

**Last year he ignored the collective voice of people around the nation and sent Australia to war on the coattails of the USA, a war that was made more disgusting because it was based on lies. For this crime against humanity and the many other actions against the Australian people, on October 9 –**

## VOTE HOWARD OUT

- Despite promising in 1996 that Medicare would remain in its entirety, the Howard Government is destroying Australia's universal, bulk billing system.
- The Government is gutting public education, from kindergarten through to the universities. A two-tier system is being created in education with tens of millions of dollars of funding meant for the public system being diverted to private schools. The universities have been converted into a user-pays system.
- Howard has sold out the country's economic independence by signing a free trade agreement (FTA) with the USA that will give American corporations unfettered access to Australia's industries and natural resources.
- The FTA had a number of strings attached, including the destruction of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme which will deprive Australians of affordable medicines in order to fatten the profits of US drug companies.
- The Government cries poor when it comes to funding services but is spending over \$40 million a day on the military in its role as US deputy sheriff and bully boy in the Asia-Pacific region.
- This is a Government of corporate welfare and jobs-for-the-boys, exposed since first elected in 1996 as liars, with corruption and nepotism as its mode of operation.
- The Government has a vicious, destructive agenda for trade unions that is aimed at stripping away the collective action of workers so as to leave them exposed to the rapacious greed of employers.
- It has persecuted refugees seeking asylum in Australia and violated their human rights.
- Under cover of "anti-terrorism" it has introduced anti-democratic laws on an unprecedented scale, taking away the fundamental rights of all Australians.



# The Guardian

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## Preserving the two-party system

Australia's ruling class and their compliant mass media outlets are going all out to present the election campaign as a two horse race – Liberal or Labor. It is extremely difficult for other parties and independents to break into this capitalist castle except in the Senate where there is a system of proportional representation.

The two major parties would dearly love to bring about changes to the Senate but but fear the likely backlash if they tried to scuttle proportional representation or removed the Senate's powers to block legislation. The election of smaller parties and independents to the Senate has given the people of Australia a voice and some say in what would otherwise be an uncontrollable Liberal or Labor Party monopoly.

If proportional representation were applied to the House of Representatives, the nature of political representation would be substantially different there as well. A system of proportional representation was introduced to New Zealand's electoral system with quite dramatic results.

The Labor Party with the help of some trade unions is flat out trying to remove Michael Organ (representative of the Greens in Cunningham NSW South Coast), one of the few Members of the House of Reps who was not elected as a Liberal/National Coalition or Labor Party representative. They are so scared of his single voice in the House of Reps and the example his election sets.

The lack of proportional representation in the House of Reps plays a key role in maintaining the stranglehold of the two-party system over parliamentary politics. The major parties are drowning the electorate with carefully targeted promises of spending millions upon millions of dollars. The daily splurge of promises is impossible to keep up with. Even Howard, whose environmental credentials are virtually nil, has the temerity to make statements about preserving old growth forests in an attempt to claim environmental respectability.

But the real class interests come out when even modest changes to industrial legislation and the cutting of government funding to some private schools are put forward by the Labor Party. Employer organisations, which have been given almost everything they could ever ask for by the Howard Government, are talking about job losses (as if they care) and other calamities should any trade union rights be restored. Brendan Nelson, Howard's Education Minister had the gall to assert his concern for taxpayers when the Labor Party leader called for a redistribution of monies going to very wealthy private schools.

How far the Labor Party is prepared to go in winding back the Howard Government's industrial legislation remains an open question. The decision made by the High Court last week (See *The Guardian* 15/9/04) is yet another severe restriction on the right of trade unions to take industrial action on any issue that is judged by conservative judges to be outside immediate employer-employee bread and butter issues.

Mark Latham commented that the Court's decision was a constitutional one and that was the "end of the matter". Yet making this ruling inoperable is a major task for the trade union movement if it is to regain its freedom of action on all matters on its agenda. Mark Latham has promised to abolish Australian Workplace Agreements – a form of non-union individual work contracts. But will he abolish all individual contracts that override awards or enterprise agreements? Would he restore a centralised system of comprehensive awards that cover ALL issues facing workers in every workplace?

Just so long as Australia's political system is chained to the two-party system it will not be possible to implement really progressive solutions to many of the economic, social and political problems facing working people and their families and which arise from the domination of the corporations over society.

In these elections the Communist Party is not standing candidates but members are out giving support to left and progressive candidates, in particular the Greens, who offer policies that are in the interests of people and the environment. The CPA supports the building of alliances and co-operation between such forces with a view to breaking the two-party system and establishing a government of a new type, a people's government.

The introduction of a system of proportional representation to replace the present single member electorates that enshrine the domination of either the Labor or Coalition parties would assist in this task and give the people of Australia a greater voice in government.

### PRESS FUND

The other day the postman brought a leaflet pointing out that there were only 14 weeks left to Christmas. This wasn't intended to remind us about caring for others, or having a nice break, or even catching up with relatives and friends you haven't seen all year. It was, of course, about visiting the shops and spending lots and lots of money. Ah, capitalism! If you would like to give the working people of Australia a nice early Christmas present, what better way than making a contribution to *The Guardian* Press Fund now! Our grateful thanks go to those who contributed this week, as follows:

T Bartlett \$100, MH \$50.

This week's total: \$150. Progressive total: \$9080.

# Iliana Hernandez visits Perth

Vinnie Molina

Iliana Hernandez, a representative of the Communist Party of Cuba, visited Perth last week for three days of intense work.

She had been invited by the CPA and was hosted by the Perth comrades. More than 200 people listened to her passionate message of freedom, self-determination, dignity and solidarity with Cuba during the course of her stay.

On her first day in town she met party branch members at a sun-downer held at the Party's headquarters in Dianella. At dawn the next day she was addressing the entire workforce of the Multiplex Woolworths construction site at the Perth International Airport. She spoke to the construction workers of the struggle of the Cuban people against the inhumane 45-year long US blockade on her country. In her inspirational speech, Iliana also explained the struggle to liberate the Cuban Five – the five young men imprisoned illegally in the US who have been condemned to sentences of 15 years to double life imprisonment on false charges.

During her stay, Iliana had the opportunity to officially launch the limited edition shirt made by the local CFMEU branch, as part of the international campaign to free the Cuban Five. Iliana's visit coincided with the sixth anniversary of the Cuban Five's detention in the United States.

On Wednesday September 15 she met with Kevin Reynolds, CFMEU State Secretary; paid a visit



Photo: Vinnie Molina

Iliana with Juan Gomez at the construction site

to the CFMEU Construction Skills Training Centre as well hosting a public meeting at Unions WA. On this occasion she learned about the struggle of Australian workers for better wages and conditions.

On Thursday 16, the last day of her visit to WA, Iliana met with Greens MLC Jim Scott. He expressed his interest on the best way to express solidarity with Cuba. Jim took the opportunity to outline the policies of the Greens for the upcoming federal elections.

In the evening she addressed a gathering of about 70 people, mainly from the Latin American community at the Maritime

Union of Australia office in North Fremantle. This was a remarkable event – the local Latin comrades drew inspiration from the organising of the meeting and pledged to work together in solidarity with Cuba and other social justice issues in future.

Iliana's visit was the spark needed for the organisers of the Australian tour of Gilda Chacon, a representative of the Cuban Federation of Workers, who will be arriving in the country in mid-October.

*Hasta la victoria siempre, Venceremos!*  
(We shall win!) ✪

## Green bashing campaign grinds on

Bob Briton

There is considerable excitement in progressive circles in Australia about the likely increase in the vote for the Greens at the October 9 federal elections. Years of grass roots activism and the self-destruction of the Democrats are combining to make the party's target of one million votes appear quite realistic. Polling agencies report that nine per cent of voters are planning to place a "1" beside the name of the Green candidate on their ballot paper. It seems everyone is talking about the influence the Greens might have in the event of a hung parliament and holding the balance of power in the Senate.

However, not all the interest in the Greens has been of a healthy kind. A campaign of vilification and disinformation is being waged in the hope that the expectations described above are not met. As reported in *The Guardian* last week, mainstream politicians like Deputy PM John Anderson have been working the "watermelon" metaphor (green on the outside, red on the inside) for all it is worth.

On the alleged "other side" of parliamentary politics, the member for Melbourne and ALP front bencher Lindsay Tanner has warned

voters "... the better the Greens go, the better Howard's chances of re-election".

The media has got in on the act. *The Herald Sun* claims that it "exposed" the Greens "soft-on-drugs" policies in the first week of the campaign. Last week Sydney's *Telegraph* carried a table of the Greens "Hidden Policies" – including the outrageous (to them) proposal for an increase in company tax.

Nobody from powerful circles appears to have a kind word to say about the emerging third force in the Australian Parliament. At the same time, there are long lines of power brokers forming outside the door of Bob Brown and the various Green candidates. Preference sharing is the hot topic and the same characters that are happy to denigrate the Greens are at the front of the queue.

"We do not agree with Greens' policy but I don't think there's a chance of the Greens winning the election. But there is a chance of Labor winning the election: that's why we won't be preferencing the Labor Party", Treasurer Peter Costello told *The Australian* in explanation of the Libs' overtures to the Greens.

In fact, *The Daily Telegraph* was

keen to promote the idea that a blue-green deal was already in the bag. Online news commentary magazine *Crikey* also ran with the "news". Comments from Bob Brown that the party would be willing to work either major party to good ends in the event of a hung parliament may have fuelled this damaging speculation.

Geoff Ash, Federal Election Campaign Coordinator for the Greens NSW had this to say about the allegation: "The Greens have never preferred the Coalition ahead of Labor in a federal House of Representatives seat, let alone a marginal seat, and I do not believe it will happen this election either."

"While The Greens will need preferences to win any lower house seats such as Sydney, Cunningham, Melbourne or Grayndler there will be no direction of preferences from the Greens to the Coalition. The Coalition will either preference us or not – we will take our chances – but we will not preference Howard's Coalition."

Another simple fact ignored in the mischievous media speculation is that Green voters clearly know their own mind. At the last election in the PM's seat of Bennelong, 90 per cent of Green preferences went to the ALP. ✪

## Fire and New Building Appeal \$10,000

We did it! With a final \$200 contribution to the Appeal from Sydney's Beloyannis Branch we passed our \$10,000 target. The fund is now closed with \$10,132 in total. This is a magnificent response from members and supporters of the Communist Party and readers of *The Guardian*. We wish to once again convey an enormous thankyou to every single contributor for their support.

We invite everyone to visit our new offices and to come to an open day which will be held on Sunday afternoon October 17. This will be advertised again closer to the day, but we are not asking you to wait until then. Come anytime and be our guest.



# Super trawler set to strip fishing grounds

Peter Mac

**Plans are afoot for the huge Panamanian-flagged fishing vessel *Veronica II* to take fish catches on a devastating scale within Australian waters. The ship has the potential to cause terrible damage to Australia's coastal fishing stocks, but the federal government appears unconcerned, and state governments are either non-committal or have expressed very limited opposition to the proposal.**

The vessel is 106m long, and covers an area the size of a football field. It is a whisker short of being the largest fishing craft in the world, and its nets are a kilometre wide.

