

Howard's plan to destroy unions

Anna Pha

The Government claims its \$6 billion vote-buying exercise announced last week will make families, the aged, child care, small businesses, apprentices, students, and numerous other groups better off. But Howard has promised employers one of the biggest, fattest offers yet, with proposed legislation that will leave millions of workers without any form of protection under the industrial relations system.

He would shut unions out of the workplace and return to the master servant relationship of the 19th century. There can be no doubt that this is one promise he intends to keep.

"A new Independent Contractors Act would ensure that freedom of contract for independent contractors is enshrined and preserved, that they have a firewall around them to protect them from the deprivation of unions and unfriendly Labor governments who would seek to impose limits and constraints on their freedom to contract", Howard boasted at the Liberal Party campaign launch in Brisbane on September 26.

The Independent Contractors Act would completely remove so-called independent contractors from the coverage of the Workplace Relations Act or state industrial relations systems, leaving them with no protection. It would be a big leap towards total deregulation of wages and working conditions.

Howard did not bother to hide his hatred of unions or contempt for workers, declaring he has a "passionate belief in flexible workplaces free of rigidity in the industrial system and unwanted union interference". By "flexible workplaces" he means bosses are a law unto themselves – no restrictions or legally enforceable limits on their exploitation of workers.

"Freedom to contract" is the catch cry, meaning the bogus "freedom" in which collective action and joining a union are against the contract's stipulations. Under this scenario, enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs) and the industrial relations commissions

are out. Thus "freedom to contract" has replaced that old lie of "be your own boss".

Furthermore, the reference to independent contractors is misleading. The Act could affect millions of ordinary workers.

At present there are around 1.4 million contractors operating in the workforce. These cover a large range of occupations and industries and take many forms. The Act would encourage many more employers to replace their existing permanent workforces with contractors, or convert them where possible into contractors.

That is one of the aims of the policy – to wind back the existing legal relationship between employers and employees and replace it by a system which removes trade unions, deregulates wages and conditions and leaves workers taking full responsibility for their own insurance, superannuation, sickness and other leave payments.

Big take back

Trade unions have won many important rights, working conditions and wage rates through more than a century and a half of struggle. There is nothing that Howard and his employer friends would like better than to take all of these things back. But first they would have to eliminate the unions.

This has been the aim of the Howard Government since it was elected. Instead of trying to abolish the federal industrial relations system with its awards, its EBAs, the courts and commission in one go – which would bring a swift response from workers and the public at large – the Government has taken a more gradual approach.

It has stripped back awards, shifted the focus to decentralised EBAs, fiercely promoted individual work contracts (known as Australian Workplace Agreements – AWAs), overseen the casualisation of a large percentage of the workforce and encouraged the replacement of directly employed workers by contractors.

Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews is to announce a



\$12 million package designed to push more workers into AWAs.

The Government severely restricted the right to take industrial action and the rights of trade unions.

Each of these steps has the aim of taking away wages and working conditions, de-unionising workplaces and eliminating collective bargaining.

This latest proposal is a logical step in that process.

The term contractor covers a multitude of forms of employment and types of work. They may be self-employed trades people, taxi drivers, sole traders, owner-driver truckies, cleaners, sub-contractors on building sites, etc.

The key difference between a contractor and an ordinary employee is that the contractor is given a price for a job. The contractor is responsible for insurance, and all leave and superannuation, not the employer. In one fell swoop a host of important gains by workers are removed, and left to the contractor.

Contractors are widely used on building sites where they may work alongside permanently employed workers. When a construction company needs bricklayers, for example, it might contract a labour hire firm to do a specific job for a specific price. The labour hire firm

then takes on bricklayers to carry out the work.

Building industry

The building unions have fought hard to win agreements with labour hire companies to ensure that the subbies are employed under the same wages and conditions as other workers on the site under the EBA, and that their superannuation, long service leave and other payments are made by the employer.

They have fought hard to retain unionised sites, with a site EBA for all workers, regardless of their legal form of employment.

In the eyes of the bosses and the government this defeats the purpose of contractors – to be able to pit them against each other and drive down costs (wages and conditions) as they compete for contracts.

The Cole Commission into the Building and Construction Industry gave this question a great deal of attention, and following its report the Government put legislation before the Senate to bring a halt to union protection in the industry. The legislation fortunately did not get through the Senate. Now the Government wants to strengthen and extend that legislation to all industries.

Regardless of the technicalities of the legal form of employment, the essence of the relationship between a worker and the company remains the same. What changes are the rights and protections accorded under law.

Workers, whether they are "self-employed" contractors, or employed by a contractor to work for another employer, are still exploited when working for a company: the company's aim remains that of increasing its profits by keeping the cost of labour as low as possible.

Howard has promised a range of other measures to promote "entrepreneurship" based on an appeal to the individual's "independence" and "freedom" to encourage workers to become contractors. No doubt there will be many employers keen to take advantage of this opportunity.

When voting on October 9, it is important to give first preference to candidates who will not only protect public health and education, but also be prepared to defend the rights of workers and trade unions and support collective bargaining.

Vote left and progressive candidates such as the Greens, who have a proven record in defending trade unions and workers.

Vote Howard Out! ✘

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The Guardian

No 1200

September 29, 2004

Election cynicism

The current election campaign has become the most cynical exercise in pork barreling by the two major parties ever seen in Australia. It follows the announcement of a record Budget surplus of between \$8 billion and \$10 billion. The sky is now the limit in spending promises.

"Millions fly in [the] battle for Sydney" and "Labor pledges \$1 bn more for hospitals" are two of the front-page headlines in last week's *Sydney Morning Herald*. The *Financial Review* ran an interview with Howard – "my fourth-term agenda" – promising to get stuck into the trade union movement even more, thereby conveying his congenital hatred of the working people of Australia and working class organisations.

Then there is the phoney "debate" about security in which the two major parties compete with one another to prove that they are the toughest in the "war on terrorism" and all other imagined enemies that they conjure up to hoodwink the electorate.

Even General Douglas MacArthur knew what governments of this sort are all about. He said: "Our government has kept us in a perpetual state of fear – kept us in a continuous stampede of patriotic fervour – with the cry of grave national emergency. Always, there has been some terrible evil at home, or some monstrous foreign power that was going to gobble us up if we did not blindly rally behind it."

For many years we had the "red threat" and the "yellow peril". Now governments are steadily building up the "Muslim peril" – a course that could well result in long periods of chaos and even the destruction of civilisation as we know it. What is happening in Iraq is but a foretaste of what this policy brings.

The electoral promises being made are virtual chaff in the wind while much more real and fundamental issues are being ignored by the major parties – policies which are the causes of the problems facing public education and public health, for example.

The consequences of economic rationalist policies of privatisation and the wholesale attack on any and every public enterprise, service and institution are being ignored.

Then there is "competition" policy which is no more than a cover for the take-over of the public sector while the big corporations grow fatter and stronger than ever.

What has the privatisation of the Commonwealth Bank done for the banking system, except to give all power to the four major (all now private) banks who have closed branches, slashed staff and imposed charges on almost every operation that a bank undertakes?

Why is there a chronic shortage of doctors and nurses in our hospitals despite the fact that we have a record Budget surplus? It is not any shortage of money. Why do many country towns have no services at all? Why have we one of the most unfair taxation systems that one could imagine?

