger resources available at Sydney University.

And while on education, Minister Nelson has announced a plan to have funding to schools tied to their sporting activity under the guise of fighting childhood obesity. But recently PM Howard rejected a proposal to ban food advertising during children's television programs, saying there is "such a thing as a safe level of consumption of a McDonald's". Howard must have some connection to the peddler of those coronary-inducing globules in a sesame seed bun (does Ronald McDonald donate to the Liberal Party?). He is full of praise for the exploited youth they employ, marvelling at the way they have been imbued with Maca manners i.e. bow and scrape or you're sacked.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is Jetstar. When Qantas introduced its budget airline, Jetstar, a couple of months back, people who eagerly rushed to buy cheapo tickets may not have realised that no-frills flights also meant no-safety. Of course, Qantas hasn't introduced cheap airfares by accepting less profit. This happens through such things as lower wages and conditions for its staff and compromises with safety. So it was that last week at Sydney Airport a cabin door of a Jetstar flight was ripped off when the aircraft started for the runway while still attached to the terminal. Said Jetstar corporate relations, "It was not the outcome desired."

Private armies, private fortunes, public

Bob Briton

Nobel laureate economist Milton Friedman was a regular visitor to Australia in the 1980s. The guru of supply side economics and "monetarism" was riding the wave of the right-wing ideological offensive that is still with us today. His "Chicago Boys" followers had just been put to work on the Chilean economy by the fascist dictator General Augusto Pinochet. The need to assist the privatising and deregulating efforts of the Hawke Government and various state governments brought him to our shores.

During one of his visits, the iconoclastic promoter of "small government" and private enterprise was charming a lunchtime gathering at the National Press Club in Canberra. A journalist had just asked a question that he, no doubt, thought had found a chink in the professor's armour. "Would you advocate the privatisation of our nation's armed forces?" There was some hearty laughter in the audience based on the belief – still widespread at the time – that it would be ludicrous to entrust something so basic and sensitive as national defence and the pursuit of foreign policy to bodies driven, above all, by the need to turn the biggest buck possible.

"Certainly!" came the reply. Friedman proceeded to advocate the contracting out of these functions as soon as possible. The professor lost the confidence of much of his audience that day with the outrageous suggestion that the state should trust corporations to run private armies. To any reasonable person, the possibility that such corporations would begin to act in their own interests and against the public interest was too obvious to be ignored.

Fast forward to Iraq

Today in Iraq, there are several dozen groups with more than 20,000 employees providing "security" to both the military and the private sector. The recruits to these companies receive many times their usual salary in their home countries

and the companies that hire them are making profits not seen since the early days of the dot-com era.

Iraq is a corporate El Dorado. Companies favoured by the Bush Administration, such as Bechtel and Halliburton, are going about their job of rebuilding Iraq's oil, transport and other infrastructure in the most wasteful (and profitable) way imaginable. They are awarded contracts on a "costs plus" basis, i.e. they are reimbursed for their expenses and paid an additional percentage of whatever they spend. Such a contract is a licence to overcharge.

This system has led to a situation where, on the one hand, US soldiers do not have sufficient bullet-proof vests to go around and sleep in tents at a cost to the tax payer of US\$1.39 a day. On the other hand, Halliburton subsidiary KBR will abandon brand new trucks valued at US\$85,000 rather than change the oil or repair a tyre and will put its staff up at the five-star Kempinski Hotel at a cost of US\$10,000 per employee per month.

Military contractors are in the top ranks of those growing fat on the "War on Terrorism". CACI, one of the contractors implicated in the sickening abuse of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison, reported a 37 percent surge in net income last April. For the first 12 months of the occupation, all contracts were evaluated by a group of six men and women in their 20s who were selected on the basis of résumés they posted on the website of a right wing "think tank" called The Heritage Foundation.

While the staff of the Defence Contract Audit Agency are supposed to maintain an oversight on these contracts, it is widely recognised that they have no hope – if, indeed, they were ever intended to have such a hope – of overseeing the many contracts being issued. And while the *Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act* (MEJA) was supposed to keep the behaviour of mercenaries in check, the whole world now knows that the private military is pretty much a law unto itself.

Blurring the lines

"Guns for hire", "soldiers of fortune", mercenaries – call them what you will – date back to ancient times. However, in Iraq we are seeing rapid advances toward the fulfilment of Milton Friedman's dream of a modern, private military.

The Abu Ghraib scandal lifted the lid on the fact that private companies are now doing some of the most sensitive work previously carried on exclusively by the official US Armed Forces. The previously mentioned CACI and fellow defence contractor Titan were supposed to be providing staff support and translation services respectively at the jail. It turns out that their staff were involved in the interrogation of prisoners and implicated in the torture, rape and in some instances summary execution of detainees.

Eyebrows in the traditional US military were raised last year when the "security" contractor Erinys started recruiting large numbers of "guards" from the Free Iraqi Forces, the army group formed by the now out-of-favour Ahmed Chalabi. Erinys now has 15,000 employees and is officially charged with protecting Iraq's oil infrastructure.

Another contractor, Aegis, has 75 "close protection teams" of eight men each offering security to the personnel of a host of other private corporations. It will link up with the services of 50 other private "security" firms. A spokesman for the US Army, Major Gary Tallman, told *Corpwatch*, "Their job is to disseminate information and provide guidance and coordination throughout the four regions of Iraq."

With a brief as broad as that, it is small wonder that some of the military top brass are starting to worry about the rise of the private military. They know that the "security" firms now infesting Iraq are not made up of out-of-work nightclub bouncers providing services akin to those offered by Chubb or Wormalds.

Who are these people?

Liberal commentators in the US regularly write about the "screw ups" of those in charge of handing out defence contracts. The waste and outrageous behaviour of the "security" companies never cease to surprise these scribes. Doubtful outfits keep getting awarded fat, juicy contracts despite the notoriety of the people at the top of them. "Didn't anyone do a Google* on these guys?" is apparently a common refrain.

If these people are sincere, it is about time that they faced up to the possibility that very disreputable people are put in charge of important military tasks **because** of their gruesome track record and not in spite of it. The "security" firms in question are top heavy with former intelligence officers from the armed forces of Western countries and former soldiers of "elite" fighting forces like the UK's Special Air Services (SAS).

Jude McCulloch had the following to say in her book *Blue Army* about the glue that binds this type of unit together:

"The all-male SAS is considered 'elite' amongst army units, and ordinary soldiers tend to view SAS soldiers as 'super-grunts' or 'super-soldiers'... Soldiers generally find killing difficult because of the strong inhibitions most people have against taking human life. The rare 'natural soldiers', the 2 percent of the population predisposed

towards psychopathic tendencies, are found 'mostly congregating in the commando-type special force [units]'."**

Members of this precious two percent have been defecting from their prestigious special forces units after receiving their expensive training (valued at US\$3 million in the case of the UK's SAS). They are signing up with one or other of the many private contractors willing to pay them as much as US\$250,000 per annum.

They have come from the discontinued repressive apparatus of South Africa's apartheid regime – from the Koevoet, a notoriously brutal counterinsurgency arm of the military and the Vlakplaas secret police. They are from the Civil Co-operation Bureaux that assisted Savimbi's UNITA forces in Angola, fed false information to the press and carried out assassinations of leading figures of the African National Congress.