It has an Australian licence to catch pelagic (open sea) fish, which include pilchard and mackerel, the prime food source of the tuna, and if the ship were to operate within Australian waters the commercial tuna fishing industry could face ruin.

The *Veronica II*, which has been nicknamed "the death ship" by some environmentalists, can hold a catch of 5000 tonnes of these commercially valuable species. As if that wasn't bad enough, its nets also indiscriminately take seals, seabirds, dolphins and sharks.

Having plundered the North Atlantic, the ship is currently in South Africa, and its owner, Irish fishing magnate Kevin McHugh, is said to be considering selling the vessel to an Adelaide-based partnership, Veronica Sea Fish, for flagging and permanent operation within Australian waters.

A special fishing permit is needed before the vessel can start fishing operations here. The Australian Fisheries Authority, which issues the permits, has stated that the full impact of "super trawler" operations in Australian waters would not be clear for at least two years, after production of special research reports.

However, the authority has decided not to wait for this crucial information, and will consider applications for permits in November - after the federal elections.

The NSW and South Australian Governments have banned the ship from operating in state waters, but the Carr Government has ruled out banning the ship from entering NSW ports.

Moreover, state waters only extend three kilometres from shore, whereas the federal government controls the remainder of a 200

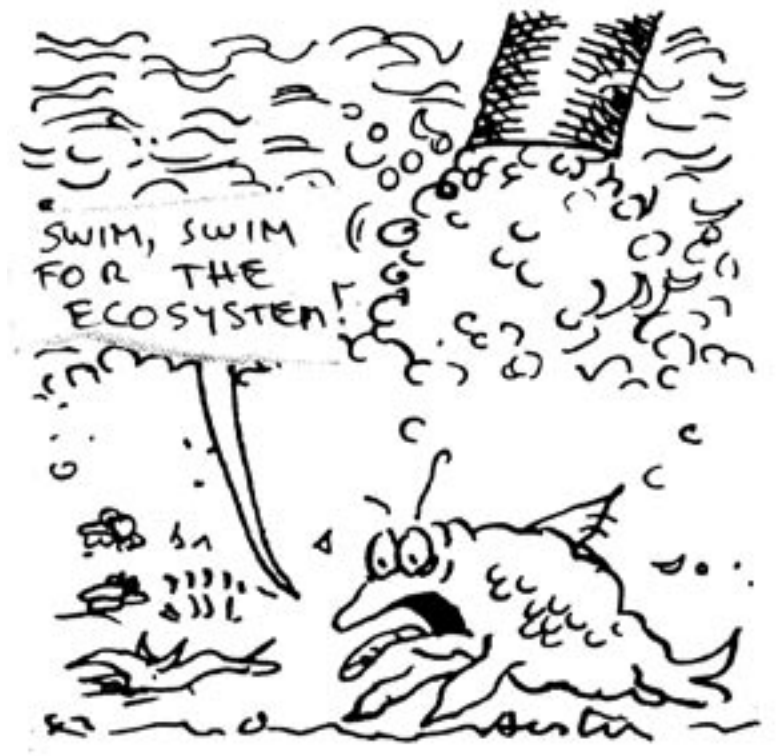
km band around the Australian coastline. It's obvious that real control over the operations of the *Veronica II* rests with the Federal Government.

The Prime Minister has contemptuously dismissed allegations about the impact of the ship's operations in Australian waters as "politically motivated".

And meanwhile, as if fully confident of Australian government approval for its plans, the owners of the *Veronica II* have been busy recruiting Australian crew members, which is having a major adverse impact on the existing fishing industry.

A spokesman for the Greens, NSW parliamentarian Ian Cohen, last week commented: "The *Veronica* and its big sister the *Atlantic Dawn* have artfully dodged fishing regulations in the North Atlantic and off the west coast of Africa for years. The NSW and Federal Governments must act quickly and clearly rule out boats of this size and destructive capability from coming anywhere near our fisheries.

"Allowing 'fish factories' such as the world's second largest trawler, the *MV Veronica*, to plunder small fish species off the NSW



south coast could lead to an ecosystem collapse and ruin local sustainable fishing industry.

"The impact of over-fishing, not just the result of centuries of unreg-

ulated abuse, but due to the increasing size of vessels and increasingly efficient methods of fishing used, is all too obvious in the North Atlantic." ✪

# NSW rail chiefs considering lethal security measures

**The NSW Government and Railcorp are considering a trial introduction of potentially lethal products against Sydney train passengers whose behaviour is deemed by transit officers to be dangerous or offensive.**

The transit officers already have the right to issue fines, arrest passengers, demand their names and addresses or order them to leave a train. Given the rate of crime on trains, many passengers are doubtless grateful for the extra security afforded by the transit officers, who recently replaced the legally ineffectual private security guards.

However, many passengers are now beginning to wonder whether some transit officers themselves may pose a threat to their health and safety.

A transit officer was recently

stood down after allegedly assaulting two passengers at Gosford station.

Now the NSW Minister for Transport Michael Costa and the heads of NSW Railcorp are discussing allowing officers to use assault products such as capscicum sprays and gels.

While Greens transport spokesperson Lee Rhiannon commented: "Transit officers are not empowered to use lethal force. Capsicum sprays and gels can potentially kill people who have a heart condition or a respiratory illness, as they cause increased heart rate and restrict breathing ...

"In most cases the effects of these capscicum products are temporary, but they have killed people with pre-existing health problems. A transit officer cannot assess a person's health condition before

using the capscicum spray or gel to restrain them."

The number of drivers peaked during the 2000 Olympics, and in fact there was a driver surplus then. The trains worked with wonderful efficiency at that time, but immediately afterwards the thousands of extra staff that had been hired by Railcorp for the Games were dismissed, and from that moment on the number of drivers also began to dwindle.

As a result, the number of drivers this year reached a critically low point, resulting in an appalling level of delays and cancelled services. The government's response was to use the shortage as an excuse to adopt the outrageous expedient of cutting weekend rail services in half. Trains were placed by far less efficient private buses.

Neither the government nor

Railcorp has ever satisfactorily explained why they cannot scrape together enough drivers to provide a bare minimum service four years later.

Because of their experience, railway guards can be trained in less than a third of the time it takes to train a raw recruit.

The key question now is whether this transfer will be a matter of robbing Peter to pay Paul" or improve the railway system. Does

the government intend replacing the guards? Or is it paving the way for a critical shortage of guards further down the track?

More drivers and guards are required, apart from present shortages, in another four years time the new Chatswood to Epping link will put huge demands on the system.

In the meantime, Sydney's train passengers await with bated breath and a great deal of apprehension the next NSW Railcorp initiative. ✪

## Pete's Corner



# Aboriginal tent embassy burns down

**On Monday, fire destroyed the Kuradji Aboriginal tent embassy established almost four years ago to guard a sacred site at a controversial housing development at Sandon Point near Wollongong in NSW.**

Three people in the embassy at the time escaped injury when the fire broke. Police refused to say if the blaze was deliberately lit. The tent embassy was staffed 24 hours a day and was set up to guard a 6000-year-old burial site uncovered by a storm in 1998.

"There were about three people inside the actual tent embassy", a police spokesman said. "One felt the warmth of it all and then looked and saw the flames." The trio managed to escape the iron and wood structure.

The latest fire follows a series of suspicious blazes at the Aboriginal tent embassy in Canberra. The embassy, on lawns opposite Old Parliament House, has been attacked three times since June 2003. Residents of the embassy said a fire, which started in a six-man tent on August 16 this year, was a deliberate attack while another suspicious fire destroyed a shed and a tent on April 10. In June 2003, a shipping container at the site was severely damaged by fire. Police said there could have been an attempt to set another building alight at the time.

Not all the suspected attacks on the Canberra embassy have been carried out under such mysterious circumstances. "Every time we put in decent structures at the embassy the NCA (National Capital Authority) and the police move in and take them down..." Gandra Penola, Aboriginal Tent Embassy representative told the media in July. "They are complaining that the embassy is an eyesore, what about the eyesore the government is turning our country into with mining, farming, logging, nuclear waste dumps, detention centres, it just goes on and on."

Aboriginal tent embassies have found themselves under violent attack ever since the first one was established outside the Old Parliament House in Canberra in July 1972. However, the Aboriginal people have not been deterred from their struggle to put their issues before the rest of the Australian community in one of the few ways available to sparsely resourced grass roots organisations.

In recent times Aboriginal communities have worked to maintain the Victoria Park Embassy in Sydney, Jarrah Going Home Camp near Bendigo in Victoria, and the Lake Cowal Embassy in Central West NSW. ✪

# Kodak negative on jobs

Six-day working weeks and plans to hire additional staff have left question marks hanging over Kodak's decision to punt 650 workers from its Melbourne operation.

Kodak blamed the "international market" for the bombshell it dropped on Coburg but affected workers told their union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU), they had been on six-day weeks up until the announcement, and 14 newly employed people had been scheduled to begin work.

The American transnational barred union officials, including AMWU National Secretary Doug Cameron and his Victorian counterpart Dave Oliver, from the meeting where it told staff they were

been working increased hours", Mr Oliver said.

"In the paper area, they have been doing six days weeks and expected 14 new starters to begin today [last Friday]. At the moment, it seems, Kodak's actions don't tally with its words.

"Kodak has treated these people with contempt and our mission is to save jobs, as many as possible. If we can only save one job it will be disappointing but it will be a better situation than we are in today."

AMWU officials brushed a city briefing with corporate lawyers to arrive at the Coburg plant in time for the announcement but were refused entry to the site and relegated to interviewing members as they left.

**"Kodak has treated these people with contempt and our mission is to save jobs, as many as possible."**

finished.

Dave Oliver said Kodak had "totally mismanaged" the issue and called on it to "come clean" about the situation.

"We want to see their business plans and the arguments on which they are basing this closure. Members have told us they have

Dave Oliver said Kodak hadn't responded to the union's first question: had the company, at any stage, approached state or federal government about possible assistance for preserving jobs?

"In the middle of a federal election campaign, you would think, they would be in a good position to

improve the situation if they wanted to", he said.

The AMWU is calling for a meeting with Kodak and the state and federal governments.

The union insists that if jobs must go, the company must offer voluntary redundancy across its operation.

Kodak blamed its decision to chop 650 production jobs on what it said was the international victory of digital over film. Four hundred administrative, sales and stores jobs will remain in Melbourne.

The company has rejected suggestions that Coburg jobs will be exported to a cheap labour site in China. ☘



"I keep having this nightmare that I'm one of my own employees."

## Make James Hardie Pay!

Asbestos victims, widows and families joined an angry protest of over 4000 trade unionists at Sydney's Darling Harbour on September 15 to demand justice from James Hardie.

"Hardie's products killed people. Hardies should pay for that", said Bernie Banton, Acting Secretary of the victims' group, the Asbestos Diseases Foundation of Australia (ADFA).

Members of the CFMEU, AMWU, MUA and other unions who rallied outside a James Hardie Special Information Meeting are demanding full payment by the company of all current and future compensation claims for asbestos related illnesses and deaths.