Working people and their families are paying a more and more disproportionate share of taxation than ever before thanks to the GST. Yet this topic seems to be totally taboo on the part of the major parties. Howard declared that a GST was a "never ever" proposition before he became Prime Minister and the Labor Party strongly opposed its introduction. Then the GST was going to solve all state spending problems for ever and ever. So what has happened?

The massive cuts to health, education, welfare, public housing and other community services along with the money that has poured in from the GST are funding tax cuts election pork barreling. Above they finance big rewards to the corporate mates of the politicians who pay large sums into the coffers of the major parties.

These major policy issues are being neglected in this election campaign yet they are the root cause of the neglect and run down of many social and welfare services that have been fought for and won in earlier times. At the same time the big corporations are reaping an ever richer harvest of profits and personal payouts. Yes, Rupert Murdoch of News Corporation, received a hand-out of \$28 million at the company's recent Annual General Meeting.

PRESS FUND

With the election looming, Democrats Senator Andrew Murray has attacked the Greens for accepting donations from the trade unions, arguing that accepting donations from anyone implies an acceptance of their position. So what? The fact that trade unions are looking beyond the ALP to a progressive alternative is a positive development. The Greens are ethically entitled to accept donations from unions. After all, the Greens opposed the Howard Government's anti-union Work Pace Relations Bill, which unfortunately the Democrats supported. By the way, the Democrats were happy to pocket \$15,000 from Hardie since 1998. What does this tell us? *The Guardian* supports the interests of Australia's working people and because of that doesn't get funding from the big end of town. If you agree with that stance, why not send us a Press Fund contribution for the next issue? We offer our sincere thanks to our contributors this week, namely:

B Appleton \$40, K and H Feves \$60.

This week's total: \$100. Progressive total: \$9180.

Jackson Report

Dust still not settled on claims by Hardie's victims

Bob Briton

Last week the curtain came down on the Special Inquiry established by the NSW Carr Government into the adequacy of James Hardie's arrangements for dealing with claims from victims of asbestos-related disease. Commissioner David Jackson QC concluded his involvement with the case by handing down a 1000-page report that was scathing of the company's management and their attempts to avoid responsibility to those harmed by their products.

"The notion that the holding company would make the cheapest provision thought marketable in respect of those liabilities so that it could pursue its other more lucrative interests insulated from those liabilities is singularly unattractive. Why should the victims and the public bear the cost not provided for?" (1:25)

Good question. In fact, Jackson's report is full of good questions and damning observations of the disgraceful means devised by Hardie management to cut future compensation claimants adrift. For months the details of the scandal had been dragged through the press to mounting public anger.

It is now relatively common knowledge that in 2001 Hardie set up two entities, Amaca and Amaba, to take over the parent company's asbestos assets and liabilities. The assets involved were then stripped to provide funds for the Medical Research and Compensation Foundation (MRCF) – a charitable body to be responsible for allocating compensation to asbestos-related diseases attributed to Hardie products.

Directors, shareholders, the Australian Stock Exchange and the public were misled into believing that the \$293 million involved would be sufficient to meet all future claims in full. The claim was apparently supported by a report from actuaries Trowbridge Deloitte, but it turned out that the advice had been based on information Hardie knew to be incomplete.

In the meantime, Hardie had become James Hardie Industries Netherlands and established a new headquarters in Amsterdam – where civil action from Australian courts could not touch them.

For all its expressed indignation, the Jackson report is downbeat about the likelihood of enforcing just outcomes in the case. The ball has been passed to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) to investigate whether charges should be brought against Hardie CEO Peter

MacDonald and chief financial officer Peter Shafron for misleading interested parties over the adequacy of MRCF's funding.

While Mark Latham has committed a Labor Federal Government to reviewing the *Commonwealth Corporations Act* to prevent parent companies limiting their liabilities with the methods used by Hardie, Jackson himself has warned that changes would probably not survive a constitutional challenge.

The most significant immediate

ed by the Jackson Inquiry, Hardie is still clearly trying to draw a line under its liabilities and its responsibilities to the victims of its products. Nobody should be fooled by its "statutory scheme".

The position of Premier Carr to the proposal warrants scrutiny. He called for the Inquiry in the first place and has publicly rejected the Hardie statutory scheme in front of a meeting of asbestos victims last week. Later, however, he clouded the issue at a press conference by

Jackson's report is full of good questions and damning observations of the disgraceful means devised by Hardie management to cut future compensation claimants adrift.

effect of the Jackson Inquiry has been the decisions of Latham and Howard to hand over donations from Hardie made to their parties since 2001 to the Asbestos Diseases Foundation of Australia. The moral status of donations from previous years (during which the dangers of asbestos were also known) was conveniently left open.

Most disturbing for victims were comments from Commissioner Jackson supporting Hardie's particular proposal for increased funding to victims. Since July, Hardie has been promoting the idea of a making more money available on condition that compensation be administered through a "statutory" or government-run scheme. Victims would forego their common-law rights to sue the company for damages and the scheme would allow claims to be capped.

The ACTU and victims have rejected the idea and are not persuaded by Hardie's arguments that more money would be available to claimants by excluding expensive lawyers from the process. Hardie's sudden concern is backed up with a report by the company's own actuaries KPMG that legal costs might eat up between 25 and 40 per cent of the available payouts. However, as plaintiff lawyers Turner Freeman point out, evidence before the inquiry shows that legal fees have accounted for only 17 per cent of the costs met by MRCF – the body currently distributing compensation.

Despite the bloody nose inflicted

saying he had his own "national solution" in mind.

Unions do not trust Carr on these sorts of questions, not since he gutted workers' compensation law in 2001, abolished common-law claims by workers against their bosses and capped the damages available to workers. For the time being, Carr has handed responsibility for negotiations with Hardie over to the ACTU and asbestos victims. A QC or retired judge might have to be appointed in the event of an impasse.

The union movement may soon have to deploy the considerable forces built up in recent months. Last week, large and vocal rallies were held in Australian capital cities to coincide with Hardie's annual general meeting of shareholders.

International actions

A demonstration was also held outside James Hardie offices in Mission Viejo in California. Around 80 per cent of Hardie's business is now done in the US and the pledge of support from US unionists to their Australian comrades would certainly worry the transnational.

Unionists protested outside Hardie's headquarters in Amsterdam. Dutch trade unionists are taking up the issue and are calling for the behaviour of the corporation to be examined by the European Parliament. The British Trade Union Congress also sent undertakings of support to the ACTU from its annual conference in Brighton. ☺

Building & Fire Appeal

With another \$552 in contributions since last week, the total raised now stands at \$10,684. This is a very encouraging and truly wonderful result. Our thanks this week to our comrades in the Perth Branch of the CPA \$52 and in the Lebanese Communist Party (Sydney) \$500.

And, once again we express our appreciation to all our readers and supporters for their generosity.

