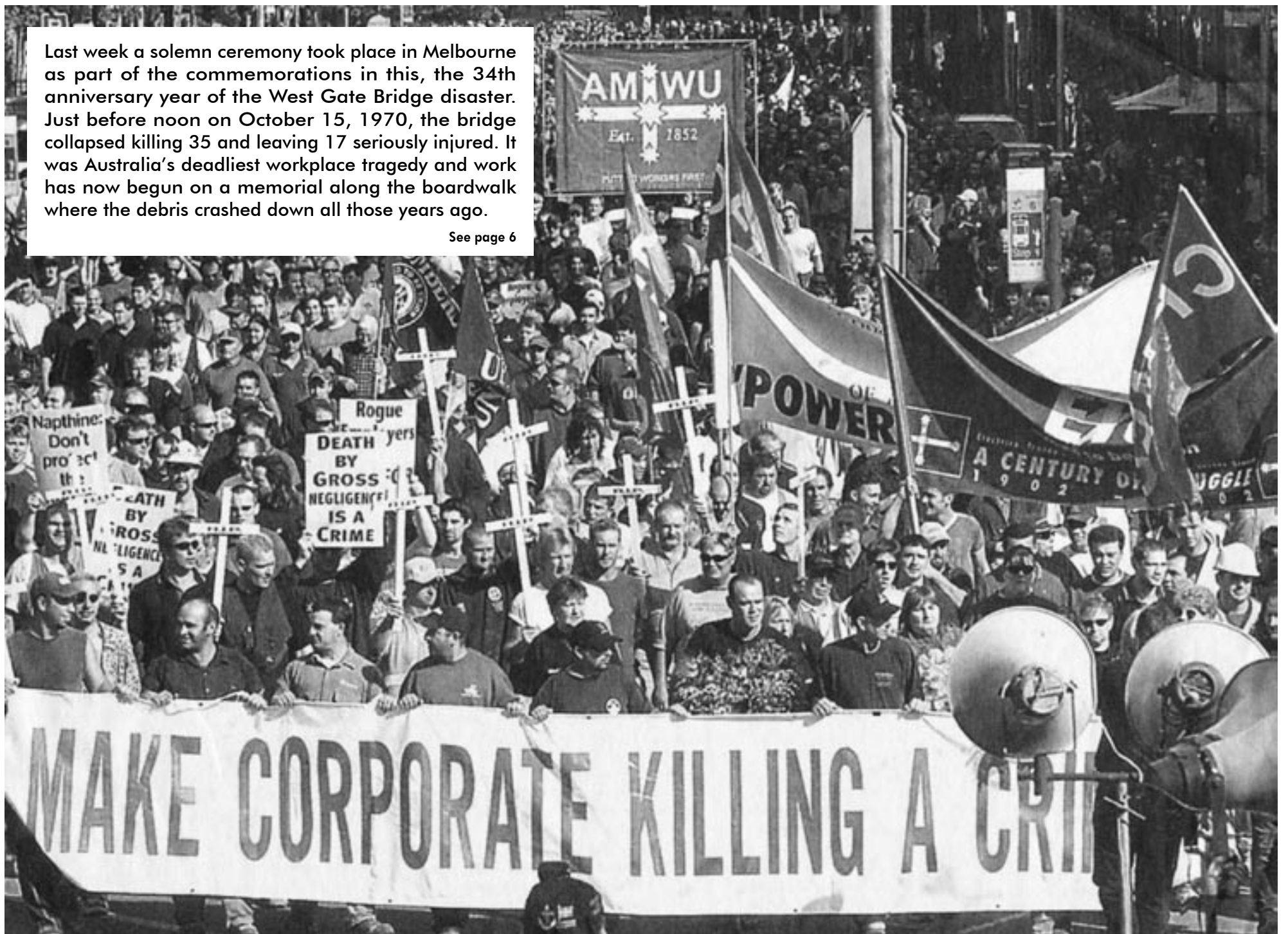


Why do workers die at work?

Last week a solemn ceremony took place in Melbourne as part of the commemorations in this, the 34th anniversary year of the West Gate Bridge disaster. Just before noon on October 15, 1970, the bridge collapsed killing 35 and leaving 17 seriously injured. It was Australia's deadliest workplace tragedy and work has now begun on a memorial along the boardwalk where the debris crashed down all those years ago.

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The Guardian

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August 11, 2004

Costello's agenda for our neighbours

Last week the Treasurer Peter Costello made a telling speech to the Australian Council for International Development about "The Challenge of Poverty Reduction". The Development Council was formerly called the Australian Council for Overseas Aid. The change of name is no accident and reflects the changed priorities of the Australian Government in its economic and political relations with overseas countries, particularly the former colonial countries of the Pacific and elsewhere.

Costello claims that the aim is "poverty reduction". Of course, the past years of colonialism and the policies pursued by the former colonial owners since the winning of "independence" by these colonies is not mentioned. This is the major cause of the existing poverty and social break-down.

Costello's recipe to "develop" these countries is nothing but the imposition of capitalist economic and political policies. He says that the governments of our neighbours need to "encourage domestic savings and investment; independent and robust public institutions; domestic political stability; and the rule of law to protect property rights and allow contracts to be enforced predictably and economically".

For Costello the rule of law is about protecting private property rights. It does not include the right to work; the right to participate in government; the right to an education, health services and housing; Indigenous rights; or the equality of women.

He claims that "Within the West, property rights, in particular individual ownership, underpin the economic growth and standard of living we have today." And the reason why the poor are poor is because "houses are built on land without formal title, unincorporated businesses have undefined liability and cannot borrow to finance growth, industries are hidden in the informal sector where investors and financial institutions cannot see them or safely lend to them." Costello rails against "traditional practices, especially in relation to authority structures, land ownership and land use".

This is the policy prescription coming from the Australian Government which is to be imposed on our neighbours. The Australian military and police forces are sent in to first bring "law and order" to the target countries. Then Australia sends in experts to take over management of the economy, customs, borders, legal and other strategic areas of government and the justice system. One objective is "public sector reform" which is merely a cover for the imposition of privatisation.

We are told that there are already 15 senior Treasury staff working in Papua New Guinea (PNG), the Solomon Islands and Nauru.

Costello has nothing to say about PNG's past experiences with the big corporations such as BHP of Ok Tedi infamy. BHP thieved the land from the indigenous land-owners and polluted the Fly River. Foreign-owned timber companies have devastated large forest areas in PNG and the Solomon Islands. Australian and other corporations and "developers" extracted the wealth, dislocated villagers, poisoned food and water sources and left the people poverty stricken.

Costello points to East Asia – "which is principally China" – attributing economic growth there to "opening the economy, trade liberalisation and moving to a market economy". What Costello conveniently ignores is that the economies of China and Vietnam, who have among the highest rates of development in the world, are "socialist market economies".

Furthermore, the other countries of East Asia such as Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, although retaining capitalist economies, have established a high degree of political independence from imperialism and Costello would not dare attempt to tell them how they should construct their economies and political systems.

The comments on Australia's foreign policies by well-known journalist Paul Kelly, whose views were published by the right-wing Centre for Independent Studies, should be listened to by Peter Costello and others. Kelly writes that "the Keating Government was immoral and the Howard Government is more immoral ... Howard's offence is deeper: it is the absence of any moral conscience in his pursuit of objectives from East Timor's independence to border protection to his alliance with President Bush in the so-called war against terror".

Kelly draws the conclusion that Australia's "relative power is in decline" relative to Asian countries and gives figures to confirm it.

Costello's lectures to our near neighbours and the imposition of policies in the interests of the capitalist ruling class of Australia are bound to fail and will lead to Australia's increasing isolation.

PRESS FUND

"Better fewer but better", Lenin said. However, for the Press Fund it's a case of "the more the merrier"! Contributions are a little bit better this week but we will need even more each week if we are to reach our annual target of \$14000. So if you possibly can, please send us a contribution to add to the cheer in next week's issue. Our thanks go to the following for their generous contributions this week:

In memory of M Glavos \$165

In memory of K Katzimburi \$27.50

SA \$7, C J and P J \$12, L K and J K \$100, T Markou \$20, "Round Figure" \$8.50

This week's total: \$340 Progressive total: \$7380

The drug monopolies' licence to print money

Anna Pha

Who had heard of "evergreening" before last week when Labor leader Mark Latham made Labor's vote for legislation on the US-Australia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) conditional on the acceptance of two amendments?

These amendments related to local content rules on free-to-air TV and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

Howard did not hesitate to accept the amendment on local content rules. But on the question of the PBS there was a strong rebuttal and for a period a political stand-off between Howard and Latham – each daring the other to hold up implementation of the FTA.

Latham swore that all he was doing was protecting the PBS and preventing higher prices for medicines. He said he was going to prevent "evergreening" by the US pharmaceutical corporations – some of the most profitable and powerful transnational corporations in the world.

He was not amending the FTA. The Bill before Parliament has nothing to do with changing the contents of the FTA. It is "enabling" legislation so that Australian laws comply with the terms of the FTA.

So why did Howard see red when Latham raised the question of pharmaceutical prices and evergreening?

Evergreening refers to the various practices used by the pharmaceutical corporations to block or delay the introduction of generic competition i.e. ensuring their drug patents "do not fall from the trees".

This is because patenting laws give the big brand names exclusive rights to sell their products for 20 years without competition. These monopoly rights enable the corporations to charge sky-high monopoly prices. They spend millions of dollars on promoting their latest products, including lavish gifts to specialists and doctors – many times

more than was spent on the original research and testing of the medication.

Meanwhile many patients go without the medication they need because of the high prices.

Patents are a licence to print money.

When the patent expires and competitors can enter the market, prices literally plummet. "The first generic competitor usually drops prices by 30 percent, and full-fledged generic competition with five or six competitors typically brings down the charge to the consumer by 70 to 80 percent", writes Robert Weissman (*Multinational Monitor*, June 2002).

Twenty years of protected super-profits still do not satisfy the greed of these corporate monsters.

Public Citizen estimated that AstraZeneca would earn more than US\$1.4 billion (A\$1.9b) additional revenue from just a six-month patent extension on Prilosec, a gastric ulcer and anti-acid medication.

They pay generic makers to stay off the market; they take over generic companies; they stall the introduction of competition through prolonged court cases they know they cannot win ... there is no end to the underhanded practices these corporations use to maintain their exclusive patents.