Speakers were Bernie Banton, Greg Combet from the ACTU, AMWU State Secretary Paul Bastian, Andrew Ferguson from the CFMEU, MUA State Secretary

Robert Coombs and long time ADFA patron and ALP candidate Peter Garrett.

One speaker drew a strong response when he pointed out James Hardie has not been punished for killing people for over 60 years – but the decision to stop work to demand justice for Hardie's victims is illegal.

James Hardie was Australia's largest producer of products containing asbestos. James Hardie knew that their product was killing workers for 50 years before they finally stopped production.

In 2001 the company and its assets were moved to the Netherlands, beyond the reach of asbestos victims.

At least \$1.9 billion was moved out of Australia. Now the company is saying some of this money will be brought back – but only if the right of victims to compensation is lim-

ited by governments.

Victims and workers refuse to accept this. They are demanding details of Hardie's recent proposal for a statutory scheme to replace the current system in NSW.

"We believe their scheme will just deny victims fair compensation," Bernie Banton said.

"It's nothing more than a taxpayer subsidy to James Hardie, transferring wealth from its victims to its shareholders."

The proposed scheme makes no reference to the huge insurance policies held by James Hardie.

"Why should Hardie's insurers be allowed to collect premiums from the company and invest these for great profit, and then not be expected to cover their insurance liabilities?" Paul Bastian asked.

"It's a windfall for Hardie and their insurers." ☘

## Telstra shocker on injured worker

Telstra is refusing compensation to a Brisbane woman forced to sell her home after she suffered "acoustic shock" at its Chermside call centre 18 months ago.

Australia's largest company, which just recorded a \$4.1 billion profit, is holding out on Jackie Skelton, despite getting an improvement notice from Comcare – the workers' compensation insurer for the Commonwealth Government – relating to the situation that forced her out of work.

The Comcare notice said the Chermside call centre had to undertake an acoustic shock risk assessment; minimise associated hazards and provide an action plan to implement necessary controls. If followed a February incident, in which 100 employees were treated for acous-

tic shock injuries by ambulance officers and paramedics in the call centre car park.

One year earlier, Jackie Skelton's life had been turned upside down by a similar incident.

"I got an electrical shock through my head set and felt a burning sensation on my scalp", she recalled. "It caused me severe pain, knocked me back in my chair and made me nauseous."

She was diagnosed with middle ear damage and the resulting loss of balance forced her to leave the job.

Initially, Telstra insurer GIO accepted responsibility for medical costs and lost wages but reimbursements were slow and inconsistent.

On December 12 last year Telstra said it would table a settlement offer the following month. But,

says Community and Public Sector Union official Paul Ingwersen, that offer never eventuated.

Since February, 2004, Ms Skelton has received no financial support from Telstra or GIO.

"I have had to sell my home in order to pay medical and living expenses", she said.

Ingwersen welcomed the Comcare improvement notice as the "first official acknowledgement of a problem" at Chermside.

"It is implicit proof that Jackie suffered a terrible injury in that call centre", Ingwersen said. "It is high time Telstra spent some of its billion dollar profit on compensating a woman who has suffered injury, lost her job and been through 18 months of dreadful uncertainty." ☘

## Latest outrage at Ranger

A contractor at the Ranger uranium mine survived a life threatening accident only because the mine is in such poor shape that, when an ore hopper hatch crushed him, a wall gave way saving his life.

Energy Resources Australia (ERA), the operator of the mine which is in Kakadu National Park, has been blasted by Northern Territory unions. The unions blame the use of federal individual work contracts, AWAs, and an "ideological industrial agenda" for falling safety standards, including the uranium poisoning of up to 120 mineworkers earlier this year.

The mine is a classic example of where profits come first, and the lives and health and safety of workers come a poor second.

In that outrageous incident last March, workers at the Rio-Tinto-owned mine, drank and showered in water containing 400 times the legal limit of uranium.

"Falling safety standards can be linked to AWAs", said Didge McDonald from the Northern Territory Labor Council. "The aggressive anti-union policy of the operator ERA means worker involvement on OH&S [occupational health and safety] is negligible. OH&S is more punitive than

co-operative, which flies in the face of all modern practice.

"Their ideological industrial agenda has led to potentially 120 workers being poisoned."

ERA has been aggressively using AWAs, leaving just a handful of Ranger employees on a union-negotiated enterprise bargaining agreement. Mr McDonald says that Territory unions are calling for major changes to mine safety legislation and for the enforcement role to be taken out of the existing government department and given to NT WorkSafe.

Unions have been critical of the NT Mining Management Act and both territory and Federal Governments over the lack of an effective enforcement regime.

"The underlying principle of the act is self-regulation", said Mr McDonald. "Both enforcement agencies are close to the employers."

Mr McDonald was also critical of the extensive use of contractors in the top end mining industry, claiming it was setting up a "two tiered" workforce with two levels of safety.

Unions are eagerly anticipating the findings of a soon to be released NT Government report into the Ranger Mine. ☘

## BOOKSHELF NEW STOCK

**Socialism Betrayed. Behind the collapse of the Soviet Union \$18 (p&p \$2.50)**  
by Roger Keeran and Thomas Kenny

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

**People Vs Profits \$15 (p&p \$4)**  
by Victor Perlo

A selection from the late Victor Perlo's weekly column, *People Vs Profits*, which appeared in the Communist Party's publication *People's Weekly World*. The chapters deal with such topics as the economic situation, Marxism, social security, racism, education, bureaucracy, corruption and decadence, big business and profiteering, militarism, oil, taxes, agriculture – and much more. (pp372)

**Addicted to War – Why the US can't kick militarism \$10 (p&p \$2.50)**  
An illustrated exposé by Joel Andreas

"Addicted to War should be assigned reading in American schools because it tells the true history of this nation's culture of war. Because of this book, many young students will think twice before considering enlistment in the military" says Fernando Suarez del Solar whose son Jesus, died fighting in Iraq, March 2003.

**Paul Robeson's Living Legacy \$10 reduced to clear (p&p \$1.50)**  
by Barbara Armentrout and Sterling Stuckey

Published to commemorate Paul Robeson's 100th birthday in 1998. Illustrated.

**Socialism and Religion \$3 (p&p \$1)**  
Writings by Marx, Engels and Lenin

Marx wrote: "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people". But read on....

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# A voice from a proud, dignified people

Iliana Hernandez works in the International Relations Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba. She previously held positions in the Young Communist League (UJC) and was deeply involved in preparations for the Cuba Vive Festival (1995) and the 14th World Festival of Youth and Students (1997). She has a bachelor's degree in pedagogy and was a senior high school teacher. She took up her latest duties in 1997 and has been part of delegations from her Party on visits to China, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Iliana recently visited Australia as the guest of the CPA. She addressed well-attended meetings in Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Melbourne and fielded questions from gatherings keen to know more about how Cuba is facing its many challenges. In Adelaide Bob Briton from *The Guardian* spoke to Iliana about some of these issues.

**Guardian:** What can you tell us recent economic developments in Cuba, about its efforts to deal with the blockade imposed by the US?

**Iliana Hernandez:** The effects of the blockade have been very severe from the beginning of the revolution. The imposition of the blockade has not only meant setbacks in the agricultural sector but also in the areas of health, education, and generally throughout society. The blockade has caused Cuba losses worth more than US\$74 billion throughout all areas of the economy. Of course the blockade has also caused disruption to the production of necessary medications and the import of vital equipment. It prevents the entry of important products for the development of agriculture and the development of industry in general. The US blockade is about preventing development in Cuba in all sectors.

## Sound economic growth

In spite of this, during the years of the blockade Cuba has been taking measures in specific areas in order to develop. Last year we were able to record positive results in various sectors. It's important that people know that in Cuba we are not only working for growth in the Gross Domestic Product but for intelligent growth of the GDP.

For example, last year commerce grew by 4.7 per cent, services by 4 per cent, the production of oil and gas rose by 4.3 million tonnes and in agriculture there was growth in the production of grain and vegetables. The sugar industry grew by 2.1 per cent. Tourism increased by 12.7 per cent with more than 1,700,000 people visiting Cuba last year. Over 63 per cent of the products supplied for tourism are made in Cuba. Unemployment was reduced last year to 3 per cent. These are the results of the very successful social policies being applied in the country.

Exports grew by 14 per cent and imports by 13 per cent. This shows the general economic situation in the country. This has been achieved in conjunction with social programs that have been prioritised by the revolution. This demonstrates that even with a low level of development it has been possible to maintain just results and social solidarity.

**G:** How big a set back have the recent storms been for Cuba?

**IH:** The impact of Hurricane Charlie – I haven't had access to details of the more recent storms – has been put at US\$1 billion; 700,000 homes have been damaged partially or completely destroyed; thousands of hectares of cultivated land were damaged; 798 educational

facilities were affected; 312 health centres damaged and the supply of electricity to the whole province of Pinar del Rio was cut off; 28 high tension towers fell and 298 electrical transformers failed.

However, nobody has been abandoned in this situation. Everyone has had access to medical assistance. The electrical and construction workers of the whole country were mobilised. Human solidarity under all circumstances is an important feature of the Cuban revolution. The value of a united people is incalculable. Those who know our country understand what this means in Cuba.

In the most recent hurricane [Ivan] the evacuation of 1,300,000 people was pre-planned. Measures were taken to protect crops and farm animals. The leaders of the revolution were present during all these steps. Within two days of the storms there were major declarations from the leaders of our country describing how we will be able to recover from this terrible setback. There have been rapid responses aimed at a rapid recovery in the country, especially in the western part. Those affected have been receiving the

achieve the goal of one teacher for every 15 students. For this project we have restored 567 classrooms and built 98 schools.

## Revolution within a revolution

Recently 4000 teachers graduated and began work as generalist classroom teachers. We have made universal access to higher education possible. We have created 732 university locations taking in 146,000 students. Of course, these 732 locations aren't new. We've rearranged the timetables of existing educational institutions, rearranging lessons so that facilities used in the afternoon for one purpose can be used for university studies in the evening.

It's important to note that we have set up two TV channels for education that have transmitted 112 educational programs. We intend that these programs should reach throughout all the provinces and provide courses for all levels of instruction. All this has been achieved in recent years in the area of education in which the youth has been given a great responsibility

## Human solidarity under all circumstances is an important feature of the Cuban revolution.

solidarity of the people of all the provinces. This is basic for us.

Solidarity from the Australian people and especially from the Australia Cuba Friendship Society has been very important. We have been pressing ahead with all the projects in Cuba initiated from Australia.

**G:** We have seen some statements from Fidel Castro about a new emphasis on education in Cuba. What has been happening in Cuba recently in the field of education?

**IH:** The first thing pointed out by Fidel is that we are making a real revolution, an educational revolution within the revolution itself. It is important that we keep developing the values, the integral culture of people. In the field of education we have introduced a joint program at all levels of instruction.