The CPA on the WEB

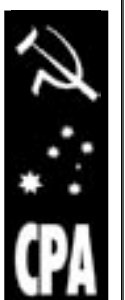
For more information on the Communist Party of Australia, documents, *Guardian* archives, campaigns, links to other parties, papers and organisations and much more, visit our websites:

Central Committee: www.cpa.org.au

Blacktown Branch: www.agitprop.org.au

Maritime Branch: www.geocities.com/cpamaritime

Sydney Central Branch: www.red-sydney.com



Pre-emptive strike rears its ugly head – again

Just as UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was criticising the US and other powers for the illegal war and occupation of Iraq and, by implication, the policy of pre-emptive war, John Howard was asserting Australia's right to take pre-emptive action in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

George Bush, speaking after Kofi Annan, attempted to justify the lies and deception used to rush into war against Iraq. His audience of world leaders at the annual meeting of the UN General Assembly listened stoney-faced.

Howard, in electioneering mode, was trying to portray himself as a strong leader, committed to protecting Australian lives. In fact, his bluster exposed him as a reckless militarist who is prepared to disregard the sovereign rights of all other countries.

Defence Minister Robert Hill and PM Howard first promoted the policy of pre-emptive strikes two years ago. It is not just an election ploy but an integral part of their strategy of aggressive war and occupation of other countries.

Rejected

When first floated two years ago it received a cool reception from Asia-Pacific countries, as it did on this most recent occasion. The Malaysian, Philippine and Indonesian Governments, in particular, rejected the concept and with justification.

Howard, Hill and Foreign

Affairs Minister Alexander Downer were forced to "moderate" and "explain" that pre-emptive strike did not amount to a military mission.

However, that is exactly what a pre-emptive strike means. Howard said, "If I believed that there was going to be a terrorist attack on Australia and there was no alternative but action being taken by Australia, I would unhesitatingly take action to prevent that attack occurring."

The theory of pre-emptive strike is merely a cover and justification for the reoccupation of former colonial countries by the military, the police and the economic controllers of the major imperialist powers. Far from it "winning the war against terrorism" it vastly increases terrorist actions as the example of Iraq is graphically showing at the present time.

A clear indication that Howard is merely moderating his words but not his intentions is his electioneering promise of the formation of two "flying squads" of Federal police for use in the Asia-Pacific region "and beyond".

Australia is also massively increasing military expenditure and stocking up with weapons that are clearly not for the defence of Australia but for operations in the Asia-Pacific region.

Far from cooperation with regional governments and respect for their sovereignty and independence, the main principles of Australia's foreign policy are inter-

ference, the use of military force and the superiority of Australia's interests over those of other nations and peoples.

In response to the Howard Government's statements, Labor leader Mark Latham emphasised the need for Australia to have friendly relations with our neighbours. At the same time, both Latham and shadow Defence Minister, Kim Beazley, joined the bidding war for more weapons. The ALP supports the purchase of unmanned surveillance aircraft but criticised the long time the Howard Government has foreshadowed for making the purchase and declared that a Labor Government would "fast-track" their acquisition.

Kim Beazley has also called for these surveillance aircraft to be armed with missiles, a step that the Howard Government does not seem to have considered. Beazley would arm the aircraft with missiles so that they could kill the terrorists before they could do any damage. On this issue Bomber Beazley would drag Australia into an even more bellicose position than that of Howard.

He is quoted as saying, "having unarmed surveillance spy plans is all right if you are trying to spot people involved in illegal fishing or people-smuggling. But if you are trying to stop a fast boat with terrorists on board, you need to arm them so they can respond straight away."

Kim Beazley is attempting to outdo the Howard Government



in warlike bellicosity and such comments will do as much harm to Australia's relations with Asia-Pacific countries as the Howard Government's statements are currently doing.

Beazley's statements are also unrealistic – as though "terrorists" are going to put up a sign reading "we are terrorists, come and hit us with a missile".

Rather than expose the Howard Government's aggressive pre-emptive strike policies that will inevitably further isolate Australia in the region, the ALP has become a victim of an equipment bidding campaign and joined the phoney "war against terrorism".

For a comprehensive alternative foreign policy for Australia see page 12 of this issue. ✪

Downer now pushing for early Timor Gap deal

Bob Briton

Australia's Foreign Minister Alexander Downer is now in a hurry to conclude an agreement with the government of East Timor over the maritime boundary between the two countries. At stake is control of oil and gas reserves estimated to be worth \$42.74 billion. Even though all three major oil and gas

fields lie on the East Timor side of the midway point between the coasts of the two countries – the internationally recognised method used to define a maritime boundary – it is estimated that the struggling nation will earn only \$5.7 billion under present arrangements.

While Downer had previously said that a final agreement on the maritime boundary and revenue

sharing might be decades away, he is now saying that an accord might be in place by Christmas. While much is being made of the new "creative" atmosphere in discussions being held with East Timorese negotiators, it is more likely that pressure from the oil industry is responsible for the Foreign Minister's sunnier disposition. Woodside Petroleum has reportedly been pressuring parties

to finalise the legal situation or risk stalling its \$6 billion Greater Sunrise project.

East Timor's Foreign Minister José Ramos Horta and his Australian counterpart agreed last month to fast-track discussions. Negotiators met in Darwin last week and in Canberra the week before. Downer could not resist trying to portray the Australian side as victims of a bullying effort on the part of the East Timorese. He claimed that East Timor had "run a bit of a campaign against us publicly and a lot of abuse has come flying our way... But, you know, that's not really made any difference... We've got to do the right thing, not just by East Timor but by Australia."

While comments from East Timor's PM Mari Alkatiri's about the very real bullying by Australian officials were widely reported, the claim of a "campaign" is rich. Our impoverished neighbour simply does not have the funds to mount an effective public relations campaign about the theft of its natural resources.

The fact is that much of the moral pressure being applied on this issue comes from Australians ashamed of the behaviour of successive Australian governments. A campaign by grassroots organisations in support of East Timor's independence and its rights to its resources has been carried on for over a quarter of a century.

Demonstrations against the Howard Government's stance were held during the recent discussions in Canberra. A TV advertising cam-

campaign favouring a more just distribution of the oil wealth was funded by wealthy WA accountant Ian Melrose. A 30-second ad was screened and a one-minute message is coming. Father Frank Brennan, founder of the Jesuit Social Justice Centre has warned the East Timorese about losing their country's sovereignty in the deal currently under discussion.

Recently two former peacekeepers went public with their views on Australia's treatment of East Timor. Former Australian Federal Police officer Wayne Sievers told the media that the maritime boundary dispute was about nothing other than the theft of East Timor's oil. Former army major Chip Henriss-Anderssen said, "We're a country that's developed and on our feet. Timor is a country that's really struggling – these people have nothing."

The Australia East Timor Friendship Association and the Australia West Papua Association are holding an open air forum outside Downer's Adelaide office – at the Commonwealth Bank building 100 King William St – this Friday at 12.30PM. East Timor will be an inevitable topic of discussion for the candidates for Downer's seat of Mayo.

For his part, Opposition Leader Mark Latham said that he would re-open boundary discussions to ensure a fairer deal for the East Timorese. The Greens have consistently backed calls for an internationally arbitrated readjustment of the sea boundaries between the two countries. ✪

Pete's Corner



Govt's Tool Box gimmick

Unions have slammed as "farcical" a move by Prime Minister John Howard to introduce an \$800 Tool Box allowance while teenage manufacturing apprentices are paid \$100 a week less than fast food trainees. Fixing low apprentice wages and an under-funded TAFE system, rather than handing out tool boxes, is the key to fixing a \$9 billion skills shortage, unions point out.