The PBS and the priority it gives to generic drugs curbs the monopoly prices and forces the big corporations to charge less. The FTA will considerably weaken the PBS, giving US corporations greater powers and involvement in the process of listing and pricing and manoeuvring to keep generic competition out.

This affects both the listing of medications on the Therapeutic Goods Register (indicating they are beneficial and can be prescription drugs) and on the PBS list. A PBS listing involves government negotiated lower prices and subsidies.

The PBS is anathema to the

big corporations – medicine prices in Australia are a fraction of those in the US. Other countries use Australian prices as a guide.

Under Latham's amendment, which the government is considering at the time of going to press, a pharmaceutical corporation taking a generic competitor to court over a patent dispute would have to certify that it was taking the legal action "in good faith", that it had reasonable prospects of success and would conduct the proceedings "without unreasonable delay".

It provides for fines of up to \$10 million for false or misleading certificates.

The provisions are a joke and the \$10 million fine – if ever a corporation were convicted – is a farce. Compare a \$10 million fine with the \$1.9 billion profit! Stronger amendments would be no more effective as the FTA would override them.

Labor's amendments amount to nothing more than political posturing to give the appearance that they are providing a "safety net" and protecting Australian culture (which involves much more than TV) and the PBS. They do neither of these things.

The FTA is more far-reaching than is being portrayed by both major parties or in the mass media. The FTA will affect virtually every aspect of our lives. It hands over Australian sovereignty to US transnational corporations. It is the economic arm of the US-Australia alliance, complementing and strengthening the military and political integration and subservience of Australia to US plans for global domination.

In sharp contrast to the betrayal of Australia's interests by the two major parties, the Australian Greens have taken a strong stand in opposition to the FTA. They have moved several amendments to the legislation, but regardless of whether these have been carried, intend voting against the deal anyway. ☺

Fire and New Building Appeal \$10,000

With just over a week to go before the big move, our special appeal is two-thirds of the way to its target of \$10,000. The response from so many of our readers and supporters is great. The work of the Communist Party and *The Guardian* is so important. There is so much to be done in the present political and social conditions. So if you have not made a contribution then don't leave it any longer. And if you have already made a contribution, we would not be shy about accepting another one! As they say, many hands (dipping into pockets) make light work. Many thanks to our kind contributors this week:

In memory of Peter Jury Alan & Beryl Miller \$100

In memory of Jack Child \$20

Phyllis Johnson \$100; Jim McKenzie \$50; Eric Parker \$105; E Ewers \$100; MH \$200; Graham Brown \$100; Tomas & Christine O'Gliasain and Ron Barrett \$50; Neil Fitzgerald \$100; Pablo & Carmen Rosa \$50; Peter Kennedy \$52

Total this week \$1027 Progressive Total \$6662.

✂

FIRE AND NEW BUILDING APPEAL

I, _____

of (address) _____

Postcode _____

contribute \$_____ to the CPA Fire and New Building Appeal.

I agree/do not agree to have my name included in *The Guardian* acknowledgements.
I need/do not need a receipt posted to me.

Post your contribution to CPA 65 Campbell Street, Surry Hills. NSW 2010.

Contributions can be made by credit card giving name (on the card), number and expiry date.

Rock Eisteddfod rocks Gov't

Andrew Jackson

"How much evil can we commit in the name of good?" is the unashamedly political theme of an entry in this year's high school Rock Eisteddfod. The production by Davidson High, entitled *Bad Night in Baghdad* easily won the NSW semi-finals in Wollongong, picking up 11 of the 12 awards up for grabs on the night.

Davidson High quickly became the target of right-wing media commentators who railed against the "politicisation" of public schools.

Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* first broke the story on July 28 and in the following days ran a further two stories with the bold headlines *It's a shock eisteddfod* and *Students between a rock and a real world*.

The next day the Letters page was headlined *Leftists put ideas in children's heads*.

Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson accused public schools of creating their own "Three Rs": Refugees, Republic and Reconciliation. He said the production presented an "extremely biased view" of the war.

However, the propaganda campaign against the school has been met with outrage by students, parents, teachers and the wider community.

"Dr Nelson can't have it both ways", says Kos Psaltis, President of the Davidson High Parents and Citizens Association.

"On the one hand he and his

colleagues accuse us in the public system of being values free or neutral, but when we present a point of view, as we have in our Rock Eisteddfod entry, he criticises us for doing so.

"The criticism, I would suggest, is made because the point of view differs from his."

Bad Night in Baghdad presents three main questions: whether the leaders lied to the people to justify the war; whether too many innocent people were killed in the pursuit of one bad man; and "How much evil can we commit in the name of good?"

Davidson High School Principal Chris Bonnor defended the production saying the students themselves chose the theme. "They don't live in a vacuum, they live in a real world where there are real wars going on. They see this debate and may engage in it".

Mr Bonnor says the school wrote to all parents explaining the anti-war theme of the production and asked that if they had objections could they please contact the school.

Not one parent responded.

And this is perhaps the real reason Dr Nelson is concerned: Davidson High is located in blue-ribbon Liberal territory on Sydney's North Shore.

At a polling booth located at nearby Davidson Primary School the Liberals polled 75 per cent of first preference votes in the 2001 Federal Election.



That *Bad Night in Baghdad* is being produced in Davidson is nothing short of an open revolt by the Liberal heartland against John Howard's unjust and illegal war against Iraq.

This must also concern John Howard personally, as he faces an unprecedented battle to retain his own North Shore seat of Bennelong at the upcoming federal election.

Among the many challenges facing him are:

- Former Liberal Party President John Valder, who accuses John Howard of committing a "criminal act" by sending Australia to war in Iraq, and has vowed a personal crusade in Bennelong to unseat him.

- The Greens, who are fielding prominent candidate Andrew Wilkie, the former intelligence officer from the Office of National Assessment who resigned claiming the government's justification for war was wrong.

- The Labor Party, which achieved a strong swing within Bennelong electorate boundaries at both the recent local council elections and last year's NSW State election.

The Rock Eisteddfod finals will be held at Sydney Entertainment Centre on September 9, with tickets going on sale August 26. Email your message of support to the Davidson High students at davidson-h.school@det.nsw.edu.au

Medical training: Universities chase the big bucks

Peter Mac

Sydney University recently announced plans to dump courses in nursing and rural management. The Prime Minister John Howard also announced a \$4 million grant to the private Notre Dame University for the establishment of a medical school in the inner Sydney suburb of Chippendale (walking distance from Sydney Uni).

Sydney University intends to terminate its nursing and rural management course, with the loss of 170 staff jobs (including 100 in nursing), and the elimination of

nearly 1200 student nursing places. The University wants to transfer the nursing positions to Sydney's University of Technology and the Australian Catholic University, and the rural management places to Charles Sturt University. However, these other institutions have not yet agreed to accept them.

Poor relation to be dumped

Nurses, who represent what is surely the least valued profession in Australia, struggled for years to

get their education properly recognised at tertiary education level. The attempt to dump the nursing courses by Sydney University is a result of the Howard Government's increasing emphasis on market economics in university education.

Sydney University was one of the first tertiary institutions to announce it would increase its fees, after the Howard Government decided to allow universities to charge HECS students up to 30 per cent of full fees. The universities are becoming increasingly dependent on student fees to meet their oper-

ating costs, and are therefore likely to favour high fee courses such as medicine and law, over cheaper courses with correspondingly low income expectations, such as nursing and education.

The proposed new Notre Dame medical faculty appears to be focused on training doctors, not nurses. Even if it accepts some nursing places, its total capacity will be only 80 students, whereas Sydney University currently offers 860 places.

There's certain to be a major hiatus in student output over the next nine years until Notre Dame turns out its first graduates, and even then there will be greatly reduced student positions. And if Notre Dame decides not to accept any student nursing places the hiatus will continue into the indefinite future.

Privatisation, an enforced conversion

Bit by bit, Australia's education is being corporatised and privatised. Because of the outrageous public funding of private schools, and the enormous difficulties public schools are facing as a result of underfunding, an increasing number of parents are sending their children to private schools.

And now the underfunding is being extended to Australia's tertiary education institutions, and public universities are already charging fees and are becoming more and more dependent on them. University education will become a matter of "whatever the market will bear", rather than allowing even the least affluent students to pursue their course of choice.

Courses in medicine are an

excellent case in point. At the moment there are 1344 medical student places in 12 Australian public universities. Over the next four years, another five universities will establish medical faculties on six campuses, three of which will be private.

The University of Western Sydney, one of the universities establishing new medical courses, has not revealed the number of places it intends to offer. However, assuming it offers 80 places (similar to the ANU and other smaller faculties), the total number of new places would be 435, of which the private institutions would offer 220, or just over 50 per cent.

Unions up in arms

Chasing the big bucks will not necessarily be plain sailing for Sydney University. The union representing staff took the university to the Industrial Relations Commission last week over the threatened job losses. The IRC issued an interim instruction to the university to make no announcement and take no action to implement the closure of the nursing course.

That's good news for the nursing profession, and for the community that depends on their wonderful services. However, thanks to the Howard Government's tertiary education policies, many universities now have their gaze firmly fixed on the big student fees, as demonstrated by the intended establishment of new medical courses and by Sydney University's attempt to dump its nursing course.

In short, if the Howard Government remains in office, the prognosis for public health in Australia is definitely not good.

Pete's Corner



Hitting Hardie's bottom line

In the latest moves against James Hardie Industries, Sydney City, Parramatta and Leichhardt Councils have signed up to a union campaign to boycott James Hardie products. Several other local authorities – including Bankstown, the Blue Mountains and Waverley – have the issue on their agendas as community anger over the compensation rip-off grows.

The move was sparked by a joint union action, with the building and manufacturing unions approaching the NSW Labor Council last month calling for community and workplace action against the one-time blue chip company.

Seven mayors attended last week's CFMEU (Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union) delegates meeting and pledged their, or their council's, backing for the boycott.

Bankstown Mayor Helen Westwood said the campaign would affect James Hardie's "bottom line – and that seems to be what they respond to".

Following the meeting, CFMEU delegates marched en masse on the inquiry into James

Hardie's corporate behaviour where more sensational allegations were being made.

Michael Slattery, QC, told the senate commission of inquiry Hardie had deliberately kept trust fund directors "starved" of information and isolated from actuaries.

The fund, MRCF (Medical Research and Compensation Fund), was set up by Hardie to control assets available to victims of its asbestos products when it moved to the Netherlands.

James Hardie told the Supreme Court it would leave behind assets worth \$1.9 billion for use of creditors. A year later it cancelled that arrangement, without informing the court, shareholders, the stock market, or asbestos sufferers.