The aim of these efforts is to have one teacher for every 20 pupils. We've introduced new audiovisual methods using videos, TV and computers. In secondary education there have been profound changes in the planning of studies so that we can

under the guidance of the government. This revolution within the revolution has been carried out in order to keep on improving the education of new generations, to keep on developing the human resources of Cuba as a crucial task for carrying forward the revolution.

## International solidarity

Of course, as well as doing these things for its own population, Cuba has been working to help other peoples throughout the world. In the years since the victory of the revolution more than 41,000 young people from various countries have studied in Cuba. Today in Cuba – in the Latin American School of Medicine – students are completing medical degrees to prepare them for their future work with some of the poorest communities in Latin America. There are young people from other countries, for example from Africa and a small group from the US.

In Cuba there is also an



Photo: AVANTE MEDIA Australia

## Iliana in Adelaide

International School of Sport, which aims to create promoters of sport in different countries. There are young people from Laos and Cambodia for example. The aim in all of this is not only to provide training for our own population but for the other peoples of the world as well. We honour the basic principle of the revolution – to provide human solidarity.

**G:** The President of Cuba's Assembly of People's Power, Mr Alarcon, has referred to the Bush Administration's detailed plans for the invasion of Cuba. Could you give our readers further information? What has been the response of the Government of Cuba to this escalation of tensions?

**IH:** There has been aggression against Cuba from the very beginning of the revolution. This year there have been further indications of aggression from the Bush Administration. President Bush

them very dearly, much more dearly than the cost of compiling this plan.

The two messages originating from the Cuban Government and declarations from Fidel to the US Government have made it clear that the unity and strength of the Cuban people are incalculable. As Fidel said in a proclamation made in May, "No force in the world could drag like a flock of animals a dignified, proud people which has withstood 45 years of hostility."

**G:** How important to Cuba are recent developments in parts of Latin America like the changes in Argentina, Ecuador and Brazil and the consolidation of President Chávez in Venezuela? Are the people of Cuba encouraged by these developments?

**IH:** The development of the revolution in Venezuela under President Chávez and the changes in several other countries are very positive from the point of view of giving a boost to the progressive movement throughout the whole of Latin America. We are very encouraged by the very positive actions of the Venezuelan Government and with the positions taken by President Chávez that have woken up various social movements.

The process currently taking place in Venezuela is very important for the rest of the region. In Cuba we admire and support this process. Latin America has been punished for many years. Unfortunately, for poor people throughout Latin America the situation remains very difficult. Violence against children and women, violence associated with unemployment, hunger and poverty have been a terrible scourge. Lula, Chávez, Kirchner in Argentina and others have taken steps towards significant change.

**G:** Do you have any other message for the friends of Cuba in Australia?

**IH:** I would like to pass on to progressive people in Australia that they can have confidence in the revolution that belongs to the Cuban people. We will never renounce the profoundly human task begun in 1959. We know well the cost of the revolution and that is why we will defend it forever. Many young men and women have died defending the revolution. Defending this revolution we know we are also defending the noblest causes of humanity.

Interview conducted in Spanish – interpreted by Juan Garrido



# Nikolai Ostrovsky – 100th anniversary

An excerpt from

## Remembering Nikolai Ostrovsky

Anna Karavaeva\*

**The balcony door stood open, and the curtain stirred in the wind, filling out, rising reluctantly, and shrinking like a dipped sail. A crumpled towel left by someone on the radio made a white blur in the dusk. It looked like a white rabbit who had laid down its long ears preparing to jump.**

I remembered that bright September morning in Sochi two years ago, the small house in Orekhovaya Street, the ripe, orange persimmons in the sunlit garden, the pleasant whitewashed room, and the dear face on the piled-up pillows.

The white rabbit nestled happily in the folds of the blanket as Nikolai's nervous fingers caressed its long, silky ears. Nikolai was laughing softly, and his gleaming teeth were as white as sugar. On the bedside table lay several big red apples, and their lovely smell filled the whole house. The white rabbit, comically twitching its soft ears, licked the gentle human hand with its small pink tongue.

I wanted to shut my eyes tight and see that hot September morning again, and the house filled with sunlight and apple fragrance. My thoughts refused to take a melancholy course, and my mind was still unable to grasp what had happened and tell itself that this was the irrevocable....

But reality asserted itself, and my eyes saw with ruthless clarity the face that had forever grown still. The last struggle for survival had sapped all his life juices, and dried him as a leaf is dried in a hot wind. It only spared his tall, handsome forehead, and his soft dark chestnut hair. This clear, domelike brow rose above a small, wizened face. And one fancied that his creative imagination, infused with revolutionary ardor and an irrepressible interest in and love of life, was still working busily....

I placed my hand on his forehead. It was still warm and even moist, as though Nikolai was simply resting after his exciting exertion. The Order of Lenin twinkled uncanonically on his sunken chest as if life were stirring in it, and one would see it rise in a soft sigh.

For three days, from morning till night, an endless stream of people of all ages filed past the bier, which was literally submerged in flowers and wreaths.

Nikolai Ostrovsky continues to live not only in his books: he himself is a heroic image, and one of the strongest and most striking personalities of his epoch.

Fate treated him cruelly, depriv-

ing him of the power of sight and the use of his legs and arms. But he overpowered his physical infirmities, his incurable disease, weakness, grief and torpor, and victoriously asserted life, creative endeavour, and struggle.

As an ardent singer of the Bolshevik youth, he sang his militant, joyous song of struggle and victory of socialism, and his voice, ringing with a beautiful, lyrical strength, resounded throughout the Soviet land and the whole world.

*Away with melancholy recollections! Let us part with them, for death is the tax we must pay for the frailty of our physical being, and let us turn to the inexhaustible, powerful fount of life....*

I went to see him on a cold, windy day in 1932 – a typical day for early Moscow spring. He lived

suddenly asked in a voice that was somewhat hollow, but very young and not weak at all.

His mother told him my name. "Oh! How nice", he said. "Come nearer, come here".

A beautiful white-toothed smile lighted up his face. Its every line seemed to glow with youthful eagerness and the joy of living. At first I fancied that his big, brown eyes also sparkled with animation. But in the next moment I realized that the sparkle came from the deep and rich coloring of the irises. Still, during our conversation I kept forgetting that he was blind, for there was so much concentration, attention and joviality in his radiant face.

We were talking about the first part of his novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* which had just been signed for publication in the maga-

one thing: don't comfort me from the kindness of your heart. You don't have to sugar the pill for me. I'm a soldier, after all, I could sit a horse when I was a mere kid, and I won't be thrown off now."

Although his lips twitched and his smile was shy and gentle, the strength of his unbreakable will was suddenly revealed to me with the utmost clarity. At the same time I felt terribly happy that what I had to say to him would, in fact, comfort him.

I told him that as I read his book I involuntarily recalled the heroes from the Russian and western classics. Many of these heroes, created by writers of genius, shaped the will and the mentality of whole generations. For background they had the history of social relations, social and personal tragedies, and

**A fresh and powerful talent, a Bolshevik, veteran of the Civil War, a man with such remarkably clear-cut ideological and moral values.**

in Mertyy Pereulok [since renamed Nikolai Ostrovsky Pereulok – Ed.]

The large flat was packed with tenants. It was noisy and crowded. People jostled you in the corridor, babies were howling and someone was typing inexpertly in a far room, pecking at the keys with a woodpecker's persistence.

What a setup for a writer! Imagine working in that din! I knocked, and opened the door into Nikolai Ostrovsky's room.

A man, muffled up to his chin in blankets and shawls, was lying on the bed. The pillows were piled high, and I saw a mop of dark chestnut hair, a large, prominent forehead, and a thin, wan face that did not have a drop of colour in it.

The thin eyelids trembled slightly. The thick eyelashes cast bluish shadows on the hollow cheeks. Hands of a waxen transparency lay on top of the blankets.

I knew that Nikolai Ostrovsky was an invalid, but still I did not picture him quite like this.

He looked so terribly weak and helpless that I decided not to bother him and come back another time.

Just then a slight old lady walked briskly into the room. She had lively dark brown eyes, and her face was wreathed in smiles.

"Mother, who's there?" Nikolai

zine *Molodaya Gvardia*, where I worked as editor at the time. Nikolai was curious to hear how his characters had impressed us.

"Pavel, I think, is not a bad kid at all", he said with sly humour, and flashed me a smile. "I'm not making a secret of it, of course, that Nikolai Ostrovsky and Pavel Korchagin are the closest of friends. He's made from my brain and my blood too, this Pavel person.... What I want to know is this: does my novel read simply as an autobiography, the story of just one life?"

His smile suddenly waned, and with his lips compressed, his face looked cold and stern.

"I've purposely put the question so bluntly because I want to know whether the thing I'm doing is good, right, and useful for people or not? There are lots of single cases that are interesting in themselves, but a reader will pause before one for a moment, as before a shop window, even in admiration perhaps, and then walk on his way, never again remembering what he had seen there. That is what every writer should fear most, and myself, a beginner, the more so."

I told him that he had nothing to fear on this score.

He interrupted me gently and said: "Only please, let's agree on

the glory of the peaks attained by human culture.

Pavel Korchagin could take a proud and confident stand among the great and the gloried. This young newcomer, emerging from the fires of the Civil War, should not feel self-conscious finding himself in such illustrious company. Nor did he have to go cap in hand begging for a place, even if only the smallest, in the literati gardens. He had something which the others had not: his young heart was possessed of an inexhaustible strength and throbbed with an unquenchable passion of struggle, and his mind was fired by the most progressive and noble thoughts of people's freedom and happiness.

Needless to say, Pavel Korchagin was irreconcilably hostile to someone like Balzac's Rastignac, but all the freedom-loving characters in literature, whether in the works of Pushkin, Byron or Stendhal, were close to him in spirit. But, of course, he would find the greatest number of kindred souls among Gorky's heroes.

We were already talking like old friends, we touched upon different themes but invariably came back to the novel. Nikolai wanted to hear how the editing went and what changes were made by Mark Kolosov, the assistant editor of *Molodaya Gvardia*, and myself. When I told him how we threw out all sorts of ornamental clichés, he gave a roar of laughter and then chuckled with good humour as I cited his unfortunate turns of speech and some words he had used.

"D'you know the reason for all these slips?" he asked, abruptly changing to a serious, thoughtful tone. "I suppose you'll say it's my lack of culture? That too, but there's another thing you must take into account – my creative isolation, if you know what I mean. I



began writing as a lone beginner, on my own responsibility. It's wonderful that I'll have literary friends now!"

He asked me what I thought of the composition of the novel as a whole, his handling of separate scenes, dialogues, descriptions of scenery, how well he had succeeded in bringing out the typical traits of his characters, and where he had made blunders in language, comparisons, metaphors, descriptive names, and so on.

Each one of his questions showed that he had done a lot of reading and thinking on the subject, and his approach to many of the problems involved in literary work testified to his maturity.

Time simply flew. I was afraid I was tiring Nikolai, but every time I rose to leave a word or a remark would start us off again, and I'd stay "for another minute". Our conversation skipped from one topic to another, the way it does with two people who have only just met and want to know each other better. Still, we went back to the novel all the time, and spoke of the second part on which Nikolai was working. I had completely forgotten that I was in a sickroom, visiting a hopelessly handicapped person.