"Most apprentices already receive an allowance of more than \$1000 a year to buy and maintain their tools", says Sharan Burrow from the ACTU. "Toolkits for apprentices are a farcical response by John Howard to Australia's major skills shortage that could cost the economy \$9 billion and is already seriously affecting businesses."

"The reason young people are not signing up for trades apprenticeships is because the wages rates are so low", said John Sutton, National Secretary of the CFMEU Construction & General Division. "Young people will not take up a trade apprenticeship when they are only paid around \$250 per week for their first year and \$315 for the

second year, while their peers are bringing in double and triple that wage.

"Will the Coalition support our application for a wage rise for apprentices in the Commission and reverse its policy of eight years of backing employers' opposition to such wage rises?"

Awards to be stripped?

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) says Howard's move raises more questions than it answers, and asks whether the Howard payment would mean employers could seek to strip this award right (tool box allowance) from all apprentices.

"Like much of what the Prime Minister says, it is safe not to take his words as the truth", says AMWU National President, Julius Roe. "The Prime Minister has already cooked the figures to count young people working at McDonalds as apprentices."

Unions have accused the Liberal Party of dishonestly exaggerating



the number of apprentices in training.

Official Government data shows that less than a third of the 400,000 apprenticeships the Howard Government claims it is currently supporting are actual trades apprenticeships.

The skills crisis has been compounded by TAFE funding being frozen at 1997 levels despite a 16 percent jump in student numbers and unmet demand for up to 57,000 extra places.

"Although \$800 for a toolkit may seem attractive, it is farcical if there are not enough apprenticeships or student places at TAFE",

says Maree O'Halloran, President of the NSW Teachers' Federation. "The Howard Government froze TAFE student enrolment growth funding, and failed to restore it in real terms."

Apprentice Funding Cut

The move follows news of the Government cutting funding to 11 utilities and electro-technology trades courses in NSW.

"We have a Government that is actively undermining the trades by removing funding from trades

courses", says Electrical Trades Union (ETU) State Secretary Bernie Riordan. "A free tool box might deliver a headline, but the real news is what this Government is doing to the national apprentice system."

Mr Riordan believes the cuts show that the Howard Government is not serious about increasing the number of apprentices.

"This is a looming national crisis that will take more than a tool box stunt to fix."

Job vacancies in the traditional trades have already risen 20 percent in the past year and are now at their highest level for 15 years. ☘

Designed to kick corporate @\$\$!

The No Sweat Sneaker, produced in a 100 percent union factory in Jakarta, is here. Distributed in Australia and New Zealand by ESP P/L, a business long involved in marketing environmentally friendly products, No Sweat Sneakers are the world's most revolutionary sneaker. Okay they may look like a Converse All-Star copy, but these sneakers come with a feature that no other sneaker in history has ever had.

Each shoebox contains a detailed fact sheet that tells consumers exactly what wages and benefits that the union workers who produced the sneakers get paid. ESP P/L has challenged Nike and Reebok to do the same.

"If the people behind a little business like No Sweat can do this and make a profit, there's no reason why the Nikes and Reeboks of this world also can't", said ESP's Nick Savaidis. "We hope every sneaker/sports shoe brand in the world will imitate this innovation. In fact, we dare them to!"

"The shoes are produced at a union shop in Jakarta, Indonesia. The workers, represented by the SMTP, receive a benefit and pay package starting at some 785,000 rupiah per month. That's almost 30 percent above the minimum wage in Indonesia, with 100% health care for employees and 80 percent coverage for family members. Plus a pension! Additional benefits include things less common in a western collective labour agreement, like a 30 litre a month rice allowance."

In the USA, No Sweat's co-founder, Jeff Ballinger said, "It's time for Nike to come clean with consumers. They've had 10 years to fix this problem and have spent all kinds of money assuring consumers that they have. Let's see what they've got. All they need to do is put it in the shoebox."

Ballinger wrote the original exposé of Nike for *Harper's Magazine* in 1992. While working in Indonesia for the US peak union body, AFL-CIO, he discovered one excellent union shop, producing shoes primarily for the local market. Twelve years later, that factory has become the source for No Sweat's new sneaker.

The fair trade sneaker comes at a fair price too. At \$60 a pair, the No Sweat Sneaker is a competitive alternative to the Nike owned Converse All-Star as well as to any other sneaker or skateboard shoe in the market place.

"It's not rocket science", said No Sweat's operations manager Anne O'Loughlin, who just returned from Jakarta after inspecting the union shop in person, "You give everyone - workers, consumers and investors - a fair share. Then you do it again the next day. Is there really any other sustainable business model?"

No Sweat sneakers are available for sale in Australia and New Zealand through select stores and websites. For your nearest stockist or further information, check out the website www.nosweatstuff.com.au or call 03 9887 5258. ☘

Workers defeat employer attempt to use High Court ruling

Four hundred workers in Dandenong, Victoria, have stared down an attempt to use the controversial Electrolux decision (see *Guardian*, page 1, 12-9-04) to dud them of money, conditions and protections.

Truck manufacturer Iveco walked away from the "try on" this week, after a mass meeting of union members endorsed claims put under the microscope by Industrial Relations Commission senior deputy vice president O'Callaghan.

O'Callaghan ruled a week and a half of industrial action at Dandenong had not been "protected" because the workers' claims did not meet the narrow definition of pertaining to the employer-employee relationship, laid down by the High Court in its Electrolux ruling.

Iveco, part of the giant Fiat

Group, used the ruling to demand that workers give up income protection, above award payments, and the right to be consulted over redundancy, contracting out, or labour hire plans.

Also included in three pages of proposed claw-backs were demands aimed at weakening union organisation on the site, including rescinding right of entry, payroll deduction and trade union training provisions.

All the clauses Iveco nominated as "non-compliant" are included in other vehicle industry agreements, covering more than 30,000 Australian workers.

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union Vehicle Division Secretary, Ian Jones, immediately accused the company of a "try-on".

"A little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing and this company

has as little knowledge about the Electrolux decision as anyone in Australia", Mr Jones said.

"They can't just draw lines through everything that has been negotiated in good faith, over the last decade, and blame it on Electrolux. It would wipe out every agreement we have got."

In dissenting from the majority High Court decision on Electrolux at the time, Justice Kirby warned that his colleagues' ruling would have a "chilling effect" on the process of collective bargaining.

More than 300 vehicle industry stewards met in Melbourne the week before last to plan bargaining strategies. They considered the Electrolux judgement and voted, unanimously, not to concede a single clause in any of their agreements.

Iveco withdrew its demands last week week. ☘

Shot in the arm for health & safety

Star City casino workers dealing with bodily fluids, including vomit and blood, have won the right to free Hepatitis B vaccinations.

Punters coughing and spluttering over dealers, dirty sheets, handling potentially violent customers are among the safety risks faced by casino workers, placing them at risk from contracting the disease.

The Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union (LHMU) has secured the measure to protect employees, a move it says comes from experience in American casinos where the vac-

ination shots are used to protect hotel and casino employees.

"We have had an ongoing concern about staff in higher risk occupations", says Tim Ferrari. "There are not too many people at the casino it doesn't affect."

"We'd like to stress that there is not a high level of incidents."

The shots will be voluntary but 250 employees took up the initial offer when medical staff gave the course of free injections on site.