Actuaries estimate that with Hardie having gone Dutch, the trust fund it left behind will fall as much as \$2.4 billion short of meeting compensation claims.

Slattery, acting for MRCF, referred to a lawyer's letter that had been changed by a James Hardie executive so victims would not be informed of plans to remove assets.

The support of local councils



Joint union and local council action is targeting James Hardie

Seven mayors attended last week's CFMEU delegates meeting and pledged their, or their council's, backing for the boycott.

Tunnellers dig in for safety

Workcover doesn't employ a single inspector with tunnelling experience in a city where more than 1000 workers are employed on a \$3.5 billion underground boom.

Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) organiser, Steve Dixon, unveiled those statistics in an impassioned plea for a "fair go" for tunnellers, after a father of two was killed on Sydney's cross-city project.

The CFMEU and AWU are urging Workcover to resuscitate the specialist Civil Sector Safety Unit, disbanded several years ago.

Dixon said tunnelling was a dangerous, complex, specialised occupation.

"Workcover expect to send out someone with no experience to understand the situation and, frankly, that's impossible", he said.

"It's not fair on the inspectors, for a start, and it's certainly not fair on people risking their lives to help rebuild Sydney.

"If the government told people they could take their cars to the local bakery to get a rego, the public would be horrified. It's the same thing."

Workers held a memorial service for Ronald Shore in Sydney, last Thursday. His body is being flown back to New Zealand for burial.

A mass meeting, last Friday, decided Baulderstone Hornibrooke's

cross-city tunnel job would remain closed until geotechnical surveys and safety audits had been completed.

Australian Workers' Union (AWU) organiser, Kevin Browne, said tunnellers on three city jobs had been "extremely generous" in providing support for Shore's family.

The union hopes to make a six-figure contribution to a trust fund that is being established for his daughters in New Zealand.

Meanwhile, Labor Council is backing AWU and CFMEU bids to meet Industrial Relations Minister, John Della Bosca, over occupational health and safety in the sector.

Workers Online ☪

Angry disability carers take action

Five thousand disability carers and workers from facilities such as Kew Cottages and community homes commenced industrial action against the Victorian State Government last Sunday in support of their enterprise bargaining claim.

The carers, who are members of the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU), rejected a State Government wages offer "as insulting and offensive and they responded accordingly", HACSU State Secretary Lloyd Williams said.

"The Bracks Government has no appreciation of the efforts made by this workforce. Our members work in extremely difficult circumstances. They care and support one

of the most vulnerable groups in our community – people with mild to severe intellectual disabilities.

"The bans will not affect residents' care. In fact our members will be able to spend more quality time with clients.

"The bans maximise the inconvenience to management. Members want to show management what they have to put up with and the increased work load and responsibilities being forced on them."

The bans are mostly financial and administrative and affect communication with management.

However, delegates have also authorised the union to step up the bans and commence rolling stoppages.

Mr Williams said that the government had offered a three percent increase a year as long as workers agree to reduce their sick leave benefits, workers' compensation, leave entitlements, and give up their job security. "That is absolutely rejected."

"Our members are appalled that the Government refuses to even make the same offer as was made to rest of the public sector.

"Our members suffer one of the highest rates of occupational assault. Approximately 77 percent of this workforce is assaulted each year. Our members are calling on the Government to properly support the workforce and the people with disabilities they care for." ☪

Tougher regulation urgently needed

The Victorian Trades Hall Council Secretary, Leigh Hubbard, last week called on the Bracks Government to introduce stricter regulations for work undertaken in the home renovating sector.

"The tragic death of a 26-year-old man yesterday [August 3] clearly points to a need for tougher regulations and more education programs regarding home renovations", Mr Hubbard said.

"The workers in the home renovation sector often receive no training with regards to performing such dangerous work. The Victorian Government needs to get its house in order and better regulate the sector through mandating that all home renovations, even those costing less than \$5000 are carried out by a licensed tradesman and have a

permit", he added.

Currently, under the Building Control Regulations, any building work being undertaken below \$5000 does not require a permit or a registered tradesperson to carry it out.

The house being re-stumped was located on ground made soft by recent rains and was not back-propped to ensure the work was carried out safely. Clearly, the men carrying out the work were not equipped with the right tools or the right training to be undertaking this job.

"Let us learn from this tragic death of a recent father and ensure that in addition to changing building regulations, WorkSafe undertakes urgent intensive education and training programs in the sector", Mr Hubbard concluded. ☪

C'wealth Bank workers national day of action

Janice Hamilton

Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA) employees across the country participated in a half-day stoppage last Friday and have planned further rolling half-day strikes throughout the month of August. Staff stopped work in support of their claim for a new enterprise bargaining agreement to improve workplace conditions.

"Staff have been forced into this action by CBA, which continues to ignore ways staff have suggested to improve their workplace, and help them provide a better service to their customers", said Peter Presdee, NSW/ACT Branch Secretary of the Finance Sector Union (FSU).

The stop-work action is part of a range of industrial activities staff have undertaken as a last resort to make CBA management listen and to commit to real workplace improvements. Thousands of job cuts are scheduled within the next 12 months, placing further pressure on existing staff already struggling to deliver services due to current understaffing.

Despite saying it wants a "fair

and quick outcome" to negotiations, CBA has failed to demonstrate any willingness to address the key issues of:

- Chronic understaffing throughout workplaces
- Consultation with staff about establishing the individual sales targets, which are now a prerequisite of the bank's "performance culture"
- A pay offer that brings CBA staff into line with industry colleagues.

"Members report one in three workplaces are routinely understaffed, and that relief staff, when provided, are more often than not untrained or unfamiliar with bank processes and products", said Mr Presdee. "This makes it extremely difficult to manage daily workloads and, with more job cuts imminent, this will only get worse."

What is the CBA solution? Make staff work faster, by allocating a time limit for each customer transaction, and reducing the level of customer engagement. Following the stoppages, staff have been returning to work and continuing a work to rule campaign with industrial bans on specific activities. ☪

Hiroshima Day 2004

A wide range of community groups supported an event hosted by the Hiroshima/Nagasaki Commemoration Committee at the Effective Living Centre in Adelaide last Sunday. The gathering at the annual commemoration of the dropping of the atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, was given encouraging news from the movement known as the Mayors for Peace to Ban Nuclear Weapons.

Professor Ian Maddocks introduced Felicity-Ann Lewis, the Mayor of the City of Marion, who has recently returned from Hiroshima. She gave a very moving account of her tour of the monuments, museums and parks of the rebuilt city. She believes that every world leader should be obliged to go to Hiroshima to learn the lessons of history and to feel the compassion of the local people. She supports the Mayors for Peace call for better outcomes from the crucial Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty negotiations in 2005.

Yoshi, a young student of law and international studies at the University of Adelaide, spoke of his family's origins in Hiroshima. Yoshi lost two relatives in the bombing, including his great uncle. He recounted the tragic story of

how the family searched the devastated city for their loved ones. He pointed out that the hibakusha (A-bomb survivors) have expressed their yearning for a world without nuclear weapons before the last hibakusha dies.

Julia Pitman of the Uniting Church gave an insightful review of the peace movement over the past century. Its role in the anti-conscription campaigns in 1916 and 1917, the movement against the Vietnam War and, more recently, the protests against a nuclear waste dump in SA are part of an impressive record of achievement.

David Palmer, senior lecturer in American Studies at Flinders University, displayed material from a number of little known sources to show the extent of the cover up of the suffering in Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the US bombing. The censorship of sources at the time helped create the impression of an "empty wasteland" rather than a scene of mass human misery. He compared the difficulties facing those wanting to set the record straight after the bombings to those put in the way of Michael Moore, the producer of *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Recent events highlight the need for Australians to press for a foreign policy independent of the US.

Fellow Flinders academic Paul Langley added details of how testing for radioactivity in the cities and even on the fuselage of the infamous Enola Gay B-29 bomber that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima was falsified. He traced some of the post-war history of weapons testing in Australia where truth was also a casualty.

Sydney

Around 300 people braved a cool winter evening in Sydney and marched from Town Hall to Hyde Park to commemorate the 59th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb "Little Boy" on the people of Hiroshima.

Speakers from the Hiroshima Day Committee, the union movement, the Greens and Democrats warned that the USA's new Nuclear Missile Defence Shield and continued imperialist wars were causing a re-escalation of the nuclear threat. Australia's participation in those wars was not making Australia a safer place, but a more likely target.

Communist Party members distributed *The Guardian* and a pamphlet publicising the Party's campaign against the Militarisation of Australia.

Meetings and vigils were also held in other major cities. ✪

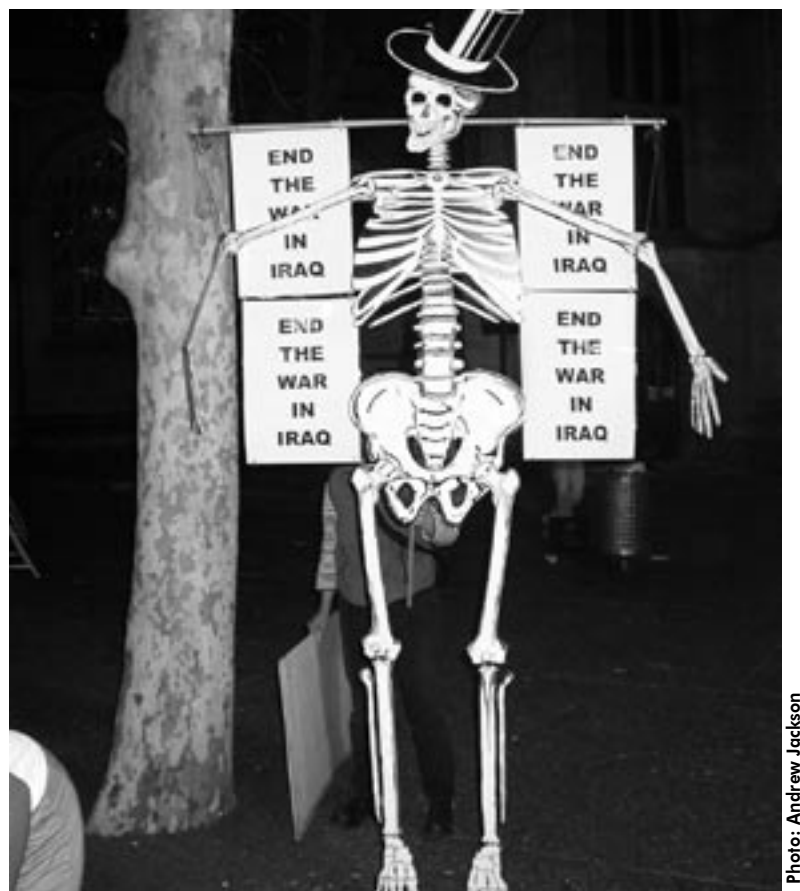
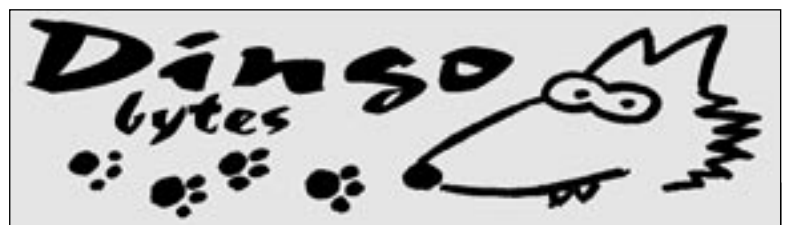


Photo: Andrew Jackson



ABC staff demand open management

Peter Mac

Australian Broadcasting Corporation staff are up in arms over the new ABC draft code of conduct, which requires staff to refrain from making "public comment" (including speaking engagements, written articles and media interviews) unless it is part of normal work or is approved by ABC authorities.