He told me about his writing plans and worries, set himself the deadline for the coming chapters, and his words were charged with such truly exuberant energy that it never occurred to me to offer any uncalled-for sympathy or encouragement.

I was terribly glad that *Molodaya Gvardia* had acquired this new author – a fresh and powerful talent, a Bolshevik, veteran of the Civil War, a man with such remarkably clear-cut ideological and moral values.

**He overpowered his physical infirmities, his incurable disease, weakness, grief and torpor, and victoriously asserted life, creative endeavour, and struggle.**

# ersary of a Soviet hero

## “Essential reading”

Carlos Rule

Nikolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered* is one of the most renowned novels of the 20th century.

It may have never gained acceptance amongst cynical bourgeois critics; it may be too “simple”, too “real” (and hence, apparently, lacking in imagination) for the 21st century patron of all that is abstract, but the fact remains that it has appeared in over 450 editions in over 110 languages in over 40 countries.

The enduring popularity of this book, especially in lands where the masses had taken control of their own destinies, and among people fighting for liberation from the world's great oppressor – imperialism – is testimony to its deep roots in the masses of the people.

This is NOT bourgeois art. This is not an abstract form, shallow in content, designed to be incomprehensible to the “lower” classes.

This is, rather, people's art, socialist art, at its very best. “Art belongs to the people, its roots should penetrate deeply into the very thick of the

masses of the people. It should be comprehensible to these masses and loved by them. It should unite the emotions, thoughts and will of these masses and arouse them” – Lenin.

Reading a book such as *How the Steel Was Tempered*, written about the Soviet Union from its inception to the early 1930s, gives the reader a feel for what life was like in that situation.

The story is by no means sugar-coated, the book does not portray the young USSR as an ideal paradise for workers and peasants. It deals with the harsh realities of destroying the old order and building a new one in the middle of a hostile world and with hostile elements constantly at work.

There are wreckers and saboteurs, there is indolence and apathy, but over time those who are working for the future become stronger and stronger, and those who are fighting for the past become weaker and weaker.

It is truly an inspiring story, and by writing it Nikolai Ostrovsky, although he died a cripple, unable to engage in physical work for the last years of his short life (he died at the age of 32),

has played an important and memorable role in the movement of the billions of oppressed people to emancipate themselves from mental and physical slavery.

When I bought my copy of *How the Steel Was Tempered*, at a Marx Memorial Library [London] book sale, the lady behind the counter looked at it and happily told me “in the old days this was essential reading for youngsters”. For good reason. This outstanding novel/autobiography has served to inspire millions over the last 70 years.

Who cannot be motivated by Pavel's courage and self-sacrificing spirit? Who cannot feel heartened by the stories of overcoming tremendous obstacles to build a society free from exploitation? Who cannot feel compelled to work harder for revolution when they read about how valiantly the Soviet people fought and worked?

*How the Steel Was Tempered* is still essential reading.

Abridged from a review in *Spark*, the newspaper of the Socialist Labour Party Youth of Britain. ☪



This was a strong character, tempered in battle, and so, rather than restrain him, I wanted to help him to develop his plans.

I can still hear his deep voice, mellow with happiness and pride, as he said:

“And so I'm back in the ranks. That's the main thing, you know. I'm back in the ranks! Isn't life wonderful! What a life is starting for me!”

All the way home I kept hearing these words: “What a life is starting for me!” and they sounded like a song.

Translated by R. Prokofieva  
\*Anna Karaeva [1893-1979].  
Novelist, editor, and journalist, whose early work touched on the struggle for a new life in the pre-kolkhoz village. A graduate of the Bestuzhev Courses for women (1916), her first works appeared in 1922. The 1928 novel *Sawmill* tells of the positive effects Soviet industrialisation has on the peasantry. In the 1930s, her works addressed the issue of the education of young people in settings as diverse as the pre-Revolutionary intelligentsia, the Civil War era, and contemporary society. The Great Patriotic War (World War II) inspired her to write on the work and struggles of those in the rear in her trilogy *Motherland*, for which she was awarded the State Prize. Between 1931 and 1938 she was chief editor of the journal *Molodaya Gvardia* and as such oversaw the preparation and publication of Nikolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered*. Also, was a correspondent for *Pravda* between 1941 and 1943. Karaeva was awarded the Order of Lenin five times.  
Sovlit.com ☪

### Ostrovsky, Nikolai Alexeivich

- 1904 **September 29** – Born in Viliya, Ukraine. (September 16, Julian Calendar)
- 1913 Leaves school at age nine to begin work as a herdsboy
- 1914 Re-enters elementary school, but is expelled by scripture teacher.
- 1917 Dismissed from the local railway station for sleeping on the job.
- 1918 Runs errands for the local Bolshevik underground during German occupation.  
**July** – joins the Komsomol  
**August** – joins the Red Army, Kotovsky Cavalry Brigade.
- 1920 Wounded near Odessa and contracted typhus, returns to action but was again wounded near Lvov and sent to hospital in Kiev.  
**October** – discharged from army on medical grounds.
- 1921 Working in railway workshops of Kiev as an electrician and as secretary of the local Komsomol.
- 1922 **August** – suffering from rheumatism and typhus he was sent to a resort on the Sea of Azov for treatment.  
**October** – officially declared an invalid
- 1923 Appointed Commisar of the Red Army's Second Training Battalion
- 1924 **January** – Komsomol District Committee Secretary in Izyaslav  
**August** – accepted as a member of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik).
- 1925 Spends most of the year in Kharkov receiving medical treatment.
- 1926 **May** – sent to a sanatorium in the Crimea. By December polyarthritis deprives him of almost all mobility and he becomes virtually bedridden.
- 1927 **December** – begins a correspondence course at the Sverdlov Communist University in Moscow
- 1929 **June** – completes University course  
**August** – loses his vision entirely
- 1930 Paralysed and blind, begins work on first novel, *How The Steel Was Tempered*. He also writes articles for newspapers and journals and speaks on radio programs
- 1932 Joins the Moscow branch of the Association of Proletarian Writers
- 1933 **June** – completes *How The Steel Was Tempered*
- 1935 **October 1** – awarded the Order of Lenin
- 1936 **December 22** – dies aged 32. Part 1 of his second novel, *Born of the Storm*, is released the very same day. Begun in January 1924 and concerning the Civil War in Ukraine, the novel remains unfinished.



#### NEW AUSTRALIAN EDITION!

In celebration of the 100th anniversary of Nikolai Ostrovsky's birth the Communist Party of Australia is pleased to present a new CD Rom Edition of the classic Soviet novel

### *How the Steel Was Tempered*

Prepared from the 1952 English Edition by Progress Publishers, this edition includes the 12 original illustrations by A.Reznichenko. The novel has been formatted as a printable PDF (A5 pages).  
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# US funded anti-Chavez groups

Eva Golinger

Documents recently obtained from the US Department of State under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) by [www.venezuelafoia.info](http://www.venezuelafoia.info) demonstrate that more than US\$5 million annually during the past two years was given by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to various organisations in Venezuela, many of which are aligned with the opposition to President Hugo Chávez.

One of the key groups collaborating with USAID is Súmate, the organisation that promoted the

The Department of State has withheld the names of the organisations receiving financing from USAID by misapplying a FOIA exemption that is intended to protect "personnel and medical files" of individuals. Such censorship indicates that USAID and the US Government clearly have something to hide regarding their collaborations with the Venezuelan opposition.

Founded by President John F Kennedy in 1961, USAID has been used, in many instances, as a mechanism to promote the interests of the US in strategically important countries around the world.

In the case of Venezuela, USAID



Chávez and his family after the recent referendum win

## Censorship indicates that USAID and the US Government clearly have something to hide regarding their collaborations with the Venezuelan opposition.

unsuccessful recall referendum campaign against Chávez. Súmate has refused to recognise the referendum's results. Despite its numerous undemocratic positions and actions, Súmate also received funds from the Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in 2003.

Although the documents were released under the FOIA, they have nonetheless been censored.

maintains a private contractor in Caracas monitoring and facilitating its projects and funds and also has a local operating centre, the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), which was established in 2002 after the failed coup d'état against President Chávez. The private contractor, Development Alternatives, Inc (DAI), manages and supervises grants approved by USAID to Venezuelan organisations.

Under a program titled "Venezuela: Initiative to Build Confidence", DAI has awarded 67 grants to Venezuelan organisations in various sectors and areas of interest. These grants amounted to \$2.3 million in 2003. In total, DAI's program in Venezuela includes \$10 million in funding for the period August 2002 through August 2004 — \$5 million annually — to "focus on common goals for the future of Venezuela."

According to the documents obtained under FOIA and DAI's project description, none of the project grants or programs have been in collaboration with the Venezuelan

Government. Furthermore, many of the recipients of US government funds through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) have also received USAID funding through DAI.

Despite the withholding of names on the USAID-DAI grants, one document apparently slipped through uncensored, at least in part. The name "Súmate" appears on a grant intended to encourage "electoral participation" in the recall referendum, citing \$84,840 as the total grant amount.

Combined with the NED grant of \$53,400 given to Súmate in 2003-2004, the organisation that is now crying fraud about the recall referendum against President Chávez (the results of which have been recognised as absolutely credible by the Carter Center and the US Department of State) has received, at minimum, more than \$200,000 in just one year for promoting its attempts to remove Venezuela's President from office.

Other recipients of USAID

funds through DAI which are apparent in the censored documents include the organisation Liderazgo y Visión for its project, "A Dream for Venezuela", created in 2002-2003 with the intent of offering an alternative vision and agenda for those opposing President Chávez's administration. Liderazgo y Visión has also been a recipient of NED funds over the past few years.

One grant from USAID-DAI focused on the creation of anti-Chávez radio and television commercials during the December 2002-February 2003 strike imposed by the opposition, during which the private media dedicated its airwaves round-the-clock to opposition propaganda.

The USAID-DAI grant shows funding originating from the US Government for some of these anti-Chávez commercials, in collaboration with former Fedecámaras President Carlos Fernandez, one of the leaders of the strike.

*Peoples' Weekly World* ☪

## Putin escalates grab for dictatorial powers

Russian President, Vladimir Putin has used the most monstrous of all terrorist attacks, the unspeakable atrocity committed against the children, teachers and parents at the Beslan school in South Ossetia recently, to announce plans to further centralise his authority and restrict the activities of political parties.

His plans for "radical restructuring" of the political system give him the power to appoint the governors of regions and restrict the election of representatives to the Duma to those standing on Party lists.

At present half the Duma's 450 representatives are elected to individual district seats and the other half are from party lists with the number based on the proportion of votes the party receives. There is a minimum threshold of five percent of the vote to be given any seats.

Putin is going to abolish the

district seats; all candidates must appear on a party list. Only four parties qualified for seats in the party-list half, including the Communist Party and Putin's United Russia. All of the independents and representatives from other parties were elected from districts.

Using arguments similar to those heard from conservative leaders in the capitalist countries, he claims his measures will create "a single chain of command" and bring about "national unity" and "prevent further crises".