The development follows the success of the casino workers' union in introducing measures

to deal with aggressive behaviour by casino customers, which has increased the confidence of staff.

The LHMU has also achieved the introduction of metal detectors to stop guns and knives coming into the casino.

"The odds are getting higher that some disgruntled punter who has lost their life's savings would come in seeking retribution", said Mr Ferrari, "as happened in Mississippi in 1999 when a punter returned and shot three dealers." ☘

Sydney

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Transport can be arranged

CPA Policy For the rights of Indigenous Australians

In the five decades following World War II the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia made slow but steady progress against strong resistance in achieving equality and recognition of their rights within Australian society.

Recognition of Indigenous people as full citizens of Australia with the right to vote; an end to the genocidal policies of removing children from their parents and the forced dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land; an end to forced labour; the recognition of some nominal "land rights"; and finally the Mabo High Court decision which overturned the Constitutional claim that Australia was *terra nullius* – an "empty land" when European settlers arrived – were all milestones in Australian history.

In contrast, the past eight years of Howard Government have seen a marked change in Government policy.

The Howard Government has pursued a policy it calls "Practical Reconciliation". Government programs that claim to increase the levels of health, education, employment of Indigenous people have taken precedence over, and in many cases replaced those based on the just claims of Indigenous people to greater self-determination and land rights.

The Howard Government's "practical reconciliation" policy has led to the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC); the abolition of government bodies and departments that had a specific purpose to assist Indigenous people; stripping Land Councils of their democratic structures and right to determination over the use of Indigenous land and resources; and enacting reactionary legislation to strip Indigenous people of their ability to claim ownership of land as recognised under the Mabo High Court Decision.

These policies mirror to the letter those put forward by Pauline Hanson and the One Nation Party

and other organisations on the extreme right.

Yet these policies do not reflect the will of the Australian people.

On May 28, 2000, hundreds of thousands of Australian people took the streets in every city of Australia in the largest peacetime demonstrations in Australia history, calling for a true reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Significantly, they called for a formal apology from the Australian Government for the crimes against humanity perpetrated against the Indigenous people.

The reality in Australia today is that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders continue to live in conditions comparable to the Third World: astronomical rates of unemployment, illiteracy and incarceration; thousands of deaths yearly from treatable and preventable diseases due to lack of access to health services; and an average life expectancy 20 years lower than the non-indigenous community.

The Communist Party of Australia calls for the ousting of the Howard Coalition Government, and the establishment of a new government that gives full rights and recognition to the Indigenous peoples of Australia, and with policies *and the determination* to ensure Indigenous people achieve full equality in all areas of Australian life.

The Communist Party of Australia is proud of its history as the first organisation in Australia that called for equality for the Indigenous inhabitants of Australia. It continues to call for:

- Formal recognition and an apology from the Government of Australia to the Indigenous peoples for past acts: of genocide; the theft of land and resources; the forced dispersal of Aboriginal people across the continent; the forced removal of children from parents; forcing men, women and children into slave labour; and for hundreds of years of discriminatory laws that have ensured that the Indigenous people have remained unequal in

democratic rights, health, education, employment and many other areas

- A treaty to finally be established between the Indigenous inhabitants of Australia and the Australian state

- Constitutional recognition of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders as the original owners and inhabitants of Australia

- The continued and expedited return of land to the Indigenous peoples, extending the "Mabo" High Court decision to recognise claims on the basis of traditional ownership, religious association, long occupancy and/or need

- The establishment of autonomous areas for Indigenous communities on the basis of communally owned land where the owners have full and inalienable rights use the land and its resources – both above and below ground

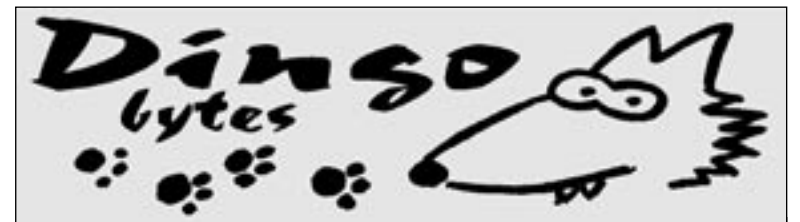
- The abolition of all laws, regulations and administrative practices based on racial discrimination or unequal status, and an end to the discriminatory use of laws against Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders

- Continuing and extending government-funded campaigns to bring about equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in health and education

- The immediate restoration of full powers and responsibilities of ATSIC (the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) with laws, regulations and sufficient funding to allow ATSIC to fulfil its charter to: pursue equality for Indigenous people; ensure Indigenous people have a voice, influence in policy decisions, and represent the interests of Indigenous people at local, national and international level; ensure Indigenous people have the same level of services that are provided to all Australian citizens; ensuring that unique cultural heritage is preserved and maintained; and promote self-determination and empowerment of Indigenous people. ☘



Doris Pilkington, author of *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*, spoke at Melbourne's Sorry Day rally.



Students at the University of Western Sydney have hired a Queen's Counsel to take action in the NSW Supreme Court against the university trying to take control of buildings and services that have been theirs for decades. The university has given the students a month to provide documents to prove that they own the five contested buildings. Student Association spokesman Jason Markwick said the university wants to take ownership of buildings and services were bought and paid for by students. He accused the university of asset snatching. "It is quite clear it's a profit motive for the university to take on these businesses", Mr Markwick said.

According to a recent survey Australians appear to be very insecure about the future and don't trust politicians to fix the nation's problems. Two thirds of those surveyed by the charity Anglicare have no trust in any level of government and believe that, despite all the election promises, widespread environmental degradation will occur in the near future. Unsurprisingly, the survey found that 10 percent of Australians believed that they were likely to become unemployed in the next 12 months.

Greens NSW MLC Lee Rhiannon has received support for the recognition of the importance of East Timor Sea Boundary Changes in the NSW Legislative Council. Ms Rhiannon said that the Greens were heartened by the full support of all political parties on such a vital issue for East Timor. Thirty seven European Union countries have also called on Prime Minister John Howard to guarantee East Timor's rights over its own resources.

The ACTU has called the Howard Government's election announcement of a toolkit voucher for apprentices an "absolute joke". The peak union body labelled the voucher as unnecessary as apprentices already receive an allowance of more than \$1000 to buy tools. They have also accused the Government of inflating apprenticeship numbers by including short-term trainees such as kitchen-hands in fast food outlets.

Conservationists dumped over a tonne of woodchips at the ALP campaign headquarters in Tasmania as a reminder to Mark Latham not to capitulate to the forest industry. Spokesperson for the action, Lauren Caulfield said, "We're asking Mr Latham to listen to 88 percent of Australians who want to see old growth forests protected, and to come out with a strong policy to protect Tasmania's forests". The ALP has so far been reluctant to give a firm commitment to protecting Tasmanian forests despite Mark Latham's visit to the area some months ago.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: Is the Australian Democrats. In a recent visit to Kalgoorlie, Industrial Relations Spokesperson Andrew Murray announced that the Democrats would resist any moves to abolish Australian Workplace Agreements, thus continuing down their anti-union path. No wonder they'll be flat out getting one percent of the vote on October 9.

"John Howard is a war criminal"

Denis Kevans

It was expected to be a quiet meeting in conservative Springwood Civic Centre, Blue Mountains. But John Valder, ex-President of the NSW Liberal Party and later, National President of the Liberal Party, put John Howard under the arc light.