The Code would also restrict out-of-hours staff behaviour. It demands that such behaviour "... must not interfere with their performance of official duties or reflect on the standing of the corporation."

Such wording could encompass almost any activity of ABC staff. Discussion about the code has to date focused largely on protecting staff privacy regarding personal

relationships. However, the code's restrictions could also be seen as applying to activity in environmental groups, anti-war organisations or political parties.

The Code even attempts to force staff to hand over any cash they receive as part of a media award. Such a spiteful requirement will inevitably stiffen the resolve of ABC staff to reject the restrictions.

This proposed code is the latest in a series of attempts to intimidate and muzzle ABC staff. These have included an investigation into alleged political bias over its coverage of the invasion of Iraq, attacks on the staff representative on the ABC Board and there are allegations of staff being bullied.

ABC management, as revealed on ABC *Mediawatch* program, issued directives prohibiting the

release of archive material to the public when it would be used for "political purposes", without the express permission of the person featured in the material.

The Howard Government is applying political pressure to the national broadcaster, which despite its short-comings, is still the government's most honest and open mass media critic. The government is determined to stifle such criticism, especially in the run-up to the federal election.

But they'll have to deal with "fired-up" resistance. A union staff meeting decided to oppose the new code, and passed a motion stating: "This meeting of ABC staff expresses grave concern about wording of the proposed code of conduct, particularly with regard to the possibility of intrusion into the private lives and affairs of ABC staff." ✪

A question of what is right

"Our enemies are innovative and resourceful, and so are we. They never stop thinking about new ways to harm our country and our people, and neither do we."

George W Bush

at signing ceremony for a \$417 billion defence spending bill. August 5, 2004

"A time will come when a politician who has willfully made war and promoted international dissension will be as sure of the dock and much surer of the noose than a private homicide. It is not reasonable that those who gamble with men's lives should not stake their own."

H G Wells

"I have a great admiration for the Nazi organisation of Germany. There is a case for Germany against Czechoslovakia. We must not destroy Hitlerism or talk about shooting Hitler, the gunman of Europe."

Remark by Robert Menzies to Gerald Mahoney, Labour MHR as reported in *Hansard*, page 337, Second Session 1940.

"We're not a democracy. It's a terrible misunderstanding and a slander to the idea of democracy to call us that. In reality, we're a plutocracy: a government by the wealthy."

Ramsey Clark
former US Attorney General

"A man who has in mind an apparent advantage and promptly proceeds to dissociate this from the question of what is right shows himself to be mistaken and immoral. Such a standpoint is the parent of assassinations, poisonings, forged wills, thefts, malversations of public money, and the ruinous exploitation of provincials and Roman citizens alike. Another result is passionate desire – desire for excessive wealth, for unendurable tyranny, and ultimately for the despotic seizure of free states. These desires are the most horrible and repulsive things imaginable."

Marcus Tullius Cicero
(106-43 BCE)

The Federal Government's religious fundamentalism has seen it carry out regressive policies to push its vicious god-bothering agenda, including accusing public schools of lacking "values", and pouring taxpayers' money into private schools. This funding bias extends to the likes of the St Joseph's School near Cowra, on the NSW north coast. Operated by a doomsday cult run by a lunatic called William Kamm, the school has been granted \$440,000 by the Howard Government. Kamm, who is known by followers as "Little Pebble", says he and his devotees will survive a coming apocalypse – they are currently building bunkers in preparation – after which he will become the last pope. Female followers are to bear his children because he carries the "Holy Seed" that will breed a new race. In the fenced-off school compound a spokesperson for the school told the media, "There are lot more loonies out there than there are in here". Yes, and some of them are running the country.

It's the little things that show they care. The punitive nature of the privatised welfare system has driven many thousands of recipients to despair and desperation and many unemployed workers to simply give up. So we have the case of a 68-year-old woman whose pensioner husband died four weeks ago. Centrelink has hounded her about how much rent she is paying and about her living arrangements with her grandson. The woman, who was her ill husband's carer for many years, had her Carer Allowance cancelled less than a week after the funeral.

The workers who have to run Centrelink are also having to bear the brunt of attacks with ongoing job cuts – more than 2000 in the last 12 months – and deteriorating work conditions. And staff often suffer violent attacks by people angry and frustrated at the system. The Community and Public Sector Union says that staff are increasingly reluctant to "carry the can" for problems caused by poor government policy. "It is often overlooked that Centrelink staff are at the front line of service delivery in Australia", says the union. "They too often get caught in the cross-fire of the political policy debate."

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is NSW Premier Bob Carr. Big business and the Federal Government are being blamed by Carr for the criminal rip-off of asbestos victims by James Hardie Industries. "You ought to go straight to the Federal Government, which has a corporations power, and find out why they did not exercise it in this case", he told the parliamentary inquiry into Hardie's fleeing the country and leaving behind an under-funded compensation trust. Carr admits the company paid him a "courtesy call" but denies anything could have been done by his government. But that clearly wasn't Hardie's view as it spent tens of thousands of dollars lobbying government staffers to "persuade" Carr not to legislate to hold the company responsible for future compensation.

WHY DO WORKERS DIE AT WORK?

Bob Briton

Last week a solemn ceremony took place in Melbourne as part of the commemorations in this, the 34th anniversary year of the West Gate Bridge disaster. Just before noon on October 15, 1970, the bridge collapsed killing 35 and leaving 17 seriously injured. It was Australia's deadliest workplace tragedy and work has now begun on a memorial along the boardwalk where the debris crashed down all those years ago.

Thirty-five sculpted columns will line the walkway – one for each of the lives cut short. Last week's gathering marked the commencement of the work. It is expected that the monument will be completed in time for the anniversary. A *Herald Sun* report records Major Projects Minister Peter Batchelor saying that it would commemorate all Victorians who died in industrial accidents at work.

"Accidents".

"Died" – in the past tense.

The memorial would "serve as a stark reminder to us all of the need to work together to prevent unnecessary death in the workplace."

Us?

At the end of April, NSW Industrial Relations Minister John Della Bosca unveiled a union-funded memorial to workers killed at work at Sydney's Darling Harbour. During the moving ceremony, families tied photographs of their loved ones to the 4.5 metre high bronze and stainless steel monument. The unveiling was part of nationwide activities to mark International Workers' Memorial Day.

With all the lip service being paid to workplace safety on the occasion of the international day, an onlooker could be forgiven for thinking that governments, the bosses and the workers were as one in their desire for safer conditions at work. You would not think that every Australian Government – state, territory and Federal with the notable exception of the ACT – was simultaneously fighting alongside the bosses to PREVENT the addition of the crime of industrial manslaughter to the statute books.

It seems deaths in the workplace are something we, quite rightly, should feel sad about but not something we ought to feel angry about. And after all, the various governments involved are pledging tough new regulations to curb the plague of death and injury attributable to the workplace. Is the response adequate? Not by a long shot!



The scale of the "problem"

ACTU Assistant Secretary Richard Marles has compared the attitude of authorities to deaths and injuries in the workplace to society's attitude to the road toll. They are almost accepted as a fact of life. Marles points out that, while people do not look kindly on negligent driving, they do not usually associate the bad driving in question with criminality. Luckily, from the bosses' point of view, this is the attitude taken to workplace tragedies by the various bodies charged with overseeing occupational health and safety standards.

However, the comparison with the road toll can only be taken so far. In the case of the road toll, major changes in behaviour with regard to drink driving have occurred – aided, no doubt, by the introduction of random breath testing. Most instructive for the comparison with the workplace is the fact that since the 1970s all states have had the serious crime of culpable driving on the books. All this has corresponded directly with a marked reduction in the national road toll – 3900 deaths in 1970 compared to 1634 to March this year.

The comparison falls down in a number of other areas also. First of all, not many of our policy makers are prepared to see if a similarly tough legislative approach to work-

much more realistic attitude to the crisis than the bosses or most governments and is keener to curb the worst excesses of the current situation. The headlines over recent months tell the story.

Last November the ACT Legislative Assembly added industrial manslaughter to the Crimes Act. The legislation came into force in March. It provides for sentences for employers of up to 25 years in prison and fines of up to \$250,000. Already the case of 60-year-old Dimitrios "Jimmy" Theodorelos, an electrical assistant and ETU member who died in a fall, is being investigated by the Australian Federal Police.

Meanwhile, the Federal Government moved quickly to exclude Commonwealth public servants from their right to protection under the Act. Robert Gottlieb's *The Australian* dutifully passed on the ridiculous defence that the ACT legislation could put the PM behind bars if a public servant suffered a fatal fall down a flight of stairs.

Proposed Victorian legislation would have allowed for fines of up to \$5 million for corporations and prison terms of up to five years for the worst kinds of industrial manslaughter. However, the Bracks Government dropped the proposal even before it established a review under Chris Maxwell QC of the state's occupational health and safety (OH&S) record. Victoria will now

throughout the state – but still no industrial manslaughter legislation.