### Compliant majority

Although his plans have yet to be endorsed by the existing Duma, this is a foregone outcome. He already has a compliant majority in this Parliament.

The Putin Government has closed all independent national

TV channels and newspapers and exiled others who defied him. Elected governors were thrown out of the Federation Council (the upper house) and Putin appointed his own "super-governors" to supervise the elected governors.

Putin's new moves have been condemned by Gennady Zuzanov the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and by the representatives of several of the "liberal" parties, but others have supported Putin's moves. Alexander Rutskoi, who won notoriety in his opposition to Yeltsin, said that "Right now people elect people who speak louder than others and have more money than others".

But these measures will have little effect on the danger of more terrorist acts. Instead of extending democratic rights and encouraging the participation of the people in government, these restrictions are already causing widespread disquiet in the course being followed by the Putin administration.

### Storm clouds

At the same time, storm clouds are gathering in the Caucus region as Georgia falls more and more under US influence and is preparing for military operations against the break-away region of South Ossetia. The US is training Georgian military forces and assault troops in preparation for war in this oil rich region.

Eduard Kokoity, President of the republic of South Ossetia, has been in Moscow for a week. In an interview he said that his republic would be incorporated in Russia, sooner or later. ☪

## Cuba sets pace for disaster management

UN officials last week stated that Cuba is an example in the prevention of hurricane risks and a model that could be applied in other countries with similar or better economic conditions that have not been able to protect their populations as effectively as the island.

No Cubans were killed during Hurricane Ivan and recently, Hurricane Charley took four lives in Cuba, as opposed to 30 in Florida.

They also recalled that Hurricane George in 1998 caused the death of just four people when it crossed Cuba, while 600 died in other Caribbean nations affected by that natural phenomenon.

There are many reasons explaining the low mortality rate caused by hurricanes in Cuba compared to its neighbours, such as education, prevention and response capacity, commented Salvano Briceno, director of the UN Institute for the Reduction of Disasters.

In his opinion, the population of the Caribbean country is constantly informed and prepared in schools, universities and workplaces on how to confront natural disasters.

"From an early age, Cubans are trained in how to act when a hurricane is approaching the island and

receive two days of training every year in ways of reducing their risks, including simulation exercises and preparing concrete actions", Briceno explained.

For her part, Brigitte Leoni, a spokesperson for the World Conference for the Reduction of Disasters, which takes place next January in Japan, highlighted the work of the Cuban Meteorological Institute and the Civil Defence as "two pillars" in the system of controlling risks originated by hurricanes.

All the island's institutions are mobilised 48 hours before a hurricane is expected to hit the territory and immediate measures such as mass evacuations go into effect.

In the Cuban case, she added, it is an example of how the vulnerability of populations can be reduced with low-cost measures, and a significant dose of political determination.

Finally, Briceno observed that Cuba's success in this field illustrates that the poor nations do have options for mitigating or preventing the consequences of natural disasters, but at times the missing links are "concrete action programs and the political will to implement them".

*Granma* ☪

Adelaide

### Spring Latino Fiesta

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# Children oppose Israel's apartheid wall

**More than a thousand Palestinian schoolchildren, boys and girls from age 6-14, wearing their school uniforms and carrying their school books and supplies, demonstrated on September 13 in the shadows of the 15-foot-high concrete "separation barrier" that is being built in a-Ram, the bustling town of 60,000 on the West Bank near East Jerusalem.**

The students, who carried posters reading, "Let us learn!" were protesting against the wall for its role in cutting them off from their schools on the "Israeli side", only a few dozen yards away. Although about 60 percent of a-Ram's residents hold Israeli identity cards, the wall will confine many of the town's residents to the "Palestinian side" and split up neighbours, families, students and teachers.

The 435-mile-long "apartheid wall", as peace and justice activists have dubbed it, is being built by the Israeli Government of Ariel Sharon to supposedly enhance Israel's security. However, Palestinians charge the wall is merely a thinly disguised land grab. The World Court at The Hague ruled July 9 that the wall is illegal under international law and should be torn down.

The Israeli Supreme Court, however, has permitted the government to continue building the wall, albeit under some restrictions. Since the Court's decision to give the go-ahead, the wall here has been going up at great speed. Only a few "holes" remain.

Local officials note that, when the wall is completed, many students will have to drop out of school altogether, since there are insufficient places at schools remaining on the Palestinian side. The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reports that a similar situation exists in nearby al-Issawiya.

According to the *Oread Daily* news service, Abu Rajab is one of at least 13 al-Issawiya pupils from kindergarten through sixth grade who have been prevented from attending school due to the sepa-

ration barrier. The 10-year-old has been spending his time at home or in his yard, occasionally going to the village school to see if it will take him in, and then returning home.

Last year, Abu went to Al-Quds al-Islamiyah, a school belonging to the Muslim Waqf in Dahiyat al-Barid, but in recent months, the wall has sprung up between the school and his home in Issawiya, in northern Jerusalem. His parents registered him for the Issawiya village school, but were informed at the beginning of the year that its classrooms are full.

For the past two years, Issawiya students who attended schools elsewhere have had trouble getting to school on time — even before the separation wall went up. An Israeli checkpoint at the main entrance to Issawiya, which operates irregularly in the morning, holds up school buses, so students are sometimes forced to transfer to another vehicle waiting on the other side to take them to school.

Would-be fifth-grader Karim Mustafa previously attended a school in Shuafat and would occasionally arrive two hours late because of checkpoint delays. His parents registered him at the local school this year, "so he wouldn't keep arriving at different times", and he too was barred for lack of room.

Some schools, like that in Issawiya, are filled beyond capacity. Others can expect to empty out. Students and teachers on both sides of the fence going up will be cut off from their schools, placing the fate of some schools in question.

"The problem will reach its height in a month or two, when the fence is complete", said a-Ram council head Sirhan Salima, warning that "a disaster is coming".

Throughout the demonstration, which was joined by 150 Israeli peace activists from Gush Shalom, Ta'ayush, Bat-Shalom, Rabbis for Human Rights and others, giant cranes continued to lift concrete slabs into place, and a large contin-



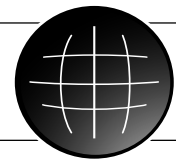
The wall is a thinly disguised land grab

gent of the Israeli Border Police was deployed along the path of the wall to prevent any interference with its construction.

The school crisis is only one of the problems created by the wall, which is cutting off a-Ram residents from their businesses and workplaces, hospitals, universities and even their cemetery, according to Gush Shalom.

In a related development, the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation and other groups have called on Congress to reject US Senate Resolution 408, which endorses Israel's construction of the apartheid wall and condemns the World Court's decision.

For more information, visit: [www.endtheoccupation.org](http://www.endtheoccupation.org)  
*Peoples Weekly World*,  
Communist Party USA



## Global briefs

**USA:** Bush's Pentagon has announced a new privatisation scheme for military physicians and other health personnel, part of its Iraq strategy of having private contractors perform what were up to now routine US military functions. The delivery of medical and health care to military personnel is a major program. Medical and dental professionals provide care to over 8.9 million active military personnel, their dependents and retirees. Turning these health-related activities over to private contractors would be a major financial boon to many Bush supporters. For example, take Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, MD, a key Bush ally. Frist runs the largest chain of for-profit hospitals in the US, Columbia/HCA, which is a major player in the recently enacted Bush Medicare drug fiasco. A number of Columbia/HCA officials are serving time in prison for Medicare fraud. But with the Iraqi war being used to test the use of private contractors as overseers of prisons and other purposes, the White House sees the complete privatisation of medical services advancing the Bush agenda and at the same time paying back his biggest corporate contributors.

**SOUTHERN CAUCASUS:** Breakaway autonomous regions in the former Soviet republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan are creating a headache for the Bush administration's geopolitical planners. The instability of this region — the Southern Caucasus — was thrown into bold relief by the hostage-taking of school children in the nearby North Ossetia town of Beslan. Azerbaijan is rich in oil and natural gas, particularly around its capital, Baku, on the Caspian Sea. The country's estimated oil reserves range from 3.7 billion to 40 billion barrels. Western oil companies, led by British Petroleum, have launched an ambitious pipeline project to transport this oil westward, through Azerbaijan and Georgia, to the Turkish town of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean Sea. Its ultimate destination is Europe. A parallel natural gas pipeline will send Caspian gas through Turkey to the "new" and old Europe, breaking what Western energy interests refer to as Europe's "strategic dependence on Russian gas".

**AFGHANISTAN:** Three Americans have been sentenced to eight to ten years in prison for running a private jail and torturing prisoners, after a panel of three Afghan judges rejected their claim that they were working for a Pentagon counter-terrorist group led by Lt Gen William G Boykin, the deputy Under-Secretary of Defense for Intelligence. Jonathan K Idema, a former member of the Special Forces, and Brent Bennett, an Army-trained forward air controller, were sentenced to ten years, and Edward Caraballo, a journalist filming a documentary about them, was given eight years. The Americans immediately said that they had had been abandoned by their American masters because they had become a political liability. "This can only have been staged by the US Government — we were an embarrassment", said Caraballo, an award-winning cameraman who says he was filming Idema's counter-terrorist operations.

## Iraq war illegal say legal experts and Kofi Annan

**In a recent BBC interview UN Secretary General Kofi Annan displeased Bush, Blair and Howard by declaring that their invasion and occupation of Iraq was and is illegal because it breached the United Nations Charter. These leaders, including Howard, immediately rushed to declare the opposite.**

So who is right and who decides what is right and wrong in the world?

Among the world's foremost experts in the field of international law, the overwhelming jurisprudential consensus is that the Anglo-American invasion, conquest, and occupation of Iraq constitute three phases of one illegal war of aggression.

These experts are none other than the world's foremost international law experts who make up the prestigious International Commission of International Law Jurists who prepared a statement called *The Legality Of The Iraq War*. (Find it by scrolling down approximately one quarter of the

way, after you've clicked onto this website: <http://www.eurolegal.org/ueur/bbiraqwar.htm>)

This document was drafted and signed by the world's foremost international law experts to provide ultimate proof of their authoritative opinion concerning the legal status of the war against Iraq.

Furthermore, this large body of eminent international law experts explicitly stated that they'd drafted their legal document in order to advise Messrs. Bush and Blair prior to the invasion: (1) that it would be blatantly illegal under international law for the Anglo-American belligerents to invade Iraq; and (2) that their joint decision as Commanders-in-Chief to commence hostilities would constitute prosecutable war crimes.

These experts deem both preventive wars and preemptive strikes to be euphemistic subcategories of outlawed wars of aggression.

They draw three conclusions. It is the overwhelming consensus of the world's foremost international law experts that:

(1) UN Secretary General Annan's opinion is correct;

(2) the opinion of the "Coalition of the Willing's" leaders is false;

(3) therefore, Americans must break free of the neocons' self-delusional mentality by learning to differentiate between fact and fabrication.