"John Howard is a war criminal", said John Valder. "John Howard has dragged us into the war on Iraq, he has dragged the Liberal Party to the right, and now he's dragging it further to the right.

"The slaughter and destruction are still going on", he said.

"They have unleashed war, destruction, and maiming on the Iraqi people, and then they are actually going to fund the repairs to Iraq", John Valder said.

"I've branded Bush, Blair, and Howard as war criminals."

"I make no apology for brand-

ing them war criminals. It is the greatest act of aggression, by any Western nation, since the days of Adolf Hitler."

There was a continuous applause and voiced affirmation of John Valder's statements by a roll up of 500 people, on the Saturday afternoon in Springwood.

John Valder said that Howard's new "Anti-Terrorism law" would leave suspects guilty until proven innocent. "I shudder to think what freedoms will next be in jeopardy. I'm never going to vote for John Howard again", said John Valder, to loud and extended applause.

"I let my membership of the Liberal Party lapse ten years ago, and I will only re-join if Howard is defeated in this election", John Valder said. "I will be concentrating on the seat of Bennelong (which is Howard's seat)."

On stage was a feisty Margo Kingston, who gave a virtual, one-woman show of anecdote

and humour, against the Howard Government. The audience streamed to the signing table to buy her book *Not Happy, John!* This title is now a bumper sticker and "every John Howard election poster in Bennelong" will wear one, Kingston said.

John Valder said that Liberal Party membership had dropped from an estimated 103,000 in 1983, to about 10,000 in both NSW and Victoria.

Liberal Party members were walking away "in disillusionment".

John Valder confirmed by fax that he was "totally happy" with the report of his Springwood speech (as printed above). John Valder's fax continued: "The enormity of what is still going on in Iraq, just these last few days, just magnifies the crime, and of course has now brought terrorist attacks right to our doorstep, with the bombing of the Australian Embassy in Djakarta less than a week ago." ☘

China's unions take on the challenge of change Pt 2

Migrant workers & building the future

During a visit to the People's Republic of China in July, MARILYN BECHTEL talked with trade unionists at the enterprise, city, provincial and national levels, to learn how they are helping workers meet the challenge of economic and social restructuring going on in China today. This is the second of two articles; the first appeared in the *Guardian* on September 15.

In the last quarter century, former agricultural workers and peasants have increasingly migrated from rural China to work all or part of the year in the cities, as industrialisation and urbanisation have greatly accelerated with the policies of "reform and opening up". These have brought reorganisation of state-owned enterprises and development of a private sector featuring both domestic and foreign capital.

This complicated process is at the heart of what the Communist Party of China calls "building socialism with Chinese characteristics", in order to overcome lingering poverty and backwardness in a developing country with a huge population, a large, divergent land mass, and a legacy of devastation from war and occupation.

Official figures show that the country's 130 million "migrant workers" (one tenth of the total population) now outnumber settled urban workers, and constitute the majority of China's industrial workforce. Most but not all are from rural areas – in 2003, over 98 million rural workers took jobs outside their home townships – up from 15 million in 1990.

These workers face many of the same problems encountered by immigrant workers in the United States. Many enter the urban environment with limited skills, and start their life in the city as construction or service workers, security guards, hotel and restaurant workers and janitors.

Just as the policies of the AFL-CIO [peak US union body] have changed profoundly in recent years and our national labour federation now champions the rights of all immigrants – documented and undocumented, organised and unorganised – so too the Chinese trade union movement has taken up the challenge of organising and representing this important sector of the workforce.

The All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), which formerly organised only workers with urban residence permits, now makes special efforts to organise migrants. The ACFTU announced in August 2003 that it would recruit as many migrant workers as possible. In the first month, over 34 million joined local unions in cities and townships throughout the country.

During a conversation last July in the north-eastern industrial city of Shenyang, the head of the city trade union federation, Wu En Tao, told me migrant workers there now number about 470,000. "They come from all walks of life", he said. "Many are seasonal, working in the tourist and construction industries in summer, but in cold weather they return home, or go elsewhere."

Migrant workers are comparatively disadvantaged, and usually are not well organised, Wu said.

The city union federation makes special efforts to incorporate them into all the different trade unions, and into county, township and village union organisations as well. "We can enrol most of them, and

then we can uphold their interests under the labour law and in connection with social insurance", he said. "We can help workers and their families who are having difficulties."

Later, in Beijing, I discussed the issue with Tong Qing Feng, vice president of the China Institute of Industrial Relations, who pointed out that while migrants are disadvantaged compared to long-time urban residents, they are generally better off than if they had remained in rural areas. Unions organising migrants take on new characteristics and new forms, he said. Because construction workers, in particular, move around a lot, Tong said unions try to build links between home-towns and worksites to create better conditions.

"Some enterprises are too small for separate unions", Ton added. "So we are flexible, and build unions according to conditions in different regions and industries."

Community-based trade unions

One such new form is the community-based trade union. At the same time urban management and services have gradually shifted to local communities within large cities, the ranks of community service workers and local construction workers – both areas employing many migrant workers – have grown greatly. Many migrants also work in small groups at private enterprises. The community-based union helps accommodate both trends.

In the eastern city of Nanjing, such unions have made sure all the communities have signed contracts with their service employees, who are mostly migrant workers. They have also represented migrant workers in negotiating collective labour

contracts with private employers. *People's Daily* quoted Chen Siming, head of Nanjing's general trade union: "Joining community trade unions is a sign they have changed from farmer to urban citizen – a big dream for many of them."

A drive by unions and local governments around the country has helped millions of workers recoup their wages, and has convinced many migrants of the importance of unions.

Another experiment is forming an all-migrant worker union. In July, *China Daily* wrote about such a union in Shenyang, which it said was the first of its kind in the country. The union had 4500 members by the end of June, and the newspaper said, it "has done much

to help settle many cases involving payment default issues".

A fundamental disadvantage faced by migrants is that under the traditional "hukou" system of residence permits, most still do not have permission to live permanently in the cities. They are thus deprived of important social and political rights as well as social security benefits.

This situation is changing, however, as cities and counties throughout the country test the granting of permanent residence permits to migrants. At a press conference in Beijing in July, Zhao Baige, vice director of the State Population and Family Planning Commission, pledged that the government will equally protect the rights and interests of migrants and the permanent urban population. She added that restrictions on employment, medical care, education and social security for migrants will be lifted.

Inequalities

In China rural incomes are rising relatively rapidly (about 4 percent annually over the last decade), but urban incomes are rising twice as fast. Despite the disadvantages, including wages typically about 70 percent that of permanent urban workers, most migrants still earn more than their rural counterparts. Many contribute significantly to the rural economy through the remittances they send home (another parallel with immigrant workers in the US).

However, an article published by *Xinhua* news agency in May 2004 makes clear the difficulties they face. "Migrant workers take on the heavy, dirty work disdained by their urban counterparts, and even when there are rural and urban workers on the same job, they do not reap the same benefits", *Xinhua* said.

"Rural workers get no insurance, subsidies or social security, and have to pay a high entrance fee when sending their children to school. The worst aspect of their situation is the unfair treatment they are subjected to, like working overtime with no pay, and being chosen to do dangerous work with no protective clothing or equipment.