Tasmania is in a unique situation. Most observers believed that, like every other state in Australia, Tasmania had no charge of industrial manslaughter. However, the pursuit by the Meatworkers Union of the case of 16-year-old Matthew Hudson – who was working unpaid at a Launceston meat processing plant at the time of an accident involving a forklift – has unearthed some forgotten legislation from the 1920s in the Tasmanian criminal code. It remains to be seen if the antique legislation will help Matthew's family and the community obtain some measure of justice.

"Affordable safety"

It must be born in mind that the promises from the states to increase penalties for deaths and injuries due to employer negligence start from a very low base. Some examples from the ACTU site will illustrate the point:

- The owners of Victorian trucking company Caldwell and Pither Pty Ltd were fined \$20,000 after a worker was buried under a truckload of logs that had fallen off one of their trucks.

- When a Queensland man was killed using a power saw on site, Chevron Construction Company Pty Ltd was fined \$37,000.

- In a NSW case involving Steggle's and Network Production Personnel, in which a driver without appropriate training was crushed by a tractor, a total of \$376,250 was imposed in penalties.

In the last mentioned instance, the actual fine of \$159,250 paid by Steggle's represented 0.025 per cent of the company's annual revenue.

Jan Carrick – whose 18-year-old son died on his first day at work for Drybulk Pty Ltd in Melbourne in 1998 – told a crowd at a union-organised rally outside Victoria's Parliament in April that the offending company will not be paying the penalties handed down. Drybulk went into liquidation so neither the company nor its principals will need to come up with the \$50,000 in safety fines or the \$20,000 in criminal compensation.

The current situation is a farce. Even the doubling of existing fines and other sanctions would still leave us with a farce. When he was Workplace Relations Minister, Tony Abbott made it clear that his attitude to workplace safety was predicated on the need to turn profit and safeguard investment. His successor, Kevin Andrews, is continuing in that tradition.

At the time the Federal Government was legislating to weasel out of the ACT's new legisla-

Sue Baxter commented ... she would have preferred industrial manslaughter legislation to a monument.

place safety would reap similar benefits. Secondly, while you would not expect much debate over the numbers killed and injured on the roads, authorities are keen to keep the official statistics for workplace death and injury as low as possible.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) claims that around 4500 people die at work each year. If you add the numbers that die at some later date from their exposure to asbestos, it turns out that in excess of 2000 Australians – or more than five every day of the year – are killed by their work. According to Access Economics [a body hardly renowned for its sympathies with the cause of the workers], if Australian authorities were to calculate work related fatalities the way they do in Finland, the figure could range from 4500 to 8200 deaths every year in Australia.

Australian figures do not include any stress related causes such as heart disease, substance abuse or suicide. Non-smoking bar staff who die of smoke related disease are not considered. The effects of bullying are not estimated. The ABS numbers only tally the cases that were compensated. No compo means no statistic.

Industrial manslaughter

The ACTU accepts the lower estimate of 4500 – a figure that still dwarfs the road toll. The trade union movement clearly takes a

get a number of "roving inspectors" to enforce the OH&S regulations. There will be tougher penalties and enforceable orders to rectify problems. There will be increased penalties and the possibility of short stints in jail for offending bosses, even for first offences.

The NSW Government, which has already gutted the rights of workers and their families to workers' compensation and common law claims, also passed the workplace safety question to a committee late last year. The four-member panel has handed down "tough" recommendations for legislation almost identical to their Victorian counterparts. Panel members maintain that to charge employers under the Crimes Act would be a backward step and, in any event, it would be too difficult to prove a case of industrial manslaughter against a boss. It seems that, while a seven-year term for daubing the Opera House with anti-war slogans is in order, comparable jail sentences for negligent bosses are inconceivable and unworkable. The sentences, it should be remembered, would only apply where the death resulted from negligence.

In South Australia it has been left to No Pokies MLC Nick Xenophon to introduce a private Member's bill permitting a charge of industrial manslaughter. In Queensland, Premier Beattie recently revealed plans to spend \$15 million over the next three years on an extra 27 health and safety inspectors

tion, Mr Andrews was trying out an argument for the truly gullible: that tougher laws will cause accidents!

"Industrial manslaughter laws only lead to uncertainty for employers and employees. Ensuring

Australian government employers and employees are not affected by industrial manslaughter laws means the focus remains on preventing workplace accidents."!!

The Federal Government's attitude is reflected in its treatment of the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission. The Commission is charged with producing key national standards for safety in the workplace. It is under-funded. It has no hope of effectively dealing with the nine jurisdictions around Australia that it is supposed to coordinate. Very few new or revised standards, codes or guidelines emanate from the struggling body. The Productivity Commission has even recommended closing it down!

Australian governments see the world the same way the bosses do. Employers will take any and every shortcut they can to reduce production costs. To them, workplace death and injury are insurance-related "risks" that are calculated in production costs. Training for the safe use of equipment, the provision of useable up-to-date safety equipment and the monitoring of safety standards on the job are "on costs". They are budget items under constant downward pressure in these days of super capitalism.

The dollar cost of insurance and penalties (what there is of them) is weighed up against the dollar cost of safety. Health and safety becomes an issue for the employer only when failure to implement an OH&S measure costs more (e.g. through trade union actions, pitiful government penalties, consumer boycotts, etc) than protecting its workforce.

Workers should remember that the more significant gains in safety



To them, workplace deaths are insurance-related "risks" that are calculated in production costs.

standards were only achieved after the most determined battle between unions and employers. Virtually every one of these advances – the ban on working on building sites in the rain springs to mind – was hard



won and now subject to sneaking or crude "grab back" from the bosses.

Unfortunately for the labour movement, union representation in the workplace continues to slip. While unions in Australia can boast a high level of training and expertise in OH&S issues (dating back to the days of the Trade Union Training Authority), relatively fewer workers are benefiting from this knowledge and protection.

The number of non-unionised casual workers in the workforce has risen to 28 per cent of the workforce nationally. Casuals are over-represented in the statistics for workplace deaths and accidents. According to a recent report by the University of Adelaide School of Social Sciences, casual workers are more likely to suffer stress and low self-esteem. Two thirds are "deeply unhappy" about their insecure situation. They are more likely to work when ill or not to report accidents or hazards for fear of the sack. Casual workers are much less likely to get training or take part in other work-related communication.

Swinburne University's Brain Sciences Institute reports that as many as 750,000 Australians were subject to at least three attacks of irresistible sleepiness every week – a recipe for disaster when handling machinery or driving. Long hours and increasing demands on workers are producing an increasingly dangerous cocktail of threats.

Solutions

It is certainly time to send the anti-worker Howard Government packing and to scrap non-union Australian Workplace Agreements and other reactionary elements of

and death requirement. Enterprise Bargaining Agreements should include undertakings in meaningful language – not "motherhood" clauses. Campaigns for adequate staffing levels are needed.

The many provisions that were contained in awards regarding occupational health and safety should be restored and the whole OH&S system strengthened. In particular, trained trade union OH&S reps should have the right to stop work on a site where the health or safety of any worker is at risk.

Full compensation rights under common law must be restored. The removal of common law rights was taken by governments to reduce the cost of insurance premiums for bosses and must be overturned.

The destruction of the centralised award system has fostered a type of decentralisation that allows the owners of unsafe workplaces to undercut businesses doing the right thing in terms of OH&S. It becomes a race to the bottom, and the price is workers' lives. Clearly this development must be reversed.

Beyond that, an assault must be made on the bosses' ideology that underpins the policies currently killing and maiming workers. This ideology of profits before people prefers symbolism to real action over workplace safety. It is cheaper.

Sue Baxter is the mother of Joel Exner. He was the 16-year-old worker who fell to his death last year on a Sydney building site. The inadequately installed safety mesh failed. It was his third day on the job. In response, the NSW Trade and Labor Council wanted the penalty of industrial manslaughter pushed up the legislative agenda of the NSW Parliament. This was to be known as "Joel's Law".

There is still no "Joel's Law". There is a monument to fallen workers in Darling Harbour. Sue Baxter commented in the press that she would have preferred industrial manslaughter legislation to a monument. "I have been appealing to the Government about the need for industrial manslaughter laws. Joel would still be alive if corners weren't cut", she told *The Daily Telegraph*.

Monuments and observance are important. However, it is only when workers become more organised in the workplace and begin to strike back at the bosses' ideology that the real gains will be made. When people come before profits! ☘

Déjà vu from British to American Empire

The central part of *The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America* brings on a rush of déjà vu. In announcing "the necessity" to "alter their former Systems of Government" because of colonial occupation by Britain, those founding the new republic recited the reasons why. It is like the summation of the actions of a certain superpower bully that have been repeated over and over and reads like a dress rehearsal for you-know-who in you-know-where. Read for yourself:

The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right to Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their Public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions of the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to their People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions from within.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our People, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislature.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our law; giving his Assent to their acts of pretended legisla-

and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments: for suspending our Legislature, and declaring themselves invested with Power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection, and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislature.

tion: For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us: For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from Punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States: For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world: For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent: For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury: For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offence.

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule in these Colonies: For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws,

large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the work of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilised nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble of terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people. ☘



Class connections – the Queen and Bush

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their industrial relations regime. Legislation to convert greater numbers of casual workers into permanent ones is way overdue. A drive to unionise a larger proportion of the workforce is a genuine life

What Russians think

Greg Godwin

What has alarmed the dean of anti-Soviet academics, the famous Richard Pipes of Harvard University?

Professor Pipes, an ardent opponent of communism, has been aroused from his retirement by a number of polls taken to gauge what the Russian people think and want. In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2004) titled "Flight from Freedom: What Russians Think and Want", Pipes expresses deep regret that the Russian people continue to

that democracy is a façade for a government controlled by rich and powerful cliques. Only 22 percent expressed a preference for democracy, whereas 53 percent positively disliked it."

We should add that in this survey the Russians are not rejecting Soviet democracy, but Western bourgeois democracy. With disgust, Pipes notes, "Russian attitudes towards private enterprise and property rights are hardly more positive. ... Eighty-four percent of those surveyed in a poll published in January 2004, for example, said

an important human right", Pipes adds. And "polling data indicate that slightly more than half the population considers the non-payment of debts and shoplifting to be 'fully acceptable' behaviour."

Another poll recorded that 72 percent of Russians wanted to restrict "private economic activity". Obviously communitarian values remain very deeply embedded in the Russian people.

"Asked in 1999 to list the 10 greatest men of all times and nations, respondents named nine Russians. (The only foreigner was Napoleon, presumably because he was defeated on Russian soil.) The first five people on the list were Peter the Great, Lenin, Pushkin, Stalin, and the astronaut Iurii Gagarin", reports Pipes.