They have also come from the CIA and the US Special Forces. Many of these people are rumoured to keep in touch about new adventures at the Special Forces Club at 8 Herbert Crescent in Central London. They can even check in to the Donovan Room, named after "Wild Bill" Donovan, the founder of the CIA's predecessor the Office of Strategic Services.

Typical mercenary leader

Typical of this latest generation of mercenary leader is Tim Spicer, head of the previously mentioned Aegis Defence Services. Aegis has just been awarded a US \$293 million Pentagon contract to coordinate "security" in Iraq. However "Aegis" is only the latest mercenary venture of the irrepressible Brit.

The former Lieutenant Colonel of the Scots Guards saw service in the Falklands and was the commander in Belfast of two soldiers convicted in 1992 of the murder of an unarmed 18-year-old Catholic youth named Peter McBride. To this day, Spicer defends the reputations of the convicted killers and of the unit, which had a name for torture in Northern Ireland. He saw service briefly in Gulf War I and was a spokesman for the UN Forces in Bosnia.

Spicer left the forces to set up a mercenary outfit called Sandline. Army buddies like Richard "Tarzan" Bethel and Alistair Morrison followed a similar path with their Defence Systems Limited. Morrison subsequently joined forces with Sean Cleary, an apartheid-era official linked to UNITA, to form the huge Erinys concern.

Sandline came to the attention of people in our region in 1997 when Papua New Guinea's Defence Forces chief General Jerry Singarok led the protests that brought down Prime Minister Julius Chan. The disgraced PM had given Sandline a \$36 million contract to put down the independence struggle on Bougainville.

Spicer sized up the Bougainville job when he visited the troubled territory as part of an AusAid delegation. He landed an estimated 170 "security" personnel with their equipment (including attack helicopters!) aboard Antonov 12 and 124 aircraft.

Working alongside "peace-makers" from the Pretoria-based Executive Outcomes, the Sandline mercenaries proceeded to attack the people of Bougainville with every-



Australian mercenaries in Iraq

thing they had. They used chemical weapons and were set to use devastating fuel air bombs and conduct psychological warfare [Operation Oyster] when the PNG General called a halt to the privatisation of his war. Spicer was arrested and detained.

The British Embassy intervened to save Spicer's hide on that occasion. It seems the "unorthodox soldier" had walked into a situation he had underestimated in terms of complexity. Not only were the PNG Defence Forces not yet ready to allow the outsourcing of their functions, it seems that future private "peacekeeping" action in the

**They have come from
of South Africa's
a notoriously
the military**

region had already been promised to a US company called Military Professional Resources Inc.

Sandline bobbed up next in 1998 in Africa, where around 90 other private armies were busy providing "security". The company was contracted to sell 30 tons of arms to the forces of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, the former leader of Sierra Leone. This activity was in contravention of a UN embargo on the sale of arms to both sides of the conflict. Spicer denies having done anything illegal and boasts that he had the co-operation of Craig Murray, a junior staffer at the British Foreign Office, for his exploits.

It turns out Spicer had been contracted by an Indian-born Thai national hiding out in Canada who



Public shame



wanted to have his diamond and bauxite mining concessions in Sierra Leone returned to him. This would involve the restoration of the corrupt former President. Spicer carried out his services while the anxious Rakesh Saxena was in detention and awaiting extradition to Thailand to face charges of embezzlement. As well as delivering the arms via the Boeing 727 aircraft of Ibis Air (the air arm of Executive Outcomes), he trained 40,000 of Kabbah's militia fighters.

With the collaboration of the Nigerian military, Spicer's side of the war eventually prevailed in 1998. Doug Brooks, head of

to announce that the company is closing down its operations forthwith. The general lack of government support for Private Military Companies willing to help end armed conflicts in places like Africa, in the absence of effective international intervention, is the principal reason behind Sandline's decision. Without such support the ability of Sandline (and other PMCs) to make a positive difference in countries where there is widespread brutality and even genocidal behaviour is irretrievably diminished."

After a number of lower key engagements, the "can do" Spicer now has his men on the ground in

seriously in the case of Sandline, its successor or the other PMCs so highly regarded by Tim Spicer. In 2000, US legislators were obliged to pass the *Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act* in response to revelations about the behaviour of Dyncorp in Bosnia. The Virginia-based company was found to have established prostitution rings in the former Yugoslav republic. Employees of the company avoided rape charges because of the jurisdiction conflicts of the case. Incidentally, Dyncorp is now in charge of training the Iraqi police.

Last week a private contractor hired by the CIA was indicted by a federal grand jury in North Carolina for the two-day beating of a prisoner who had surrendered in Afghanistan. The prisoner subsequently died. Unfortunately, this example is an exception that proves the rule of immunity for private contractors. In the infamous Abu Ghraib case, while two Marines and one Army reservist have been given prison sentences and six other services members are facing trial, not one of the contractors has been charged.

This shielding of the mercenaries is no accident. If the gravy train that is private "security" and other military services is to continue to roll, if more and more of the shameful detail of US and allied foreign policy is to be kept "commercial in confidence", if the vision of giant private corporate armies protecting other giant corporations is to reach its potential, that is how it is how it has got to be.

* For readers who are not familiar with the internet, "Google" is the name of a popular search engine for finding information on the internet.

** McCulloch, *Jude Blue Army - paramilitary policing in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, 2001

Acknowledgements:
www.warprofiteers.com
www.corpwatch.org

in the discontinued repressive apparatus
apartheid regime - from the Koevoet,
brutal counterinsurgency arm of
and the Vlakplaas secret police.

the mercenary peak council, the International Peace Operations Association, summed things up this way: "Sandline was remarkably effective... Their goal of restoring the democratically elected government was achieved. They maintained a low profile but played a critical role in the success."

Spicer, however, was not happy. Other mercenary outfits were doing much better for themselves out of the latter-day scramble for the territory and resources of Africa. Some were getting part of the oil, diamond and other resource wealth that they captured as payment for their services. In 2000, he quit Sandline and left the following note on the company website:
"Sandline International wishes

Iraq, ready for more philanthropic work, thanks to a US\$293 million contract from the Pentagon.

Unaccountable by design

In his autobiography, Spicer set out this sanitised version of his credo:

"Sandline has five basic principles: we only work for legitimate governments, we will do nothing illegal, even for those governments; we will do nothing against key Western nations' foreign policies; we apply First World standards to all our military work, including respect for human rights; and we ensure client confidentiality."
It is hard to take much of this

Make sure to cancel your credit cards before you die

From a friend of a friend

My Aunt died this past January. Citi Bank billed her for February and March for their monthly service charge on her credit card, and then added late fees and interest on the monthly charge ... the balance had been \$0.00 ... now was somewhere around \$60.00. I placed the following phone call to CitiBank:

Me: I am calling to tell you that she died in January.

CitiBank: The account was never closed and the late fees and charges still apply.

Me: Maybe, you should turn it over to collections.

CitiBank: Since it is two months past due, it already has been.

Me: So, what will they do when they find out she is dead?

CitiBank: Either report her account to the frauds division, or report her to the credit bureau - maybe both!