"If they fall ill, or get injured to the extent of disablement, they are simply fired." At the National People's Congress session in March, ACFTU leaders called for



Union coverage is determined by conditions in different regions and industries

far-reaching legal reforms, and special enforcement efforts, to assure migrants' rights to organise, and their personal freedom, equality in employment, wages, and health and safety.

Chasing unpaid wages

A common problem for migrant workers – and one the unions are campaigning to overcome – is late payment or non-payment of wages. Payment of wages on a yearly basis is being replaced by regulations requiring monthly payment

mining and construction. Besides efforts to cut the injury rate through better law enforcement and to close small, unsafe mines, occupational injury insurance is now increasingly being extended to migrant workers.

In Shanghai, an occupational injury insurance program was extended on July 1 to cover all local enterprises that are part of the city's employee social security system, including state owned enterprises, government institutions and private businesses.

Families also suffer special stress, whether they migrate as a family or some members stay behind. Health problems of women and children in migrant families are the subject of serious study by the State Council's Working Committee on Women and Children.

In education, too, new concepts are being tested to break down barriers, including lowering or eliminating the often prohibitive special fees charged migrant students. In Beijing, extra fees once charged by public elementary and junior high schools have been abolished, and the city budget now includes US\$4.2 million to help migrant children from poor families finish education through junior high.

In sum, while China's migrant workers and their families continue to face many challenges, the special attention the country's trade union movement is giving to organising them, and the work being done by government at the national and local level to abolish discriminatory practices, are opening the path for migrants to overcome discrimination and to take their place as full and equal members of China's working class.

(Part 1 appeared 2 weeks ago) ☛

Rules of war for one side only

Uri Avnery

“For all I care, they can starve to death!”, announced Tzahi Hanegbi, after Palestinian prisoners declared an open-ended hunger strike against prison conditions. Thus the Minister for Internal Security added another memorable phrase to the lexicon of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Hanegbi became famous (or infamous) for the first time when, as a student activist, he was caught on camera with his friends hunting Arab students with bicycle chains. At the time I published a photo of him that would not have shamed German or Polish students in the 1930s. With a small difference: in the 30s the Jews were the pursued, now they were the pursuers.

In the meantime, Hanegbi has changed like many young radicals – he has turned into an unrestrained careerist. He has become a minister, wearing elegant suits even on hot summer days and walking with the typical, self-important gait of a cabinet minister. Now he even supports Ariel Sharon’s disengagement plan, much to the distress of his mother, Geula Cohen, an extreme-right militant who has not changed her spots.

But beneath the minister’s suit and the statesman’s robe, Tzahi has remained Tzahi, as evidenced by the total inhumanity of his statement about the prisoners for whose well-being he is officially responsible. His influence is not limited to words: the current prison crisis was caused by his appointment of a new Director of Prisons, who immediately proceeded to create intolerable conditions for the Palestinian prisoners.

Let’s not dwell too much on the personality of the honourable minister. It is much more important to turn our thoughts to the hunger strike itself.

Its basic cause is a particularly Israeli invention: the one-sided war.

The Israeli Defence Force (IDF) generals declare again and again that we are at war. The state of war permits them to commit acts like “targeted eliminations”, which, in any other situation, would be called murder. But in a war, one kills the enemy without court proceedings. And in general, the killing and wounding of people, demolition of homes, uprooting of plantations and all the other acts of the occupiers that have become daily occurrences are being justified by the state of war.

But this is a very special war, because it confers rights only on the fighters of one side. On the other side, there is no war, no fighters, and no rights of fighters, but only criminals, terrorists, murderers.

Why?

Once there was a clear distinction: one was a soldier if one wore a uniform; if one did not wear a uniform, one was a criminal. Soldiers of an invading army were allowed to execute local inhabitants who fired at them on the spot. But in the middle of the 20th century, things changed. A worldwide consensus accepted that the members of the French resistance and the Russian and Yugoslav partisans and their like were fighters and therefore entitled to the international protection accorded to legitimate fighters. International conventions and the rules of war were amended accordingly.

So what is the difference between soldiers and terrorists? Well, the occupiers say, there is a tremendous difference: Soldiers fight soldiers, terrorists hurt innocent civilians.

Really? The pilot who dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and killed tens of thousands of innocent civilians – was he a soldier or just a criminal, a terrorist? And what were the pilots who destroyed whole cities, like

Hamburg and Dresden, when there was no valid military necessity anymore? The declared aim was to break the will of the German civilian population and compel them to capitulate. Were the commanders of the British and American air forces terrorists (as the Nazis indeed called them, inventing the term “Terrorflieger”)?

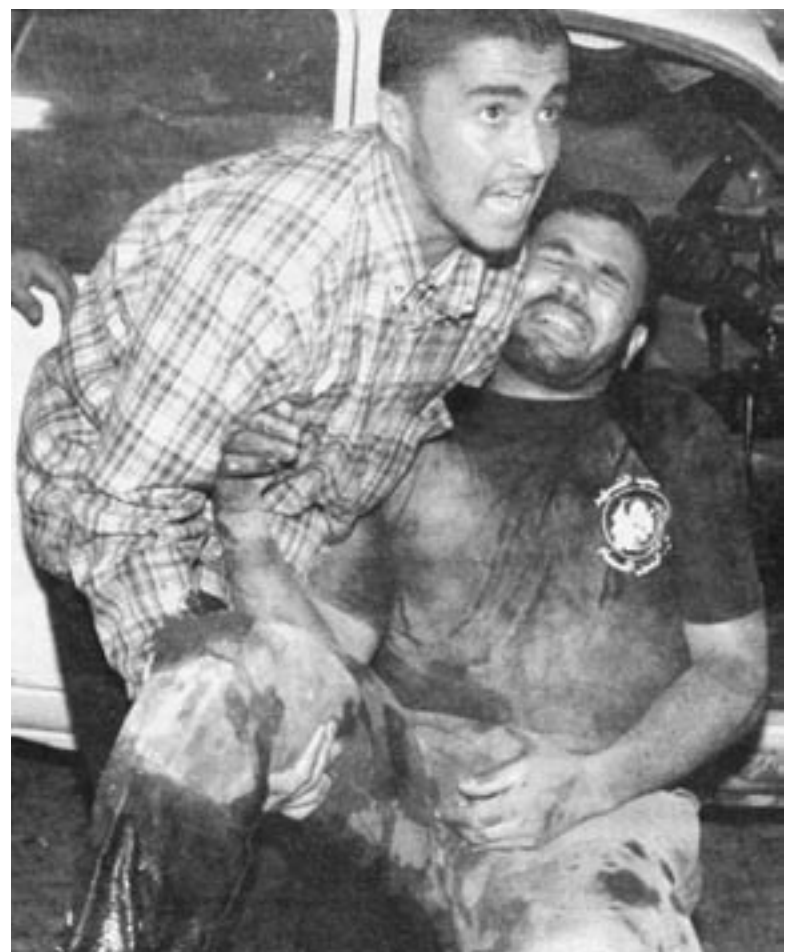
What is the difference between an American pilot who drops a bomb on a Baghdad market and the Iraqi terrorist, who lays a bomb in the same market? The fact that the pilot has a uniform? Or that he drops his bomb from a distance and does not see the children he is killing?