While it is difficult to say with certainty without knowing the polling methodology, these results appear disappointingly nationalistic. One would have hoped that the Russian people would have retained more of the internationalist spirit of the Soviet era. Nonetheless, it is revealing that three of the five "greatest men" were from the Soviet period, with Lenin remaining the most revered figure of modern times. Pushkin, of course, was of African-Russian descent, a fact proudly emphasised in the Soviet era. The so-called "democrats" of the counterrevolution are noticeably missing from the list.

Again quoting Pipes: "These findings help explain why so many

These poll results show how the values of socialism and Soviet life are deeply rooted among Russians.

reject the Western economic and political model while yearning to restore Soviet power. Despite his best efforts, unparalleled propaganda, corruption, and subversion, the Russian people still reject the bitter pill of Western bourgeois democracy and capitalism.

"Democracy is widely viewed as a fraud", Pipes reports. "There is a prevalent perception that Russia's politics have been 'privatised' and controlled by powerful clans. Seventy-eight percent of respondents in a 2003 survey said

that wealth in Russia can only be acquired through connections. Four out of five respondents stated that the inequalities in wealth in modern Russia are excessive and illegitimate, and most blamed the country's widespread poverty on an unjust economic system."

It would seem that these former Soviet peoples retain a profound understanding of capitalism despite the best efforts of the West and the Russians' current misleaders.

"Only a quarter or so of Russians regard private property as

Russian communists hit by dirty tricks

Ed Griffiths

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), with 560,000 members and roughly 10 million voters, is one of the world's largest non-governing communist parties. It is also the only opposition party represented in the Russian State Duma.

The CPRF held its 10th congress in Moscow July 3. During the congress an attack took place aimed at disrupting the proceedings and breaking up the party. It took the form of the convening of an "alternative" congress, spuriously validated by an "alternative" plenary meeting of a handful of central committee members, which obediently dismissed the party leadership – including its chairman, Gennady Zyuganov – and installed a new team.

The "alternative" CPRF chairman is Vladimir Tikhonov, governor of the Ivanovo region in European Russia and rarely thought of as a party heavyweight. Behind him stands Gennady Semigin, a multimillionaire who was recently expelled from the CPRF over allegations that he was trying to subvert it into a social democratic "loyal opposition". And behind Semigin lurks Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Revealingly, the "alternative" congress was held at an undisclosed location, presumably in order to avoid embarrassment over how few delegates were in attendance – but it was still graced with the presence of "observers" from Putin's Ministry of Justice. According to the CPRF,

the "alternative" congress could have drawn no more than a fifth of the party's duly elected delegates and therefore lacked any authority.

It is alleged that Semigin and others spent up to 60 million roubles (\$2 million) a day on anti-Zyuganov publicity in the run-up to the congress.

There have been repeated suggestions that the Kremlin would like to promote the formation of a "patriotic-minded" social democratic party which could edge the CPRF out and play the role of a tame parliamentary opposition. The other interpretation is that Putin's aim is to simply to destroy the CPRF. This seems more plausible.

This most recent stunt has been denounced by a string of high-profile CPRF members and supporters, including Nikolai Kharitonov, the 2004 presidential candidate, the editors of main opposition newspapers *Sovietskaya Rossiya* and *Zavtra*, Valentin Kuptsov, the party's former deputy chairman, and veterans of the left-wing CPSU opposition in the Gorbachev era, including Starodubtsev, Lukianov and Ligachev.

The "alternativshchiks," as the Semigin forces are now called, are petitioning the Ministry of Justice to decertify the real CPRF in favour of their "alternative." Given that they have better friends in higher places than Zyuganov, it is quite possible that they will succeed. But this will be no more than a purely bureaucratic and legalistic victory. A series of regional CPRF conferences has overwhelmingly rejected this manoeuvre, with fewer than 10 per

cent of party organisations backing calls for a change of leadership.

The real importance of this episode is in what it reveals about the modern Russian state. It's clear that this is part of an elaborate, state-sponsored attack on the only real opposition party in the country.

The "alternative" congress was backed up with a wave of minor acts of sabotage directed against the CPRF. There was a mysterious power outage in the meeting hall during the congress, requiring Zyuganov to deliver his political report by flashlight in a hall with no functioning air conditioning. The CPRF and other left-wing web sites have been repeatedly attacked by hackers.

But the longer-term consequences for Russia's communist left will, quite possibly, be positive. Zyuganov, correctly, is making no attempt to paper over the cracks or whine about "restoring party unity". Tikhonov and Potapov have been quickly expelled from the party and others are likely to follow. The belief in the mainstream of the Russian left that there can be no reconciliation with the existing political system will probably be strengthened rather than weakened.

Zyuganov, addressing the CPRF congress, accused Semigin and his cronies of wanting to "deprive the party of its social-class character – in essence, to liquidate it as the representative of the oppressed masses and of the progressive tendencies of social development".

The struggle for the future of the Russian communist movement is far from over.

Morning Star, abridged ☪



A protester in Moscow's Pushkin Square

Russians – 74 percent in one poll – regret the Soviet Union's passing. ... Another survey, conducted toward the end of 2000, asked Russian citizens whether they considered the present regime or the one that had preceded it to be 'legitimate, popular, and their own'.

"Fully one-third applied these adjectives to the Soviet Union, a regime that had ceased to exist nine years earlier. Only 12 percent regarded the post-communist regime as 'legitimate', and only 2 percent called it 'their own'."

These results not only confirm the high esteem still held towards the Soviet system, but pose a serious challenge to liberal democratic theory. How can Russian elections be proclaimed free, fair, and impartial by Western observ-

ers when only 12 percent of the electorate declares the regime to be legitimate?

"[I]t is not surprising", Pipes concludes, "that when asked in an October 2003 survey how they would react if the Communists staged a coup, 23 percent of respondents said they would actively support it, 19 would collaborate with the insurgents, 27 percent would try to survive, 16 percent would emigrate, and only 10 percent would actively resist."

Imagine the results if the pollsters had foregone the negative term "coup" and used the less pejorative terms "revolution" or "general strike"! Once again, these poll results show how the values of socialism and Soviet life are deeply rooted among Russians.

People's Weekly World ☪

Iraqi Communist Party condemns criminal bombing of churches



In a statement given to the Iraqi press last week, the Iraqi Communist Party leader Mr Hamid Majid Mousa strongly condemned the criminal acts targeting churches in Baghdad and Mosul on August 1. He said: "These terrorist and treacherous acts are targeting the lives of innocent civilians and aim at stirring up sedition".

Mr Mousa described the attacks as "desperate acts to terrorise the Iraqi people. Those responsible are exploiting the abnormal

conditions in Iraq".

He stressed that "these acts will end in miserable failure. Those responsible will be damned forever".

"Our Iraqi people should be vigilant, pursuing the criminals and reporting on them, to enable the national security forces to combat these crimes and put an end to them", Mr Mousa said.

He also called on the interim government "to take effective measures to protect the citizens and foil the evil schemes of terrorists". ☪

Castro slams Bush on sex, lies, drinking

Terrie Albano

During his annual July 26 speech, Cuban President Fidel Castro slammed George W Bush's unfounded charge that Cuba promotes "sex tourism".

At the national celebration commemorating the 51st anniversary of the attack on the Moncada Garrison, Castro said a recent campaign speech by Bush in Tampa, Florida, was full of deceitful "accusations and insults" that were "clearly aimed at slandering Cuba and justifying the threats of aggression and the brutal measures that they had just taken against our people".

Bush charged that Castro promotes "sex tourism". Bush then quoted Castro as saying, "Cuba has the cleanest and most educated prostitutes in the world".

When the White House was asked for the quote's source, it provided a link to a research paper written in 2001 by a Dartmouth undergraduate student named Charles Trumbull. Trumbull, who is now in law school, said the quote Bush used was distorted and taken out of context. "It shows that they didn't read much of the article", Trumbull said in a telephone interview with the *Los Angeles Times*.

Trumbull, who won an award from the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy for his paper, said it would be inaccurate to say the Cuban Government promotes prostitution.

Prostitution was widespread during the reign of Batista and American-run casinos. It was outlawed after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Cuban officials have discouraged prostitution, but have acknowledged that it hasn't yet been eradicated.

"Many people in the world who know very little about the Cuban Revolution might fall victim to the

lies and tricks the US Government spreads through the huge media available to it", Castro said.

"But there are many others, especially in poor countries, who are aware of what the Cuban Revolution is about", Castro told the July 26 Santa Clara crowd in nationally televised remarks. From the very beginning, the Cuban Revolution sought to provide education and health care services to all its children and the

Cuba is world-renowned for its education and health care – infant mortality is lower than in the US.

whole population, Castro said.

Cuba's "spirit of solidarity that has led it to co-operate selflessly with dozens of Third World countries", and "its strict adherence to the highest moral values" and "lofty concept of the dignity and honour of its homeland and its people" are hallmarks for which "Cuban revolutionaries have always been willing to give up their lives", he said.

Cuba is world-renowned for its education and health care, all of which is provided free of charge. Infant mortality is lower in Cuba than in the US. The Cuban Revolution placed the people's physical, mental and moral health as a number one priority.

"Has no one told him [Bush]", Castro asked, that Cuban children are protected by law and that they "all attend school, including

more than 50,000 who suffer from disabilities?"

Searching for other reasons why Bush would "conjure up" such falsehoods, Castro referred to Bush's 20-year bout with drinking and substance abuse as a possible reason.

Castro extensively quoted from the newly released book, *Bush on the Couch: Inside the Mind of a President*, by Dr Justin Frank. Frank argues that Bush may have stopped drinking but shows signs of being a "dry drunk". Frank says "dry drunk" isn't a clinical term but Bush shows "traits that the recovery literature associates with the condition, including grandiosity, judgementalism, intolerance, detachment, denial of responsibility, a tendency toward over-reaction and an aversion to introspection".

Castro said Bush's recent speech is an attack on Cuba's tourist industry, a key source of income for the struggling country. "Mr Bush does not hesitate either in tarring Canadian tourists", he said. For the most part, according to Castro, they are senior citizens. They "come to enjoy the exceptional safety and calm, the politeness, culture and hospitality that they find in our country".

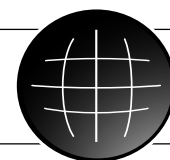
"What would Mr Bush call the tens of millions of tourists who visit the United States every year where casinos, gambling dens, areas of male and female prostitution, pornography and sex abound?", Castro asked.