Me: Do you think God will be mad at her?

CitiBank: ...excuse me?

Me: Did you just get what I was telling you ... the part about her being dead?

CitiBank: Sir, you'll have to speak to my supervisor!

Supervisor gets on the phone

Me: I'm calling to tell you, she died in January.

CitiBank: The account was never closed and the late fees and charges still apply.

Me: You mean you want to collect from her estate?

CitiBank: ... (stammer) ... Are you her lawyer?

Me: No, I'm her great nephew.

Lawyer info is given

CitiBank: Could you fax us a certificate of death?

Me: Sure.

Fax number is given

After they get the fax

CitiBank: Our system just isn't set up for death

Me: Oh ...

CitiBank: I don't know what more I can do to help ...

Me: Well ... if you figure it out, great! If not, you could just keep billing her ... I suppose ... don't really think she will care...

CitiBank: Well ... the late fees and charges do still apply.

Me: Would you like her new billing address?

CitiBank: That might help.

Odessa Memorial Cemetery ##### Hwy 129 and plot number given

CitiBank: Sir, that's a cemetery!

Me: What do you do with dead people on your planet? ☹



Cyprus referendum rejects Annan Plan, but not a political solution to conflict

Steven Katsineris

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan is blaming the Cypriot President and government for the failure of the Annan Plan, which was rejected by a majority of the people in Cyprus in the recent referendum and equating this outcome as also a rejection of a solution to the conflict.

These criticisms are unfair and grossly offensive towards the Cypriot people and government, the very ones who have suffered most from the occupation and strived tirelessly and patiently to find a just and viable settlement to the partition of the island.

The UN and others showed flagrant disregard for the very real concerns of Cypriots, whose experiences with Turkey are vastly different to those who live in the comfort and relative safety of NY and other places.

The rejection of the Annan Plan was not a vote against a resolution or against the Turkish Cypriots.

The government of Cyprus continues to work towards a solution and actively supports Turkish Cypriots with various measures.

Annan should look a lot closer to home when apportioning any fault for the results of the vote, as it was the weakness of the Annan Plan that was to blame and Kofi Annan is largely responsible for that himself.

The Plan was designed to suit the interests of Turkey and its supporters not that of the Cypriots.

It is one thing for the UN to propose and help draft agreements towards getting opposing parties together to find a solution to division and another to take the decisions away from the legitimate Cyprus government and the Cypriot people and try to impose a settlement.

The UN promoted a solution that satisfied Turkey, the US, EU, etc, but largely neglected the feel-

ings, aspirations and views of the Cypriot side.

The UN and others showed flagrant disregard for the very real concerns of Cypriots, whose experiences with Turkey are vastly different to those who live in the comfort and relative safety of NY and other places.

It is the Cypriot people who would have to live with the consequences of an inferior plan, one that left most Turkish troops and settlers in north Cyprus with promises from Turkey to respect an agreement built on hopes of Turkish goodwill.

It should be remembered that for 30 years Turkey ignored UN resolutions and critical reports from

Human Rights organisations, the EU and other groups in relation to Cyprus.

Now that Turkey wants to enter the EU it is not right for the international community to ease the way for Turkey by ignoring the victims of its abuses and occupation and expecting them to accept anything on offer.

Not only that, but threaten and cajole Cypriots to accept.

Then when the people do not consent to the unfair and inadequate agreement blame them!

Does anyone really believe that rejecting the Annan Plan was anything other than a very painful, difficult and heart wrenching decision for Cypriots, especially refugees from the north to make.

Search for settlement continues

The referendum on the Annan Plan was not the end of the search for a Cyprus settlement, as statements and efforts by the Cyprus

leadership including the Cypriot President, Papadopoulos, and the House President and Communist Party AKEL General Secretary Demetris Christofias have repeatedly stressed since.

The President of the Social Democrats Party EDEK, Yiannakis Omirou said at a press conference, "that the people rejected a plan that created a feeling of insecurity, injustice and dysfunctions ... a plan that appointed Turkey as permanent guardian and Cyprus' overlord, the people rejected suggestions, admonitions and blackmailing dilemmas, foreign and domestic".

In May, Demetris Christofias stated that the result of the referendum should not be used to exert unwarranted outside pressure nor should it be seen as a tool in hasty policies that will not serve the purpose of promoting the long-sought settlement of the Cyprus problem. "The Cypriot people not only should not be subject to pressure from abroad, but on the contrary ... the UN solution plan was rejected mainly due to serious concerns of the overwhelming majority of Greek Cypriots, connected with security issues and satisfactory Guarantees for implementation of a solution, the outcome ... should be seen as the beginning of a new effort", said Demetris Christofias.

The wishes of Cypriot people and their democratic decisions should be respected and understood by the UN and the rest of international community and renewed efforts sought to promote an acceptable and workable solution to the division of Cyprus, one that overcomes the serious mistakes of the failed Annan Plan and bases itself on the real concerns and common interests of Cypriots first and foremost.

Cypriots have shown remarkable patience, tenacity, resilience and persistence to endure and persevere on their small island home. It is these same qualities that will ensure the bringing about of an ultimate peace and reunification.

Steven Katsineris is a Hobart-born writer of Cypriot background presently living in Victoria. ☪



US union calls for end to war and bringing US troops home

Nearly 4000 delegates of the Service Employees International Union, the nation's largest union with 1.6 million members, voted unanimously at the union's national convention in San Francisco in June to end the US occupation of Iraq and to bring US troops home.

A strongly worded resolution linked military intervention abroad and attacks on workers at home. The resolution charged the Bush administration (backed by a majority in Congress) with responsibility for declining wages and benefits, deunionisation, cuts in public services, crumbling health care and educational systems, cuts in veterans benefits, escalating public debt and eroding economic, social and personal security.

The union proclaimed, "We cannot solve these economic and social problems without addressing US foreign policy and its consequences."

It accused the Bush administration of using "deception, lies and false promises to the American people and the world" to launch a "unilateral, pre-emptive war" in Iraq,

causing the death of thousands of Iraqis and hundreds of US soldiers, and costing taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars.

US trade unions established in 2003 an organisation, US Labor Against the War (USLAW). It is a national network of labour organisations and has more than 70 labour affiliates.

The USLAW calls for a just foreign policy based on international law and global justice; an end to the US occupation of Iraq; redirecting the nation's resources from inflated military spending to meeting human needs; supporting US troops by bringing them safely home; protecting labour, civil and immigrant rights and civil liberties; and solidarity with workers around the world struggling for labor and human rights, and those in the US who support US foreign and domestic policies that reflect our nation's highest ideals.

The Service Employees International Union resolved to work with all religious, community, political and foreign policy groups which support similar policies. ☪

Hunger strike ignored

Alejandra Arriaza, a lawyer with human rights organisation CODEPU and social democrat parliamentary deputy Antonio Leal last week denounced the irregularities of the sentencing of political prisoners that have led to the current human rights crisis in Chile.

In a statement to the media Leal pointed out that Ramón Escobar (who has spent 12 years in prison), Julia Peña (10 years) and Claudio Melgarejo (11 years) have not yet been sentenced and their cases remain open after more than a decade.