Their advice is to reject the temptation to vote for Messrs Bush and Cheney, because:

(1) both men were advised beforehand that their decision to commence the invasion of Iraq would be blatantly illegal under international law;

(2) they invaded nonetheless, and now they are cynically attempting to mislead the public again by falsely arguing that "The Iraq War was legal!";

(3) their argument is legally-meritless nonsense; and

(4) they have repeatedly demonstrated their disdain for universal human rights and democratic governance under the rule of law.

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## If we do not fight we loose!

In last week's *Guardian*, Editor Anna Pha highlights the very dangerous decision handed down by the High Court on September 2. The decision involves union claims for bargaining fees to be charged to free loaders who enjoy union benefits in the workplace.

This dispute goes back to 2001 when several unions negotiated a new enterprise agreement with Electrolux. The log of claims included a fee to be paid by non-union members for the right to enjoy benefits hard won and negotiated for by the unions.

The case was taken by employer groups to the Federal court where it found in favour of the unions. At that time letters to the editor in *The Guardian* and the general press discussed the issue of bargaining fees. At that time it was thought that bargaining fees could be dangerous for unions that use the servicing model as a way of building the union movement.

It was also highlighted at that time that unions needed to involve members in the organising and building of unions. The key task and role of unions was to organise the workplace to minimise the number of free loaders.

Since the coalition took

office, working conditions and the right of workers to organise had been eroded. The introduction of right-wing legislation like the Workplace Relations Act and further amendments have made it legal for employer groups and the government to savage hard won conditions.

Anna's analysis of the recent court decision is in my opinion a serious warning for the Trade Union Movement in the country. Her views that somehow the Act must be defeated should be taken seriously by progressive forces and the unions. The only way to defeat the Act is by the trade union movement taking action pressing a new government to repeal these draconian laws.

The pressure should be now on the ALP to commit itself in the case of winning the federal elections on October 9 to deliver a more democratic industrial relations law. Smaller political parties, in particular the Greens and other progressive forces should join the claim for the repeal of the Act.

As it was shown during the MUA dispute and more recently with the Royal Commission into the Building and Construction Industry, the attacks on workers have been up-front. Class struggle in which the owners of capital will not rest until they see working class organisations destroyed. If we do not fight we loose!

V Molina  
Perth, WA

## Student Opinion

This letter has been written in response to another letter written in a previous issue of *The Guardian*

called "Schools in need" [August 25] and also to point out how ignorant some of today's youth are.

The first thing I'd like to say is I too am a student in Duncraig Senior High School and that I agree Duncraig is in bad shape but some of it has been exaggerated. Some of the staff complain about the conditions in the school as well and that the government doesn't give enough money for public schools.

Another point I'd like to address is how the administration does not give the students much say with what happens with the funding and doesn't really allow students to express their political beliefs. Even though we have a student council they too don't really have much of a say as the two "dominant" councillors put down most of them.

They don't do much that benefit the other students only them and their friends, for example when they organise a school event they don't use the other councillors' ideas only theirs. How do I know all this, my friend is apart of that council and he has complained about it to me and feels the same way I do about the school. When he tries to bring up important issues with them they just ignore him or tell him that his idea is "stupid".

The other issue I'd like to address is how ignorant today's youth are. I've been trying to get students to sign a petition to allow us to have more say with what happens with the funding and perhaps start a student union in our school. I've been able to get 40 signatures so far to support this idea, but when I try to explain the idea to other students they call me a "hippie" or a "dirty commie"

and yet they still complain about the conditions in the school and maybe it could be fear of expressing themselves.

Today's youth just don't care and are closed minded. Another example of this, when you show you care about something or your views differ from theirs they'll put you down and continuously bother you about it, and I find it disgusting how racist they are.

I'm not to say that the youth are to blame for this kind of behaviour but that it's most likely society, and a solution that I think may work better is if we open up their minds a bit more to what's around them and let them understand more about others.

Ian Bryson  
Sorrento, WA

## Selective interviews?

The recent article *TV Shows Worth Watching* had a very worrying review of *Soundtrack To War*.

The review makes a variety of fait accompli conclusions on the "mentality" of the US army based on the dozen or so interview "bites" from a half-dozen or so wackos that were dug up, mostly in the first 10 minutes of the program, before the interviews and discussions proper.

We don't know if these soldiers were a typical cross-section or not. We aren't told how many soldiers in total were interviewed for the feature to give us an idea how prevailing any mindset shown was, and for the "horrifying" bites we don't see the full interviews.

The show should have been taken for what it was, a heavily edited highlight reel of the more

interesting or controversial interviewees dug up, whether were guitar-playing introspectives or borderline psychopaths.

The feature itself doesn't purport the conclusions drawn by the reviewer. The final supposed insight about the "dichotomy" is lazy and fatuous; the "dichotomy" presented is good television, not an objective survey.

Chris

## DIMIA actions questionable

How can we calm a young man who shakes uncontrollably?

What was it?  
How can we sooth his mind so he can get some sleep.

His head feels like it is exploding. There are terrors racing through his every thought. He cannot even speak coherently. All we hear is gibberish. Is this the same bright eyed teenager who sought safety from Australia?

Three years later, he is not a teenager and we do not recognise him.

In Australia the thousands of Aussie "mums" are trying to do that via emails and faxes to the people in our Nauru detention camp.

I wonder if DIMIA [Immigration Department] were trying to "start a fire" in the detention camp on Nauru when they went there this week to coerce people into returning to their places of nightmare. Was it a veiled hint when they spoke of deportation with "binding hands"? Was this just to cause distress or is it a real threat?

Elaine Smith  
West Haven, NSW

## Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

### Not happy, John!

Dissatisfaction with the Howard Government is manifesting itself in all sorts of unlikely places, especially within the ruling class itself. There was the intriguing spectacle of John Valder, formerly head of the Stock exchange and President of the Liberal Party, launching the "Not happy, John!" campaign to a big and enthusiastic crowd in Howard's own electorate.

(Incidentally, you can get free bumper stickers from that campaign via their website: www.nothishappyjohn.com)

There was the highly critical ad placed by various eminent retired public servants, military officers, etc. Howard publicly dismissed it, but criticism of a Lib government from within the ruling class is not so easily dismissed in reality.

And on September 2, my local paper the *Central Coast Express Advocate*, not normally noted for having a radical posture, came out with a blistering editorial attacking the Government's health care funding and privatisation policies.

The immediate cause of the paper's wrath was the news that Central Coast Radiology, a company that provided a mobile X-ray service to the elderly, would close on September 3. In future, patients in nursing homes, or elderly people living in their own homes, would have to go to Wyong or Gosford

hospitals, in many cases by ambulance, to have hips, chests, etc, X-rayed.

As the *Express Advocate* said in its front page news story, the decision will "place more strain on the Central Coast's embattled public health system". It would also "stretch ambulance services".

The company has operated the service for ten years, but claims it is not profitable (a claim the *Express Advocate*, as we shall see, readily accepts).

However, local health care workers and the newspaper suspect the closure has more to do with MIA, the company that owns Central Coast Radiology, "rationalising" services and assets in preparation for an impending mega merger.

On June 7, MIA announced that DCA would acquire the company for a cool \$700 million. The merger will make DCA not only "Australia's largest diagnostic imaging provider" but a "health and aged care company with an expected market capitalisation of more than \$1.2 billion".

The merged company, reports the *Express Advocate*, will employ more than 350 doctors in about 275 clinics.

However much the paper may have been impressed by DCA's size or market share, it was not impressed by the company's closure of the mobile X-ray clinic. In fact, in an editorial, the *Express Advocate* called the closure "another example of how our health services are badly underfunded by all levels of government".

It went on to compound this subversive view with the startling observation: "Part of that problem is the view in some circles that privatisation is better than government control."

"This X-ray service has been

provided by a private operator. It should not have been".

Not, mind you, because of the need to sustain government income as well as provide services at low cost to all on the basis of need. No, it should not have been privatised because "no private company could ever hope to make a profit from it" and could not, therefore, sustain the service.

In fact, the paper recognised in a backhanded way public need counts for nothing with the corporate world unless it is profitable: "no private company can turn a blind eye to losing money".

However, John Howard can take little comfort from the conclusion the editor of the *Central Coast Express Advocate* reaches: "The answer is not to shunt the elderly around to hospitals, using ambulances as de facto taxis.

"The answer is for governments to properly fund the service."

## Dramatic licence

Another political figure was in the news recently: Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Austrian-born Governor of California. The former body-builder turned actor, whose politics are very reactionary, made a speech predictably supporting his mate George Bush's attempt to get re-elected as President.

Arnie tried to justify his and Bush's conservative politics by harking back to the Cold War and "the Soviet threat". Just like Bush would have done. And, of course, just like Bush, Arnie could not avoid making assorted gaffes.

He told his audience that he came from a country (Austria) that had suffered under a Communist government after WW2. He spoke movingly of his memories of seeing Soviet tanks in the streets of his home town.



## Terrorist at large

Boy, nothing gets past those American counter-terrorist guys, does it?

Veteran US Senator Ted Kennedy has flown between Boston and Washington regularly for 42 years, but since Bush's "Homeland Security" laws went into effect, he has been refused permission to board the aircraft on no less than five occasions because his name is on a "no-fly" list - as a suspected terrorist.

When the blue-blooded Senator from Boston, whose two brothers were assassinated, asked why his name was on the list, he received the answer, "We can't tell you". ☺





Sun 26 September  
Sat 2 October

The French documentary series *Little Buggers* (SBS 7.30pm Monday), has obtained more than 70 awards in various international festivals, so it must be doing something right!

Written and directed by Thierry Berrod, its four richly documented and humour-filled episodes examine the interaction between people and the insect world, using remarkable electron microscope shots to illuminate its tiny protagonists.

The first episode, *Mosquito Alert*, deals with a lethal mosquito-borne outbreak of encephalitis in New York in 1999. According to the ABC's notes, "the CIA began to wonder about the use of the mosquitoes as 'bacteriological weapons'".

Presumably they mean that the CIA began to wonder whether someone was using germ-laden insects against the US, because the US itself has been using mosquitoes and other insects as "bacteriological weapons" for at least three decades, beginning in the Korean War and used most recently against Cuba's agriculture.

*Grass* (SBS 10.00pm Tuesday) follows the trail of dubious 20th century propaganda against the smoking of marijuana, which would, it was claimed, turn America's younger generations into "insane murderers", "sex-crazed maniacs", "heroin addicts" and (probably worst of all) "Communists" – and sometimes a combination of all four.

The USA's senseless and hypocritical "war on drugs" needs to be exposed for the sham that it is. *Grass* however appears to tell only part of the story.

I have not had the opportunity to preview the program, but the synopsis provided by SBS would suggest that it concentrates on the ludicrous

aspects of the campaign against pot ("Pot smokers beware! Scientists report bizarre side effects: men grow breasts!") while ignoring the commercial war on hemp.

A E Dupont, the chemical giant behind Nylon, rightly saw the widely used natural fibre hemp as the chief obstacle to Nylon's commercial success. Dupont's skilful manoeuvring resulted in hemp being equated with the dreaded weed marihuana and when marihuana was banned so was hemp itself.

Neat, eh? A pity that aspect is apparently glossed over in *Grass*.