The 1953 attack on the Moncada army garrison in Santiago de Cuba, Cuba's second largest city, by Castro and 160 other opponents of the Batista dictatorship, is widely regarded as the beginning of the Cuban Revolution, which triumphed in 1959.

People's Weekly World
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Bush – a tendency towards over-reaction



Global briefs

COLOMBIA: Benedicto Caballero, a leader in the agricultural co-operative movement, is the latest victim in the wave of assassinations of trade union, popular movement and Communist activists in Colombia, the Communist Party of Colombia said. "This new assassination is part of the systematic persecution against popular leaders and activists of the Communist Party of Colombia and gives the lie to the official demagoguery about the guarantees for the opposition: the CPC said. Under the Uribe administration, forced displacements, threats, arbitrary detentions and assassinations of CPC leaders have increased, the party said. Over 3000 Communist activists have been assassinated in the last 13 years, in the context of the political genocide against the Patriotic Union, whose victims number over 5000, the CPC said.

GEORGIA: When Mikhail Saakashvili became Georgia's Prime Minister last November he promised to make Georgia a prosperous state with control over all of its territory. He was faced with break-aways in the Adzhara and South Ossetian regions. Their governments preferred to have close relations with the Russian Federation. Saakashvili has forced out the leader of the Adzhara region and has now turned his attention to South Ossetia. Saakashvili, a US stooge, was installed to facilitate the construction of a major oil export pipeline across Georgia thereby avoiding Russian territory. Saakashvili's policies towards the region and Russia are seen as provocative. One of his aims is to prevent any meaningful dialogue or co-operation between Russia and Georgia. He is now turning his attention to military might which is being built up by the US. His latest remarks that Russian tourist ships will be shot at if they come close to the disputed territory brought a strong diplomatic protest from the Russian foreign minister.

GREECE: The Communist Party of Greece cited "the dozens of dead and injured workers" along with violations of people's labour and democratic rights, environmental damage and repression in the name of "security" in its statement on July 23. The CPG pointed out that under the control of the multinational corporate giants, the Games lack "any measure ... to develop and support mass popular athletics for all". The statement demanded the new facilities be given to the people when the Games are over. Meanwhile, head of the Greek Construction Workers' Union said that the union had details of 14 workers who had died while building Olympic facilities. According to the union the total may be closer to 40 when deaths on the supporting infrastructure are counted. "Men are being forced to work long shifts, up to 14 hours a day, every day, in very hot temperatures and under constant pressure to complete construction work in time... Most have no hard hats or safety boots and if they complain, they're sacked", said the union leader.

Cuba offers aid after supermarket fire

President Fidel Castro has sent a message of condolence and solidarity to the Paraguayan people, especially to the families of victims of the August 1 fire that broke out in the Ycuá Bolaños

supermarket in Asunción.

In a letter to President Nicanor Duarte, Fidel expressed confidence that the Paraguayan people can count on the support of Cuban doctors currently providing services in

various parts of that South American country.

He also stated that the island is prepared to dispatch, with utmost urgency if necessary, a group of experts with the necessary medications to support the forces deployed to care for the wounded, and in the struggle to save lives, Radio Habana Cuba reported.

Meanwhile, it was learned that Cuban doctors working in the interior of Paraguay quickly contacted the Cuban medical mission and embassy in Asunción to make themselves available to the Paraguayan health authorities, and they are now caring for people wounded in the Asunción disaster.

The Cuban medical brigade has also offered blood donations to help survivors of the tragic event, which has deeply affected the Paraguayan people and sent many into mourning.

The Paraguayan Attorney General has charged the supermarket owner, Juan Pio Paiva, his son and five security guards with premeditated murder. Many survivors of the tragedy affirm that when the fire broke out, the guards locked the doors to prevent possible robbery.

One of the guards admitted that he received an order from the owner to close the doors so that shoppers would not leave without paying, even though the store was already in flames.

India

Fishing industry workers demand better security, conditions

A delegation of the All India Fishers and Fisheries Workers' Federation has met with the Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar and presented a memorandum on the demands of fishermen and fishery workers. Pointing out that the country was losing huge amounts of foreign exchange because of the operation of foreign trawlers in India's territorial waters, the delegation demanded that foreign trawlers should be banned and their licences cancelled.

The memorandum also raised the pathetic living and working conditions of fishing industry workers and demanded that comprehensive legislation be enacted providing them job security, minimum wages, safety, social security, maternity benefits, housing facilities, insurance and compensation.

Other demands included: supply of diesel and kerosene at subsidized

rates, provision of the old age pension, protection of migrant fishery workers, education facilities for the children of fishermen and fishery workers, development of fish markets, fishing harbours, cold storage facilities, construction and maintenance of protective walls against sea erosion.

The workers want a single ministry to deal with all aspects of the fishing industry, a tripartite all India industrial committee should be formed on fishing and the Government should allot more funds for the overall development of the fishing industry, they said.

The importance of protecting the bodies of water belonging to the central and state governments was emphasised and the delegation demanded that only the fishing industry cooperatives should be able to use government-owned waterways for fishing activities.

Letters to the Editor
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Pragmatic arguments about the Timor Gap

In the *Weekend Australian* (July 31 – August 1, 2004), two articles about the sharing of oil and gas resources in the Timor Sea were published. One was written by Christopher Pearson and the other by Paul Kelly.

Both articles depict East Timor as being ungrateful for Australia's intervention to stop the massive slaughter being wreaked on it by the Indonesian military and its militias in 1999.

Neither article presents the true East Timor position. Its main argument is not to cry poverty, but is based on international law.

Pearson's article cannot really be taken seriously as he does not develop a serious case for supporting Australia's stance. He is merely content to make insulting remarks about Australian politicians who are trying to adhere to the principles of fairness and international social justice.

Paul Kelly argues that East Timor is not agreeing to the boundary that was negotiated between Indonesia and Australia during the former's occupation of the country. Why should it accept? It was

an agreement between the illegal occupying power and Australia, the only country to recognise Indonesia's sovereignty over East Timor.

Indonesia accepted the lopsided agreement because it was an international pariah due to its murderous behaviour in East Timor. Australian leaders now expect the East Timorese to accept a rotten deal that the East Timorese leaders had no say in. These are the people who preach values to us. One may ask, what sort of values?

Under international law, the sea bed boundary between Australia and East Timor is the line midway between the coastlines of the two nations. This means that most of the oil fields currently being exploited (including Greater Sunrise) are in Timor's half of the sea.

Australia has already taken revenues worth about \$1.7 billion from the oil in East Timor's part of the Timor Sea. These monies should be held in escrow by the UN until the actual boundary is agreed upon.

The fact that the richest nation in the region is short-changing the poorest is a great disgrace for Australians of goodwill. It is even more so when we recall the sacrifices that the East Timorese made for Australia during World War 2 and the shameful 24-year period of betrayal by successive Australian governments when East Timor was occupied.

If *The Australian* is to be fair in this debate, it should allow the East Timorese to put their position in the pages of the paper. It is very one-sided to have articles from two correspondents who have never shown

much respect for the human rights of the East Timorese.

Andrew (Andy) Alcock
Chairperson Australia East
Timor Friendship Association
(South Australia) Inc
Forestville, SA

Commissioned for sex discrimination

Why am I not surprised that Pru Goward, federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, has come out and supported the Vatican's most recent take on women's rights? Goward's endorsement of the Pope's statement, which includes an attack on "feminism" as the cause of conflict between men and women, is a disgrace. (Why don't you take that little gem and promote it at a women's refuge Pru? Well, anyway at one the Howard Government hasn't managed to shut yet.)

This at the same time as there is a concerted push by the right, led by the Government, to completely bar women's access to abortion. Some Sex Discrimination Commissioner! I think the agenda for Goward is to, sometime in the future (if she gets the chance after the coming election) oversee the dismantling of the Sex Discrimination Act.

In her response to the Vatican's paternalistic pronouncement she slyly tied in the anti-abortion message, saying the Pope "is recognising" women have the right to work and bear children, otherwise, says Goward, "we are going to see a continuation of the decline in the fertility rate". So, Pru, that's the fault of

feminists as well, is it? We certainly do have a lot to answer for.

In fact, it seems we've made men so dysfunctional with our feminist ways the Government believes there is a need for a special mentoring program for school-age boys.

And Goward apparently believes that her role as Sex Discrimination Commissioner gives her the right to speak for all women who, it appears, are just waiting out there to satisfy their throbbing, biological urge to procreate: "We love being different and we love having children."

Which brings us back to that fundamental right – women's right to have control over their own bodies. The anti-abortion crowd are currently attacking the right of women to choose. We're told choice on

abortion has ceased to be the main question now, overtaken by such intangibles as "values" and "moral imperatives" and the like.

So, it turns out that in this society based on individualism, where "choice" is held up as the ultimate right of the individual, women are to have their right to choose taken away, if the emissaries from the Dark Ages get their way.

They have no more enthusiastic a supporter than the Sex Discrimination Commissioner: "When the Pope says let's get on with it and support both those roles [work and motherhood], I think the game's over." It's a long, long way from that, Pru.

Jo Dunleavy
Wodonga, Vic

Big Red Clearance Sale

Books, posters, desks, tables, chairs, bookcases, metal racking, records.

We are moving following last December's fire in our premises. Thousands of books: Marxist classics, Left Book Club titles, history, biographies, general literature, Melodya 33 records

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Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Big end bargains

If you live in Sydney, you no doubt made a bee line on August 2 to the "Everything Half Price or Below Half" sale at the establishment of Messrs Vince Maloney. Located between Sheraton-on-the-Park and Tattersall's Club, Vince Maloney & Co are purveyors of fine clobber to the gentry.

I know the idea of a sale is rather plebeian for such an establishment, but let's be honest, from Vince Maloney, even a bargain is certainly not cheap. Dear me no.

At Vince's sale, corporate heavyweights from what is called "the big end of town" could pick up "pure cashmere Italian sports coats" normally priced at \$5500 for half price! That's right, a whole sports coat for a measly \$2750.

What willpower it must have taken not to buy two. And then there were the Brioni French nappa jackets, normally priced at \$4750 a pop.

Vince had three of these for only \$2250 each, a snap at that price, I'm sure you'll agree.

And with prices like that for jackets alone, we can only conjecture at what obscene price tag would have been attached (even at "half price") to the "top international label Italian suits".

But then, as we all know, CEOs and corporate directors (as well as top lawyers and the like) do have to dress the part, regardless of cost. It's part of the burden they bear – and you never hear them complaining about it, either, do you?