Furthermore, military tribunals have applied different laws to try the same "crimes" and, in some cases, the prisoners have spent more time in prison than set down by those laws. The deputy recalled that the ex-Minister for Justice Francisco Cumplido himself has

stated on more than one occasion that the application of the Anti-Terrorist Law was wrong in the case of these political prisoners.

The intolerable situation led six of the political prisoners to commence a hunger strike in April.

The following is a declaration made in Santiago on June 20 by the President of the Communist Party of Chile, Gladys Marin:

We have come to express our solidarity with the imperilled political prisoners on hunger strike and to demand their immediate release.

It is neither possible nor acceptable that human beings who have given their all for their ideals, striving to obtain democracy for our country, should be subjected to the physical tortures that 70 days on hunger strike represent without giving them a solution.

This cannot be permitted; it is at such times that the people have

the right and the duty to go into the streets to demand the liberty of those Chileans who have paid dearly for their right to be treated justly and with dignity.

If today we have some democratic possibilities, we owe them to human beings like those who have dared to risk their lives to reach them.

From this moment on, and from a perspective of profoundly human ethics and values, we are going to redouble our efforts to achieve their immediate release. We will struggle together with their families and friends. We will not accept that they should be traded like commodities in exchange for impunity to those who violated human rights during the dictatorship.

Immediate freedom for the political prisoners!

Unofficial translation ☪

"Do not come, Bush!"

Tens of thousands of protestors (about 100,000 according to the organisers) spilled into the streets of Istanbul, Turkey's largest city, last Sunday for a noisy demonstration against a two-day NATO Summit and the presence of US President George Bush.

The demonstrators, ranging from left-wingers to Islamists and environmentalists, chanted slogans such as "United States, Assassins, Leave the Middle East", "Do not come, Bush", and "The war organisation NATO, should be disbanded".

"The torturers, the killers are here for a summit of war. Our struggle is for the people of the Middle East who resist torture and

occupation," said Mustafa Avci, the secretary-general of KESK, one of the biggest trade unions in Turkey.

Gencay Gursoy, the head of the Istanbul Union of Doctors said, "The NATO summit is a summit that will paint the Middle East red with blood and war."

"NATO is gathering here to prepare a dirty scheme on the Middle East. What they want is to take over the region's oil resources", said one of the protestors, a 52-year-old construction engineer.

Some 25,000 police, backed by paramilitary troops and combat aircraft, were on duty to protect NATO leaders. Steel and concrete barriers were erected to close off a large area around the summit venue. ☪

Puerto Rico

The call for independence is still alive

Puerto Rico is one among 17 cases of colonisation still awaiting a definitive solution, despite being considered by the various US administrations as a "harmonious associated commonwealth". On May 16, the Hostos National Independence Movement (MINH) constituted in Caguas. One of its main tasks will be to keep the question of Puerto Rico's status in the national arena.

Noel Colón Martínez, a member of the UN Puerto Rico Committee and an attorney by profession, said that gaining independence will be an "arduous and huge battle that has to alert and unite forces", given that it was more than 50 years ago – 1952 – that a resolution was approved establishing the island's link to its large Northern neighbour.

Those events, Colón explained, signified the "tragic submission of Puerto Rico, via anti-patriotic theories of colonisation by consent, but this time, there shouldn't be any pips in a poke.

"We will be calling for respect for the Puerto Rican initiative regarding the resolution of its status before the Decolonisation Committee in June."

Referendum

With the goal of establishing a platform of shared demands among all the political tendencies, which include leftists and some of the main traditional parties, the MINH has launched the idea of a referendum for a Constitutional Assembly on Status that would be in a position to demand a genuine national sovereignty of the US Government.

Since the day it was founded, the renewed political grouping has directed its energies at promoting that discussion in Puerto Rico and among its communities established throughout the Americas, and also in the international community.

In that context, pro-independence leader Juan Mari Brás expressed his conviction that Puerto Ricans "will strike a blow at the United States, which is not only trying to be the tyrant of our country, but of the entire world".

Based on this new stage of the struggle *Granma* spoke with Edwin González, the MINH representative in Havana. According to González, "we are in the presence of a national project with an inexorable destiny, which sooner or later will be decolonisation".

"In that effort, the front becomes like a motor – small, but very united and strengthened, which will involve the entire nation in a battle similar to the one we waged to get the Marines out of Vieques. The fusion of the Hostos National Congress and the New Independence Movement is a memorable moment in Puerto Rican revolutionary struggles", he emphasised.

Among the premises favourable to the convening of such a popular referendum is the country's long history of emancipation – first from Spain, then from the US.

The activists have a vast accumulated experience, backed by the combination of the wisdom and commitment of various generations of revolutionaries.

Elections

The new HNIM redefined its interests via a Programmatic Platform which, in addition to political objectives related to the independence cause, will closely

follow the most important issues for the average Puerto Rican. Increasing crime; drug consumption; lack of access to jobs for graduates; the brain drain to the United States; dependency on the "tyranny" of credit and banks; participation in the war against Iraq; and the upcoming November elections are among the topics the movement is prioritising.

We are in the presence of a national project with an inexorable destiny, which sooner or later will be decolonisation.

for Vieques by the US administration continue to be just that: promises. Likewise, reports are proliferating of a "re-colonisation" phenomenon on former Navy land. People are steadily arriving to purchase the best land, which should be available for the island's sustainable development.

Based on an article by Maria Victoria Valdes Rodda from *Granma* ☪

In addition, support for demo-

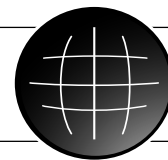
Alert

Vieques has finally been left in peace – without noise, active contamination or military exercises. The US Marines left one year ago, on May 1, 2003. This was possible thanks to constant civil disobedience by Puerto Ricans over a period of 40 years.

Activities at the Roosevelt Roads military base (strategic because of the nuclear submarines that come through there) have also ended. The decision to close it down on March 31 this year was related – according to the base's military command – to the absence of the Vieques firing range.

In spite of that, González commented, colonialism has many ways of adapting in order to perpetuate itself. In that light, the Pro-Vieques Rescue Committee in particular and Puerto Ricans in general are ready to hold more demonstrations, and to go to jail if necessary.

The clean-up efforts promised



Global briefs

IRAQ: "If we consider that the occupation ends June 30th, that would mean the end of the international armed conflict", said Nada Doumani, a spokesperson for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Baghdad. "When the conflict ends the prisoners of war should be released, according to the Geneva conventions", she explained. "Therefore, all people detained in relation to the conflict should be released unless there are penal charges against them". According to Article 118 of the third Geneva Convention, prisoners of war should be repatriated without delay at the end of hostilities. Article 133 of the Fourth Geneva Convention says that interned civilians should also be released when the conflict ends. After the handover, detainees held by the Iraqi authorities will be subject to Iraqi law. However, prisoners who are not freed because they face penal charges will remain under the protection of the Geneva conventions.

USA: The Bush administration is forcefully promoting its anti-abortion agenda in international agencies. The US has not paid its share of funding to the UN Population Fund for almost two decades. Now the Bush administration and its right-wing fundamentalist supporters have set their sights on any agency that co-operates with the Population Fund by denying funds to groups that even discuss abortion as an option. This position has angered UN officials and family planning advocates, who have complained that advances in education and awareness on reproductive issues are being undermined by the USA, where abortion is legal.