Nevertheless, there are still plenty of worthwhile targets for director Ron Mann. In SBS's words: "pot activist Woody Harrelson narrates as archival footage and playful graphics are used to delineate and poke fun at the mentality that spawned modern-day US narcotics policy".

*Variety* describes *Grass* as "a frequently funny, openly partisan look at the war on drugs ... consistently entertaining".

There's a certain air of *déjà vu* about this week's *Storyline Australia* program *Who's Afraid of Designer Babies?* (SBS 8.30pm Thursday). It's about the social and moral dilemmas associated with pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, or PGD, which allows scientists to screen embryos conceived through IVF.

Just a few weeks ago, at the end of August, SBS ran another program on this same subject, *Generation Next*. That one was British, but the dilemmas covered in the two programs are much the same: Are we "playing God", and if we permit the screening out of embryos with genetic diseases will the next step be screening out (or selecting) embryos with red hair or athletic ability?

It seems to me that to deny families suffering incurable or debilitating genetic diseases access to PGD is cruel and inhuman. To do it on the spurious grounds that it would open the way to the wholesale subservience of science to the whims of fashion would be doubly so.

*Cracker* (ABC 9.30pm Saturdays) first appeared nine years ago, in 1995. Written by Jimmy McGovern, it was a detective series centred on a police psychiatrist. More accurately, it was centred on the uneasy relationship between the psychiatrist and the police.

But then, Dr Eddie Fitzgerald

("Fitz" to friends and enemies alike) had an uneasy relationship with everyone: colleagues, suspects, wife, you name it. A compulsive gambler, he was always in debt, drank heavily and smoked continuously.

At first glance, he was an argumentative, sexist pig, but McGovern's densely plotted double- and tripple-episode stories revealed a much more complex personality. The series became a classic, a model for "police procedural" series – many have tried to emulate it but few have even come close.

Which is why it is so pleasing that the ABC has begun to repeat the original three series from the beginning. Unfortunately, the first double episode began during the hiatus when *The Guardian* was not published while we moved our office.

However, take it from me: *Cracker* is a cracker of a series, brilliantly written, well acted, well directed and above all *credible*. Compare an episode of *Cracker* with any episode of *Midsomer Murder* and you will quickly see the difference.

McGovern's characters ring true, as do his situations. The filming of the tales is in close, personal and frequently very powerful. This is quality television programming, and the series has several prestigious awards to prove it.

*As It Happened: The Ghost of Roger Casement* (SBS 7.30pm Saturday) examines the life and execution of a controversial Irish hero. Roger Casement was a member of the ruling class, who had a distinguished career in the British Colonial service but who found the actions of British imperialism simply too hard to swallow.

Sent out to oversee British interests in the booming rubber industry in the Congo and the Amazon, Casement was so appalled by the horrific treatment of native workers that he turned against the exploitative imperialism that was responsible.

His damning reports forced the British Government to institute widespread reforms. He was given a knighthood but his course was now set and he joined the movement for Irish independence. In 1913 he helped form the Irish National Volunteers, and in the following year he visited New York in an attempt to drum up support for Ireland's freedom.



A 1950s US government poster (*Grass*)

With the outbreak of the First World War, Casement similarly sought help from Germany. He arranged for an arms shipment from Germany for the Easter Rising but the ship was seized by the British and scuttled.

Put ashore near Tralee in County Kerry on 12 April 1916, he was arrested by the British after 12 days, taken to London, and charged with treason. Hopes for a reprieve were dashed when copies of diaries reputed to be written by Casement were conveniently circulated among government officials, detailing alleged homosexual practices with native boys.

Roger Casement was hanged

at Pentonville Prison, England, in August 1916. His remains were not reburied in Ireland until 1960.

Were the diaries genuine, or a fine example of "black propaganda", at which the British Government and British Intelligence were rather good? In any case, their revelations of homosexual practices had no real bearing on the question of Irish independence.

But Casement was a distinguished member of the Anglo-Irish ruling class, and his activity to win Irish independence was widely seen as further undermining British rule. He had to be disgraced and punished. ✪

Sydney

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**AUSTRALIA TODAY: PUBLIC APATHY VERSUS MORAL VOICES**  
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# Putting the care back into health care

**The Communist Party of Australia is a staunch advocate of Medicare and the Public Health System.**

We believe in a quality public health system for the people based on need and not on ability to pay. Central to this are the principles of:

- universal access to Medicare and bulk billing;
- health services to be funded centrally through a progressive taxation system;
- no payment of fees for service.

We oppose the current dismantling of bulk billing and the imposition of up-front fees for visits to the doctor.

The Government's "Medicare Safety Net" is a con. It has nothing to do with strengthening Medicare. A universal system does not need a safety net. This is leading to the destruction of Medicare as a universal system.

The safety net encourages specialists to increase their fees and it is already being rorted – especially by

the Medicare Rebate WITHOUT tying the increase to bulk billing, by doctors is a cheap pre-election trick. It is, in fact, an attack on bulk billing.

We need MORE doctors and MORE bulk billing doctors – NOT more money going into the pockets of existing doctors without any improvement in health services.

## Private health insurance

The 30 percent private health insurance rebate is a massive failure. The rebate, including on costs, eats up \$3.6 billion of the health budget annually. Yet the private hospital system remains second class without providing a full range of services such as intensive care units, 24-hour resident doctor cover, etc. We oppose taxpayer-funded support for the private health industry.

When Mark Latham was recently acutely ill, his doctors quickly advised him to go into a

## More than 60 percent of privately insured people still go to a public hospital when they are sick.

obstetricians and radiologists. They are free to charge what they like, and the wealthy, who can afford to pay upfront, can then claim 80 percent back from the taxpayer. The "Medicare Safety Net" is not economically viable and is designed to bring Medicare to its knees with cost blowouts.

Howard's proposal to increase

public hospital where the best care is available.

More than 60 percent of privately insured people still go to a public hospital when they are sick – rather than be faced with large out of pocket costs when they get out.

Private hospitals "cherry pick", often refusing admission to the

elderly or patients with chronic illnesses, even when they have had private insurance all their lives. They are worried that the patient will stay in hospital and end up costing them money!

The Communist Party calls for an end to the taxpayer funded \$3.6 billion annual Private Health Insurance Rebate.

## Spend public money on the public system!

- This money should be used to:
- increase funding for public hospitals;
  - provide more doctors and more nurses for our struggling public system;
  - increase funding for aged care by 10%;
  - introduce a national public dental scheme;
  - put a nurse into every GP clinic;
  - fix the acute shortage of

doctors and nurses by removing the limit on the number of doctors accepted into GP training;

- increase the number of nurse undergraduates as recommended by Australian Nursing Federation (1100 per year for the next 4 years)
- increase funding of postgraduate nursing places to urban as well as rural areas (ANF policy)
- increase funding for Aboriginal health.

Aboriginal Health is a National calamity. Government policies have had a devastating effect on the Aboriginal Medical Service and Aboriginal Communities.

## Hands off the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)

Affordable medicines are a right for all Australians. The PBS has worked well but is now under threat from the big US pharmaceutical cor-

porations as a result of the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement.

The Howard Government is determined to increase prescription costs. An increase in prescription costs is a direct attack on the sick, the chronically ill and the elderly – many of whom need 4, 5 or 6 prescriptions a month. We say there must be no increase in prescription costs and no direct advertising to the public by the pharmaceutical corporations of their products. At present the pharmaceutical corporations spend \$900 million per year on direct marketing to doctors.

All of the above proposals for a universal, no-fee-for service, quality public health system could be funded by simply ending Howard's massive taxpayer subsidy to private hospitals through the private health insurance rebate.

Publicly owned health facilities and publicly funded health care is a right of all the Australian people. ✪



# Rights of women – time for progress!

**The last eight years of ultra-conservative Howard Government have been marked by a concerted effort to roll back the hard-won rights of women in Australia.**

Stripping workers of their rights has been one of the driving aims of the Howard Government and many of these have had a serious impact on working women.

Trade Unions have played an important role in the movement for equality of women in the workplace. Through regressive Industrial Relations legislation Howard has severely curtailed the ability of unions to fight for better benefits and conditions for working women.

Despite recent gains by nurses and teachers, many women still do not receive "equal pay for work of equal value". The childcare, aged care and textile and garment industries are among the dozens of female-dominated industries which still pay a fraction of the wages paid to similarly skilled workers in comparable male-dominated occupations.

Awards, which once guaranteed workers' rights, have been stripped back to bare minimum, doing

away with clauses and conditions benefiting women and parents that the Government deemed "superfluous".

The vast majority of casual jobs in Australia are filled by women. Without a permanent job and guaranteed work hours it is difficult for women to maintain financial independence.

Women in casual work have no

## Without a permanent job and guaranteed work hours it is difficult for women to maintain financial independence.

access to maternity or family leave. Casual work leaves women more vulnerable to instant dismissal – or "we no longer have enough work to employ you". This tactic is all too frequently used against women who become pregnant or who require leave to care for sick children.

Even women in permanent jobs are now vulnerable as government legislation removes what limited

protection there was against unfair dismissal in small workplaces.

The Government's one-off "Maternity Payment" and ongoing Family Payments do not offset the enormous child-rearing costs faced by families – especially single parent families headed by women in the overwhelming majority of cases.

Long hospital waiting lists and lack of access to bulk billing force

parents to pay skyrocketing fees for private healthcare for their children

A scarcity of childcare places (175,000 children are currently on waiting lists) and the enormous fees (increasing 30 per cent in the last two years) have forced many women out of the workforce.

John Howard and his Ministers pursue an extreme right-wing religious agenda to strip reproductive

rights off women. Legislation has been passed to ban single women and lesbians from access to IVF fertility treatment.

The Federal Government – and some state governments – have also begun a surreptitious campaign to undermine women's right to terminate pregnancies. Legal obstacles to abortion and government funding restrictions deny women the right to make decisions.

Overseas aid has been denied to programs which provide birth control or abortions to women in developing countries.

**The Communist Party of Australia, in line with its policy of full equality of women in the workplace and throughout society, demands:**

- A legislated minimum of 14 weeks paid Maternity Leave in line with International Labour Organisation standards.
- The right of all people to permanent jobs, transferring all casual workers, amongst them hundreds of thousands of women, into secure employment.
- Continued progress in the struggle for "equal pay for work

of equal value", with a concerted government campaign on all fronts to bridge the current \$100 weekly wage gap.

• Scrapping of Australian Workplace Agreements, with all workers covered by comprehensive Awards to secure conditions for working women, including: freedom from harassment and discrimination; protection of women travelling to and from the workplace; adequate training of women in the workplace to achieve equity in pay increases and promotion; maternity leave and family leave provisions.

- Strong Unfair Dismissal laws to protect pregnant women and working mothers.
- The right of single parents to a pension providing an adequate standard of living, scrapping the current "mutual obligation" conditions, and maintaining adequate PBS prescription, travel and other concessions.
- Government-funded childcare places for all children to allow women to fully participate in the workforce.
- Full access to fertility choices, including contraception, IVF treatment and abortions. ✪



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