It's fortunate then that CEOs

tend to have plenty of money, mostly ours.

If CEOs sack a couple of thousand of their employees, thereby "saving" the company the money that should have been paid in wages to those workers, CEOs get whopping great bonuses for "a job well done".

Or else they devise cunning schemes that allow companies to be wound up in such a way that the workers suddenly discover their employer has no assets, and their legal entitlements have mysteriously disappeared.

When the Woodlawn open-cut mine in Tarago, near Goulburn, closed in 1998, its 160 mine workers were left with a big hole in the ground (which they didn't own any way) and an equally big hole where their entitlements of \$6.5 million should have been.

Now Collex, the international waste-disposal company, is going to reopen the former copper, zinc and lead mine as a huge garbage pit. Collex seems to have an ambition to secure a monopoly on waste disposal in NSW, if not the country.

When you think about it, a monopoly over garbage disposal would be almost as valuable as a monopoly over water supply. In a developed capitalist country you cannot really exist without both.

Collex is certainly thinking big. The waste transfer station they want to set up in the Sydney suburb of Auburn will prepare garbage to go to the Woodlawn mine site: six trains a week, each loaded with 1200 tonnes of rubbish!

The people in Auburn had some funny idea this might mean increased pollution, noise, and traffic congestion in their suburb. The Land & Environment Court agreed with them and refused consent.

Collex is well known as a contributor to the Labor Party in NSW so no one was that surprised when the Carr Government legislated



to overrule the Court and allow Collex's waste transfer station to go ahead.

Collex claim they have been looking at suitable country sites for their super rubbish dumps for a decade. After being dumped on big-time by the previous corporate owners of Woodlawn, the Tarago locals must have been identified by Collex early in the piece as a potential fly in the ointment.

Any attempt to use the Woodlawn mine site for a money-making venture without first taking care of the former mine-workers' entitlements was going to run into major political hassles.

So lo and behold, Collex generously offered to pay the miners' entitlements. Along with promising to hire "as many locals as possible"

and paying a royalty towards local community projects, etc, this move effectively bought off any local opposition.

It also provided the Carr Government with a convenient justification for overruling the Land & Environment Court (the two arguments advanced by the NSW Government were "saving the miners' entitlements" and "averting a landfill shortage" for Sydney).

Collex's action also cut the ground from under the Labor Council, for to oppose the creation of a vast rubbish dump at Tarago meant to deny the Woodlawn miners their entitlements. Ain't capitalism clever?

It should be remembered however that the Woodlawn miners were entitled to their \$6.5 million. It was

not the mining company's money, it was theirs.

Pocketing workers' entitlements is theft. The CEO, directors and shareholders of the company that mined Woodlawn and left their workers in the lurch should have been pursued personally by the authorities to reclaim the missing money.

Their houses, shares and bank accounts – not to mention Brioni jackets and Italian suits – should have been seized and sold to repay the mineworkers who had been robbed.

Ah, but that wouldn't be capitalism, then, would it? That would be some dreadful, socialistic workers' state, wouldn't it?

And no one would want that, would they? ☹

Revolution in progress

President Hugo Chávez has invited the people of Venezuela to use the opposition-called Referendum challenging his presidency to ratify and consolidate the Revolution. The US is determined to bring down the Chávez Government by whatever means it can. The following speech by Leonel Vivas, Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was given on the night of Solidarity with Venezuela in Brisbane on Saturday August 7. It shows why the US administration is so threatened by Chávez and why is having so much difficulty in defeating such a popular government:

On behalf of the Venezuelan people, my government, President Chávez and myself, I would like to express to the organisers of this meeting and of course, to all of you, my deepest recognition of gratitude. In fact I understand and appreciate this meeting not only as an act of solidarity and friendship with the Bolivarian Revolution but also as an act of solidarity and friendship with the struggles of the peoples of Latin America in search of dignity, justice and sovereignty.

By South American standards Venezuela is a medium size country. In its territory of about one million square kilometres live some 26 million people. No doubt Venezuela is a rich country. Venezuela produces and exports iron ore, bauxite, coal, gold, diamonds and many others minerals. Venezuela as, you know, is a very rich oil producing country – one of the largest in the world. Every day we produce nearly 3.3 million barrels of crude oil and export more than 2.3 million, mainly to United States to which we are the third largest supplier of crude oil.

Nevertheless, one could say that Venezuela is in fact a rich country, but a poor Nation because we have a high rate of poverty. This situation means a great contradiction as a result of the high levels of corruption and mismanagement of the

or higher rate of illiteracy; high levels of insecurity; a corrupted system of justice; very high levels of dissatisfaction among the population; an external debt of about US\$35 billion and US\$40 billion deposited in foreign banks. Only a few Venezuelans were the owners of those funds and they, of course, had stolen that money. We also had an inflation rate of more than 50 per cent and only the equivalent of US\$10 billion in foreign currencies in international reserve.

In short, Chávez ran in 1998 as a candidate for President in a collapsed and broken country.

Clear mandate from the people

When Chávez was campaigning he clearly promised to the Venezuelan people to combat and change that grim situation. Well, as you remember, at the end of 1998 he was democratically elected President by a large majority of the popular vote. One and half years later he was re-legitimised by an even larger and more overwhelming majority of nearly 60 per cent of the popular vote. In both cases he beat the traditional political parties that governed Venezuela for more than 40 years. At that time nobody doubted the clear mandate the Venezuelan

low. Nowadays, the great majority of Venezuelans have a political consciousness that is much higher. It's true we had a bad form of democracy for four decades, a representative democratic system that every five years called the Venezuelan people to cast their votes to elect the President, but nothing else. It was without any other participation, either in the small or in the big decisions of the government of the day. Today we say, "What was left behind is, in fact, representative democracy, in order to construct participatory democracy within the framework of a social state with justice".

This challenge is only possible in a revolutionary process. As well as questioning globalisation and neo-liberalism and condemning the state terrorism perpetrated by the United States, we are leading with concrete proposals for regional integration. All of this is only been possible within a revolution.

The condemnation of the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas), the strong rejection of the invasions of Iraq and of Afghanistan, the efforts to construct a multi-polar world, have all come about by virtue of the revolution. In the case of Venezuela it has been by virtue of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Massive participation of the people

At the same time and along the same line of thought, how else can one explain that in less than a year we have achieved the astounding goal of reducing illiteracy by more than one and half million people – thereby almost eliminating illiteracy in Venezuela?

Only in the framework of revolution was it possible to approve a new national constitution with such a high degree of participation and



Chávez is carrying out a new and revolutionary program

an atypical process without precedents, not only in Latin America but in the entire world. In fact, this revolution has been pushing ahead in a peaceful and very democratic way. In fact, Venezuela is a pluralist country. Our National Constitution guarantees respect for all dissidence. Every Venezuelan, whatever his or her political, religious or cultural beliefs may be, has the right to express his points of view and the government of President Chavez has always shown respect for the opposition.

Unfortunately, the Venezuelan opposition has been influenced and sometimes dominated by anti-democratic and fascist sectors. For this reason it has attempted to overthrow the Chávez Government several times by every possible means. It was the case of the failed coup d'état of April 2002 and the sabotage of our oil industry that cost to the country more than US\$10 billion in three months...

Definitely, the neo-liberal model – based in egotism and irrationality – has failed in Latin America. Thus, our societies urgently require deep changes, deep transformations in order to replace the savage neo-liberalism that so many and painful difficulties have created in our Latin American homelands. Nobody having good will could deny the present situation of the region, as President Chávez stated sometime ago: "When you walk along the streets of Latin America, you can very clearly sense a reality that no one can deny – the peoples of this continent, oppressed and dominated for centuries, are ris-

ing up again, and this time nothing and no one can silence them.

"They are seeking out ways to redemption, roads to justice, ways to dignity ... and there is no other way to reach it but by revolution. There is no longer any kind of dilemma for us. I am convinced (says President Chávez) that the only way to put an end to poverty is by giving power to the poor, not by giving handouts to the poor, but by giving them the power to make decisions and find their own solutions, participatory democracy and a new economic model for democracy and for a fair distribution of the wealth."

It is very well known; we have in Venezuela many social and economic difficulties, and also a political confrontation, which at times has been very strong. Nevertheless, as you are aware, this is quite normal and even inevitable, when a social, economic and political reality is dying and other one is striving to be born. That is the case of my country nowadays.

Be sure, dear friends, the political confrontation happening today in Venezuela is nothing other than the result of the struggle between supporters of the process of change and transformation taking place in my country and the opponents of this revolutionary process. Nevertheless, the revolutionary process and President Chávez have the support of the people and the army. The people and army are fighting right now, and will fight with total resolve and decisiveness in order to preserve dignity, justice, hopes and dreams of my people. ☪

"When you walk along the streets of Latin America, you can very clearly sense a reality that no one can deny – the peoples of this continent, oppressed and dominated for centuries, are rising up again, and this time nothing and no one can silence them."

political parties and their leadership that ruled Venezuela during the last 50 years. Of course, I also have to say that the policies of the neo-liberal model applied to Venezuela in the last three decades or so are co-responsible for the collapse of the country reflected in the high levels of poverty that we have and which President Chávez is fighting against with all his resolve.

When Chávez was running as a candidate for President in 1998, the situation of the country was really grim: high poverty, despite the richness of the country; amazing levels of corruption in all levels of the government; a collapsed system of health and education; a 20 per cent jobless rate and a 12 per cent

people had given him...

Chávez proposed to carry out a new and revolutionary national project to overcome the traditional difficulties of our people, especially of the poor people. He proposed a national project based in justice; in participatory democracy; in a far better distribution of the country's wealth on the basis of an aggressive fight against poverty and in respect for sovereignty of the country.

Without any doubt, today we have in Venezuela a revolution in progress. Venezuelan society has undergone a radical transformation, one that is only possible in a revolution. For instance, before the Chávez's Government, the political consciousness of citizens was very

popular consultation as has been the case in Venezuela. How else can one explain the amazing defeat of the coup d'état, supported by the US and Spain among others, and having rescued democracy in less than 48 hours without resorting to violence?

How does one explain, the success of missions such as "Inside the Barrio", which has been able to provide free medical attention and medicines in more than 15 million cases in less than a year? These and many other missions are in progress with the massive participation of the people, especially the poor people. This is a direct reflection of the revolution in progress in Venezuela.

I also have to stress that the Bolivarian Revolution is a new and



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