UKRAINE: Two Ukrainian seamen recently freed from the notorious Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq have told the Ukrainian official responsible for their release that US guards at the prison treated them like "dogs", but much better than Iraqi prisoners. The two Ukrainian nationals were the captain and first mate of the tanker ship *Navstar-1*. They had been found guilty by an Iraqi court of attempting to smuggle 3500 tons of diesel from Iraq. They were imprisoned in October last year and released in June this year. Both reported violent and demeaning treatment by US guards. They were kept in a cell built for 20 inmates, but occupied by more than 60 Iraqis detained on a variety of charges – a mix of former Iraqi military personnel, civilians suspected of anti-American activities and common criminals. US military warders regularly used tear gas "at the slightest provocation" to control the inmates. As a result of crowded conditions, innocent prisoners repeatedly were gassed. One of the sailors showed evidence of serious lung damage, which aggravated his asthma and placed increased stress on his heart. He was also a diabetic and during his stay at Abu Ghraib he had complained of only having access to the minimum amount of insulin necessary to keep him alive. US officials gave both sailors a week's worth of medicine gratis on the day of their release.

Protests in Greece against new

"Anti-Terrorism" Bill and NATO Summit

ATHENS: On Wednesday last week, a Parliamentary majority ratified the clauses of the Justice Ministry's bill on a European arrest warrant law. Then on Thursday Parliament was set to discuss amendments to "anti-terrorism law No 2". The original "anti-terrorism" law was passed by the PASOK (social democrat) government with the support of right-wing New Democracy (ND) just a year ago.

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) has strongly denounced the reactionary nature of the new "anti-terrorism" bill, prepared by the previous government and tabled by the new ND Government, that curtails elementary democratic rights and freedoms, undermines national sovereignty, and threatens the popular movement and its struggles.

This new "anti-terrorism" bill is said to be "needed in order to bring in line the Greek legislation

with respective EU anti-terrorist decisions". The regulations are also being sold as part of the Olympic Games "anti-terrorism" measures. They will be up and running by July 1, with the active participation of NATO.

The Communist MPs walked out of the debate on Tuesday last week, expressing, point by point, their total opposition to the draft law and refusing to legalise its procession by the Parliament. The other opposition parties also voted against the law project.

However, the spokesman for PASOK stated that voting against the law does not mean that they vote against the framework where the Bill is based.

The new "anti-terrorism" Bill has been met with strong opposition, even from the Legal Advisory Committee of the Parliament and the Greek Bar Associations as well from a wide range of unions, scien-

tists, prominent individuals, organisations of immigrants etc.

On Tuesday (June 22) thousands marched through central Athens towards Parliament. The demonstration was called by the Democratic Rally for the Popular Freedoms and Solidarity and was backed by Greek Committee for International Détente and Peace (EEDYE), and many unions and students' associations. Similar demonstrations took place all around the country.

At the same time, preparations were being made for protests in the lead up to the NATO summit in Istanbul from June 28-29. The EEDYE together with the Balkan Anti-NATO Centre and KNE organised a massive delegation to participate in the big anti-NATO demonstration on June 27. KNE were also preparing to participate in a International Anti-NATO Youth Camp.

More info: www.solidnet.org ☪

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



email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Message from Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP)

It will soon be 45 years that our small country has been under imminent threat, facing an extraordinary cruel blockade and sanctions imposed by the super power. Arbitrarily, we have been included in the list of states that supposedly sponsor international terrorism.

At this time, the US imperialist forces are preparing more wars, declaring that now is the turn of Cuba, looking for a pretext with flagrant lies against our country, so as to intervene with their military troops, in order to destroy the process of the Revolution. It will produce unimaginable human suffering.

Cuba knows and understands what terrorism means and Cuba condemns terrorist acts, methods or practices. There are many evidences and manoeuvres that make us think of the aggressiveness [and its] escalation against our nation.

Even now, tens of thousands of our friends overseas have a permanent movement and action plans

against the recently measures adopted by Bush Administration, and a gigantic representation of solidarity is taking place all the world over to express unconditional support to the Cuban people. Many documents have been published, declarations have been signed by thousands of anti-imperialist people, and they all strongly reject the manoeuvres of US Government.

Nowadays as never before, the moment has come for greater amount of participants as members of the XXII Contingent of the Southern Cross Brigade. Unsuccessfully, the international order is in great confusion with the so many violations committed every day in Iraq and everywhere. This catastrophe should never be repeated! The economic and social environment is also in real chaos throughout the world.

We Cubans only possess our ideas and at the same time we fully understand this situation is affecting all our friends and supporters of the Cuban Revolution. Nevertheless, the Brigade is one of the most important events of solidarity with Cuba, and truly a tradition in the unbreakable solidarity movement between our people and the peoples of Australia and New Zealand; for that reason, the Cuban people needs your support.

Therefore, we call on all members of the ACFSS and NZCFSS [Friendship Societies] to do their very best and take immediate steps.

In spite of false accusations, and inhumane hostile policy, our duty is to be prepared to allow entering

all those who bring ties of friendship and solidarity to learn about our people, the Revolution and our realities.

Alicia Corredera Morales
Director Asia-Pacific Division
ICAP

So embarrassing

The US Embarrasser, Tom Schieffer, continues to interfere in Australian politics. Wasn't he the same Tom Schieffer who hurried to Wollongong to chastise the elected Green Member for Wollongong, for daring to express public opposition to the illegal invasion of Iraq?

Mr Embarrasser, you are so embarrassing!

Denis Kevans
Wentworth Falls, NSW

Star Wars "Protection" for politicians and Pine Gap

Labor supports the Coalition in charging the poor and sick more for their drugs while Defence Minister Hill is about to sign a 25-year agreement committing Australia to tens of billions of dollars of taxpayers' money to a Star Wars "defence system" around our population centres.

What Hill is not telling us is that the anti-ballistic missile system is part of America's nuclear-backed pre-emptive strike doctrine.

It's objective is to give the US the ability to strike anywhere, anytime with nuclear tipped missiles if

necessary, while disabling any missile retaliation.

This lunatic policy will only drive a new arms race to develop MIRVd (Multiple Independently targetable Re-entry Vehicle) missiles to overwhelm any defensive system.

You can bet your bottom dollar that the first population centres "protected" will be Alice Springs and Pine Gap, Kirribilli, Sydney and Parliament House, Canberra.

Gareth Smith
(NDP candidate for Richmond)
Byron Bay, NSW

Has the ALP the courage?

How much are our democratic systems corrupted by the interests of corporate wealth? Private negotiations, never ratified by the people, allow global corporations the power to override our laws and whole cultural system.

The very future health of our political system will be measured by the health of our community, our soil, water, air, conservation of our unique flora and fauna and the education that may be available to the next generation.

What is the ALP prepared to offer voters if they sign the Free Trade Agreement? Has the ALP the courage to stand up for the people? This is the burning question? Can they offer job security, real future abundance with sustainable enterprise? Or are they going to hand over responsibility to the FTA colo-

nialists and the Howard Government at the next election?

Mary Jenkins
Australian National Organisation
of the Unemployed (ANOU .WA)
Spearwood, WA

Remember the Howard Years?

Where is the National Trust? Where is an enterprising tourist company? We have memorials to the Howard Years that should be preserved.

Do not let them pull down the detention camps. It is part of our history. Art lovers want to look at the marvellous murals painted on the walls of Port Hedland by a man now locked in Baxter.

Historians will want to read the names written in blood in the suicide watch room.

When there is a Royal Commission into the terrible abuses, I want them to be able to see where it all happened.

International tourists will want to wander the football field in Nauru where over a thousand people were kept, hundreds are still there.

I want to see where the kids played, where the babies learned to walk, where the young men cried. For many years we Australians thought we were not capable of such things. Now we need to walk around our "sites" in order to see ourselves truthfully, and remember the Howard Years.

Lest We Forget.

Elaine Smith
West Haven, NSW

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Yugoslavia – the drug connection, again

Drugs are back in the news in connection with Yugoslavia. Drugs have seldom been far from the subject of Yugoslavia for at least the last four years or so.

We can all name several reasons for the Anglo-US air war on Yugoslavia and the subsequent coup they engineered against the Socialist Party government of President Slobodan Milosevic.

These would include destroying as a sovereign state the country that had persistently stood up to imperialism and rallied other "non-aligned", small or Third World countries to do the same.

Teaching independently minded governments a lesson about doing what the US and its imperialist allies say would definitely be one of them. Establishing a permanent bridgehead and base for future action against Russia or any of the other republics of the former Soviet Union would be another.

Protecting a potential future route for an oil pipeline from Turkey and Central Asia to Europe would also be one. And protecting the phenomenally profitable drug trade would certainly be another.

As I have written on previous occasions, the huge amounts of "black" money that flow into the coffers of imperialist corporations and government agencies by means of the drug trade are extremely useful to those agencies and corporations.

No matter what they may say publicly about "waging war on drugs", privately there is no way they are going to relinquish such a valuable milch cow.

The Kosovar Albanians ("Kosovians" in George Bush's immortal terminology) are a community terrorised by a group of close-knit criminal families involved in trafficking women for prostitution, gun running, extortion and the drug trade.

Like its Sicilian counterpart, the Kosovar Albanian mafia depends on poverty and ignorance as the glue that holds it together in opposition to "the law". Both mafia organisations are consequently bitterly opposed to Communists and other progressives.

At the time of the NATO war on Yugoslavia, while Albanian nationalists dreamed of establishing a "Greater Albania" and the local mafia dreamed of setting up their own criminal-fascist state, the US and Britain extolled the virtues of the Albanian terrorists and falsely condemned the Federal Yugoslav Army for "genocide".

This is why the numerous, authoritative articles at the time exposing the Kosovar Albanian mafia's grip on the heroin trade into Western Europe received scant attention in the bourgeois mass media. "Hands off the drug trade" was the order of the day.

Kosovo fell into NATO's maw, and the people there are suffering for it still. President Milosevic, who had campaigned so strongly against Anglo-US-German machinations in the Balkans, was first ousted in a well-organised civil coup and then kidnapped by NATO and imprisoned in The Hague where he is to this day still "on trial".

Drug trafficking, however, refuses to fade into the background. Two weeks ago, the man accused of organising the assassination of Zoran Djindjic, Yugoslavia's first post-Milosevic Prime Minister, caused a sensation by disclosing that

Djindjic had asked him to smuggle large amounts of heroin into Western Europe to help Djindjic's Democratic Party.

The Democratic Party, the governing party at present although this week's elections may change that, is fiercely anti-Milosevic and anti-socialist and just as fiercely pro-Western and pro-capitalist.

The man the government accuses of the assassination, Milorad Ulemek, also known as Lukovic and "Legija" ("the legionnaire"), is a former member of the French Foreign Legion who, under President Milosevic, headed the Yugoslav Army's Red Berets unit, their equivalent of our SAS.

He aided the coup by refusing to order the Red Berets to defend the Socialist Party government. No one is happy with a turn-coat, however, and shortly after taking office Djindjic sacked him and disbanded the Red Berets.

Lukovic denies any complicity in the assassination: "Neither me nor any members [of the Red Berets] organised or participated in the attack against the late Prime Minister Djindjic", he said in a statement.



However, he claims that leading members of Djindjic's pro-Western Democratic Party asked him to smuggle 700kg of heroin to countries in Western Europe on their behalf in 2001. "I liked that idea of revenge against the West for 78 days of aggression [the NATO bombing war] so I was asked to think about ways to transfer these drugs into Bosnia, Croatia and Romania on the way to Western Europe."

In the first round of the current Presidential elections in Serbia, the largest surviving piece of Yugoslavia, the Serbian Radical Party (SRP) leader Tomislav Nikolic won 31 percent of the vote. He will face Boris Tadic of the Democratic Party in the run-off election for President this week.

Other candidates in the first round included the "Serbian Berlusconi", millionaire Boguljub Karic who owns much of Serbia's commercial media. In the race for the first time, Karic bagged more than 16 percent.

The Radicals believe that Karic got the protest vote from many of those opposed to Serbia's current pro-Western leadership and hope

they will swing over to the Radicals in the final round.

Europe's bourgeois press is urging support for Tadic and the Democratic Party, labelling Nikolic a "hardline nationalist" and – inevitably – calling on Serbian voters to "save democracy".

Tadic has a long record of anti-working class political activity. He was jailed by the Tito Government for anti-communist activities when he was still a student.

Today, his pro-Western platform includes closely integrating Yugoslavia into the European Union, a move the Radical Party opposes.

Says Radical leader Nikolic: "We want to finish the job we started in the first round. But I am now expecting that all criminals will rally behind one candidate – Boris Tadic."

"This is the final battle between the SRP [Radical Party of Serbia] and the Democratic Party, between the people who want a proud and honest Serbia and between the others who want Serbia to continue on its current path – to continue the path Serbia has taken since President Milosevic was toppled." ☺



Sun July 4 ~
~ Sat July 10

Crime (and detection) dominates this week's offerings on the ABC: period crime, contemporary crime and military crime in foreign parts. Let's start with the period crime, *Death On The Nile* (ABC 8.30pm Sunday).

Agatha Christie was phenomenally popular as a writer of mystery fiction. I could never see the appeal, myself.

There are much more engaging detectives and more rewarding mystery stories in the work of some of Miss Christie's competitors.

Her puzzle-plots usually sheeted the blame home to the one person who we have been led to believe could not possibly have done it, or to some similarly preposterous variant. In *Murder on the Orient Express* everyone did it!

Character development, either of suspects or detectives, was not her forte. Her great Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot, forever bragging about his "little grey cells", was all too often a bore.

Peter Ustinov, in the 1978 movie version of *Death on the Nile*, refused to take the character seriously and, to the displeasure of Miss Christie's devoted fans, played Poirot for laughs. It improved the film, but could not save it.

However, there is no denying the fact that, in the hands of a competent scriptwriter and direc-

tor, her stories can make fast paced and quite pleasing movies and television.

Hercule Poirot made his film debut in 1931 and his television debut in 1962 (in the US). Tony Randall, Albert Finney and Peter Ustinov had all appeared as Poirot before London Weekend Television began telecasting, in 1988, its now long-running series of feature-length Agatha Christie mysteries with David Suchet playing Poirot.

Now we have the latest Suchet adventure, a new version of *Death On The Nile*. Suchet is a credible Poirot without being a caricature (difficult, given the way Christie wrote him) and the period atmosphere, accents and costumes are just right.

With the exception of Simon Doyle (played by JJ Field) and his wife Linnet (Emily Blunt), who are simply inadequate, the cast is first rate. James Fox makes an excellent Colonel Race, arriving in style here.

The Egyptian sequences were shot on location and the film deftly captures the atmosphere of wealthy foreigners at the beginning of the '30s taking their leisure languidly viewing the Pyramids and cruising the Nile (on a marvellous vintage) ferry.

It's a great setting for murder. There's even a Communist on board, although, since he's also an extremely rich titled lord, he seems to be having a foot in everybody's camp.

Despite the best efforts of Britain and the US to destroy Zimbabwe's economy and blatantly interfere in its elections, the government of ZANU-PF and Robert Mugabe has survived.

Imperialism does not easily give up, however, when there is profit at stake, and efforts to undermine the Zimbabwe government and bring about its overthrow continue. The propaganda war against the country is unceasing (even cricket is dragged into it).



Reopening old cases (*New Tricks*)

Cutting Edge: Secrets of the Camps (SBS 8.30pm Tuesday) purports to be "a groundbreaking investigation by the BBC's Africa correspondent, Hilary Andersson who has uncovered the horrifying background to the creation of Robert Mugabe's feared youth militia.

"In their training camps the Zimbabwean Government is subjecting thousands of innocent youths to rape, brainwashing and brutality. It is all part of a process designed to mould youths loyal to Robert Mugabe and his ZANU party."

Yep, that's how left wingers build political movements all right.

It would make you laugh if this stuff wasn't so unrelenting, so serious and so successful.

Birth Rites, a documentary that draws a powerful comparison between birth issues in outback Australia and the icy regions of Arctic Canada, screens in the *Storyline Australia* timeslot (SBS 8.30pm Thursday) in NAIDOC Week.

Lack of resources, funding, skilled staff willing to live in remote

towns and the fear of litigation mean that there are no birth services in smaller outback towns in Australia, while the medical establishment dismisses Aboriginal women's desire to have their babies within their own communities and culture.

This situation is contrasted with the position of the Inuit women in remote Northern Canada. The Inuit now have a treaty with the Canadian government and have more control in health areas resulting in a more appropriate birth system for their own people.

They have stopped being evacuated to centralised hospitals in distant centres for births because they now have a remote birth centre in their small town. Indigenous midwives have been trained locally and provide the benefits of both Western medicine and their own culture.

Says director Jennifer Gherardi about the Australian situation: "The lack of culturally appropriate birthing facilities is a national issue. There's no government support, financially, to alleviate the problem."

The military detective series *Red Cap* (ABC 8.30pm Fridays). The first series was set on or around British army bases in Germany and concerned the efforts of SIB, the army's detective unit, to solve crimes by or against British personnel.

Its right-wing militarist bias was relatively easy to ignore for the sake of a well filmed crime drama, with some complicated personal relationships thrown in for good measure.

Despite some overly tricky flashbacks, this is an extremely well-made show. Shame about its overt militarism.

The new series opens in Bosnia and the politics of the show ("Serbian atrocities", Russia supplying arms to terrorists, etc) are more up front than usual and harder to ignore. But at the end of the first episode they are all off back to Germany, so it will be interesting to see if the political spin changes at all.

A credit at the end of each episode says that the show is made with the full co-operation of the British Army and Ministry of Defence. It doesn't glamorise the army, but for the sort of people the army want it must still function as an animated recruiting poster.

Last week's feature-length pilot for *New Tricks* was as unrealistic a cop show as could be found. But like similar shows, such as *Frost or Pie in the Sky*, it was rendered entertaining by the writing of the characters, both coppers and villains.

Alun Armstrong, James Bolam and Dennis Waterman are the three ex-detectives brought back into service under Superintendent Sandra Pullman (played by Amanda Redman) to reopen old cases and generally make themselves unpopular.

The series proper starts this week (ABC 9.30pm Fridays) and although it is necessarily less thoroughly developed than the longer pilot, it is still good - if undemanding - fun. ☆

BOOKSHELF

Socialism Betrayed. Behind the collapse of the Soviet Union \$18 (p&p \$2.50)

by Roger Keeran and Thomas Kenny
This book is about the break-up of the Soviet Union and the collapse of socialism there. Bahman Azad who wrote the book *Heroic Struggle Bitter Defeat* says of this new book, "A well researched work containing a great deal of useful historical information. Everyone will benefit greatly from the mass of historical data and the thought provoking arguments". (pp230)

People vs Profits \$15 (p&p \$4)
by Victor Perlo.

The late Victor Perlo was an outstanding Marxist economist who wrote a regular column, "People vs Profits" in the Communist Party USA's weekly newspaper, *People's Weekly World*. This book is a selection from the 3000 articles

written over a period of almost 40 years. They deal with such topics as the economic situation, Marxism, social security, racism, education, bureaucracy, corruption and decadence, big business and profiteering, militarism, oil, taxes, agriculture - and that is not all. An excellent book for those trying to come to grips with political economy. (pp372)

Dynamics of Social Change. A reader in Marxist social science \$12 (p&p \$4)

Selected and edited by Howard Selsam, David Goldway and Harry Martel. This selection of the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin presents their ideas in sociology, history, politics and economics. (pp 416)
Once again, a very rich collection.
On Colonialism \$10 (p&p\$4) A selection of articles by Marx and Engels on colonialism in China,

India, Persia (Iran), Afghanistan and Burma; on the Irish question; the opium trade; and much more. It includes a number of letters written by Marx and Engels on these issues. (pp380)

Reader in Marxist Philosophy from the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin \$15 (p&p \$4)

Selected & edited by Howard Selsam & Harry Martel What is Marxism? Materialism, dialectics, the theory of knowledge, the materialist interpretation of history, religion and ethics make up its seven sections. This is a very rich collection well worth the \$15 (pp 384)

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

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July 2

Iraq After June 30?

Michael Humphreys, Head of School of Sociology, UNSW;
Andrew Vincent, Director of Centre for Middle Eastern and
North African Studies at Macquarie Uni

July 9

What's happening to the Liberal Party?

Where are the small "L" Liberals?

John Valder, a former President of the Liberal Party
Prof Peter Baume, Chancellor of the University of Canberra and
former Liberal cabinet minister

July 16

The Josephite Sisters, Inspirational Fighters for Social Justice:

East Timor, Refugees And Other Issues

Sr Susan Connolly, Sr Josephine Mitchell

Inq: Pat Toms 02 9358 4834 pbtoms@bigpond.com; Janet Fischer 02 9398 8891;

PO Box 325 Rozelle NSW 2039; Win Childs Fax 02 9660 6554

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CP strengthens resolve for sovereignty

The Iraqi Communist Party has welcomed the UN Security Council resolution adopted on June 8 as a step towards an independent, unified democratic pluralistic federal Iraq. An editorial in the weekly newspaper of the Party says that the resolution "consolidated the steps taken on the path to end the occupation and regain full sovereignty". We reproduce the editorial in full for the information of readers:

Following weeks of lengthy negotiations and the introduction of four amendments on the initial US-UK draft, the UN Security Council adopted a new resolution (UNSCR 1546) on June 8, a week after the Interim Iraqi Government had been formed.

This resolution consolidated the steps taken on the path to end the occupation and regain full sovereignty, and also gave a boost to the current political process in the country by endorsing the formation of the Interim Government that will assume full responsibility and power on June 30.

Significantly, the resolution welcomed the commitment by the Interim Iraqi Government to work for building a unified democratic pluralistic federal Iraq, ensuring full respect for political freedoms and human rights.

We have to stress the role of the masses, their organisations and the patriotic parties.

The resolution also emphasised the right of the Iraqi people to freely decide their political future, exercise full power and control their financial and natural resources.

Shortcoming

In an obvious shortcoming, the resolution failed to specifically refer to the Transitional Administrative Law of the Iraqi State. However, it endorsed the timetable proposed for the peaceful political transfer of power and emphasised the holding of free direct democratic general elections on December 31, 2004, or not later than January 31, 2005, for an transitional national assembly that will draft a permanent constitution paving the way for the formation of an elected constitutional government by December 31, 2005.

The resolution dealt with the security issue and the status of the multinational forces. While welcoming the efforts to build the Iraqi armed forces and the role they would play, enabling them ultimately to assume full responsibility, subject completely to the relevant Iraqi ministers, it renewed the mandate given to the multinational forces in accordance with UNSCR 1511.

This mandate is to be reviewed when the Iraqi Government so requests, or 12 months after the adoption of the resolution. But it will be terminated, in any case, by the end of the political process, or before that at the request of the Iraqi Government.

The relationship between the

Iraqi Government and the multinational forces was determined according to the letters of the Iraqi Prime Minister and the US Secretary of State which were issued as appendix to the resolution.

Oil

Furthermore, the resolution granted the Iraqis full control over the arrangements pertaining to the deposit of revenues of exporting oil, products of oil and natural gas, whereby the "International Advisory and Monitoring Board" is to continue to monitor the work of the Iraqi Development Fund after including a representative of the Iraqi Government as a member with voting power. The Iraqi Government will also play the main role in the co-ordination of international aid to Iraq.

Unlike the two previous resolu-

tions 1483 and 1511, the present resolution gave the UN a bigger and fundamental role in the current political process. This role will continue until the election process is completed.

The Iraqi side was present in the deliberations at the Security Council during the preparation of the resolution, through the delegation of Iraqi foreign ministry. However, had there been a better chance for consultation and co-ordination, and sufficient time, there would have certainly been an extensive Iraqi consideration of the draft resolution based on the will of the Iraqi people and their patriotic forces to fully end the occupation, in all its manifestations, and regaining sovereignty as envisaged by the Transitional Administrative Law and the statement issued by the Iraqi Governing Council on May 25 about the concept of sovereignty.

Government responsibilities

A careful scrutiny of the resolution would show that the Iraqi Government has become responsible for several things, with the implementation depending on its attitude and the policies it draws up.

This includes matters such as the role of the multinational forces and the time limit of their presence, and the attitude towards the International Board supervising the Iraqi Development Fund, as well as the UN role as subsequently requested by the Iraqi Government.



What matters is the commitment by all sides to the resolution

On the other hand, several of the afore-mentioned points will depend on the success of the current political process and its culmination in achieving a permanent constitution and forming an elected government on its basis. Thus, a lot depends on the work of the government, its performance, and the extent to which the policies it draws up coincide with the aspirations and will of our people. **This also requires exercising oversight by the masses and their organisations, and exerting efforts to ensure that.**

The content of the resolution offers much promise for the future of Iraq, as well as support for the political process and the formation of the Iraqi Government.

However, it is still below our aspiration for more transparency and clarity in some of its clauses, especially regarding the role of multinational forces in relation to the issue of security in the broader comprehensive sense, as well as the need from now for a concrete government role in the administration of the Iraqi Development Fund and to determine the directions of expenditure in accordance with our people's priorities and needs.

We have to say that what matters here is not only a generally good resolution, but also the effort to implement it and the commitment of all sides to abide by its content. This will depend to a great degree on the performance of the Iraqi Government and its endeavour to be a worthy representative of the Iraqis, reflecting their present aspirations and wishes, and preparing the conditions for achieving the timetable of the political process.

We have to stress the role of the masses, their organisations and the patriotic parties in helping to provide these conditions and ensuring the success of the political process. To realize this will ensure the future Iraq we want, the free independent and peaceful Iraq, the unified democratic federal Iraq. ✪

Iraqis stand against violence

Shortly before *The Guardian* went to press it was announced that the first step in the hand-over of power to an Iraqi Government had taken place in Baghdad on June 28 – two days earlier than scheduled. But Iraq and its people continue to suffer the consequences of military invasion and occupation and a terror campaign launched by the remnants of the Saddam Hussein regime and outside terrorist forces. The mass media tends to present these attacks as popular acts of resistance to the occupation forces. A closer examination shows that while some US soldiers have been killed, the majority of deaths are Iraqis.

An editorial in the weekly newspaper of the Iraqi Communist Party, *Tareeq Al-Shaab*, in its issue of June 19, denounced these acts of violence, often on civilian targets, in the strongest terms. The editorial said that defeating terror is an urgent patriotic task. The editorial continued:

"The country has recently witnessed an escalation of violence, acts of sabotage and terror, including car bombings that have killed scores of innocent Iraqis and foreigners.

"Such murders and intentional harm have exposed the true nature and designs of those who carry them out and those who stand behind them. The fig leaf that the terrorists sought to take cover behind has fallen. All attempts to give their crimes the semblance of credible resistance have failed.

"The butchering of Iraqis will only provide additional pretext for those, inside and outside the country, who want to keep Iraq bleeding in order to achieve their sinister self-interested designs.

"The message, deeds and aims

of the terrorists are obvious to any objective observer regardless of the glorifying and drum-beating in some of the media which relish nothing more than scenes of destruction, bloodletting, scorched corpses and scattered human limbs.

March of the people

"However, the march of our people proceeds, albeit painfully, with optimism towards their desired goal – regaining full sovereignty and advancing the political process to its final objective of building a democratic Iraq.

"It is imperative to tackle the difficulties exploited by the enemies of our people, especially the delay in transferring the responsibility for handling security to the Iraqis.

"We stress the need for a comprehensive approach to the security issue. It is too complicated to be tackled solely by military means. There is urgent need for further measures and steps in all fields, including economic, political, media and mass work, and tackling unemployment and providing essential public services.

"In the current conditions, it is imperative for political parties and the people to take the initiative in order to foil the schemes of terrorists and saboteurs. Regardless of different opinions and views, it is patriotic duty and our country's fate that dictate the need for co-operation and co-ordination of efforts to defeat terror and crime.

"These are two grave dangers that obstruct achieving the aims of the transitional period, ending foreign occupation in all forms, eliminating the legacy of the dictatorial regime and advancing on the path of reconstruction, development, and building a unified federal democratic Iraq." ✪



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