I am not saying this, of course, to justify the killing of civilians. Indeed, I strongly condemn it, whoever the perpetrators may be – soldiers, guerrillas, pilots above or terrorists below. One law for all.

Soldiers who are captured become prisoners-of-war, entitled to many rights guaranteed by international conventions. A particular international organisation – the Red Cross – oversees this. POWs are not held for punishment or revenge, but solely in order to prevent them from returning to the battlefield. They are released when peace comes.

Underground fighters captured by their enemies are often tried as criminals. Not only are they not entitled to the rights of POWs, but in Israel their prison conditions are even worse than the inhuman conditions inflicted on Israeli criminals. The Americans have learned from us, and President George W Bush has been sending Afghan fighters to an infamous prison set up for them in Guantanamo, where they are deprived of all human rights, both the rights of POWs and the rights of ordinary criminal prisoners.

Years ago, when the Hebrew underground organisations were fighting the British regime in



Israel justifies its action by a state of war

Palestine, we demanded that our prisoners be accorded the rights of POWs. The British did not accept this, but in practice prisoners were generally treated as if they were POWs. The captured underground fighters could enrol for correspondence courses, and in fact, many of them completed their studies in law and other professions in British prison camps.

One of the prisoners at that time was Geula Cohen, Tzahi Hanegbi’s mother. It would be interesting to

know how she and her Stern Group comrades would have reacted if a British police commander had declared that he didn’t give a damn if she died in prison. Probably they would have tried to assassinate him. Fortunately, the British behaved otherwise. They even brought her to a hospital for treatment (where she promptly escaped with the help of Arab villagers.).

Article from the *Gush Shalom* peace organisation in Israel (Abridged) ✪

Greed drives offshore outsourcing

Tod Tollefson

Last spring the television show, *The West Wing*, came very close to portraying reality. In that episode, a trade pact negotiated by a presidential aide allowed a US tech company to “offshore” 17,000 jobs to India. The Communications Workers of America (CWA) was even in the story, fighting the runaway jobs. In the episode, the president agonised over the deal. In the real world, the Bush administration praises offshoring

and fights anyone who tries to stop it.

The Times of India has quoted US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick saying Washington is against any attempt by state governments to legislate a ban on outsourcing. In February of this year, N Gregory Mankiw, chairman of President Bush’s Council of Economic Advisors, said, “Outsourcing is just a new way of doing international trade. ... And that’s a good thing.”

Also, according to the *Asia*

Times, more than 100 call-centre executives were handling Bush’s campaign from the Indian outsourcing hubs of Noida and Gurgaon, which adjoin the national capital, Delhi.

In short, George W Bush doesn’t lose any sleep over jobs being offshored. But does that mean Indian and other foreign workers are the problem? Absolutely not.

“Corporate-led globalisation is about capital reducing its costs and increasing its profits by eliminating its responsibilities to

labour and society”, said Anannya Bhattacharjee of Jobs with Justice/New Trade Union Initiative of India (NTUI) project.

“Outsourcing of jobs, for example, is about capital moving to areas where wages are lower, be it areas of a particular country where union density is low or to other countries where wages are lower.”

So, is offshoring a necessity for US corporations to stay competitive in a global economy? No, not really. For example, Microsoft has begun offshoring its most advanced jobs – software engineers and developers, hardware engineers, technical writers, project managers and web developers.

Microsoft now employs nearly 2000 workers in India, double the 970 it previously acknowledged, as shown in internal company documents obtained by WashTech News, which is the voice of the Washington Alliance of Technology Workers, part of CWA.

But does Microsoft have any real competition? For those who have followed the anti-monopoly lawsuits against Bill Gates’ company the answer is quite obvious: Microsoft, for all intents and purposes, has no competition. The reason Microsoft is offshoring high-paying jobs to India and other lower-wage countries is the same reason a large section of manufac-

turing has left the United States for Mexico and beyond – greed.

A study by Forrester Research predicts that US companies will transfer 3.3 million service jobs overseas by 2015, compared with just 102,000 jobs shifted in 2000. The majority of these jobs will be people who work with computers.

Bhattacharjee said her organisation is planning a tour of a few NTUI representatives in the United States. Both Jobs with Justice and NTUI believe that in order to build a movement today to challenge rampant global corporate power, “we need to build alliances not just among unions, but also with other social movements and build a broad base of power among those that are facing the same challenges”, she said.

Bhattacharjee continued: “In a workshop sponsored by WashTech, NTUI, and others at the World Social Forum in Mumbai, India last January, one core principle identified was that of reciprocity between trade unions.

“Workers across the world need opportunities to develop meaningful relationships so that their struggles are informed by an understanding of each others’ challenges. Opposition to weakening of labour rights can only come from a strong trade union movement.”

People’s Weekly World ✪



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Germany: PDS makes big electoral gains

In elections held on September 19 in two eastern German federal states (Länder), the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) substantially improved its vote. The Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and Christian Democratic Union (CDU – conservatives) suffered heavy losses.

The two regions were Brandenburg (around Berlin) and industrialised Saxony, both in the east of Germany, the former socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR).

In a statement issued following the elections the PDS described the results as important milestones in the political development of the two regions. They are an indication of the loss of support for the policies of the main political parties. The PDS proved itself to be a strong political force in the east.

The election results were a protest against the neo-liberal course of the SPD-Green federal government in the economic and social fields. For the first time in years the conservative CDU, which is pushing the government to dismantle the German welfare state even quicker,

was repudiated by voters for its hypocritical stance.

In the Brandenburg state the Social Democratic Party received 31.9 percent of the vote, down by 7.4 percent compared to the elections of 1999.

The vote of the conservative CDU which had announced that it would take the lead in the region dropped to 19.4 percent – a loss of 7.1 percent.

Record result

By receiving 28 percent – an increase of 4.7 percent – the PDS scored a record result. The Party's share of the votes for individual candidates in each electoral district reached 31.2 percent. While winning five electoral districts in 1999, the PDS now holds 23 – winning all these seats from the SPD. This is a sign of the high confidence of voters in the candidates of the PDS for their many years of struggle in the interests of the people, said the PDS statement.

In Saxony, the conservative CDU has been governing alone with a comfortable absolute majority since the GDR was taken over by West Germany. It suffered a land-

slide loss of 15.8 percent. However, with 41.1 percent of the total vote it continues to hold first place. The SPD sank to an historic low of 9.8 percent.

In that state, the PDS was the only state parliamentary party to increase its vote – to 23.6 percent, up by 1.4 percent – thus preserving its place as the second party and leader of the opposition.

The result could have been better were it not for a smear campaign by the political adversaries of the PDS and by a section of the media making unproven Stasi accusations against the top candidate of the PDS. The fact that the party nevertheless rose in strength shows the minimal effect such tactics have today among voters in eastern Germany.

In Saxony, the rising neo-nazi threat showed itself in a dramatic way. For the first time in 24 years, the National-Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) managed to enter a Lander parliament with a score of 9.2 percent – nearly as much as the social democrats received in this state.

The neo-nazis' hate propaganda had an effect on frustrated young



people, mainly male voters, and on people in Germany's eastern border regions who fear an influx of cheap labour from eastern Europe with the entry of Poland, the Czech Republic and other states to the EU. Migrants are portrayed as the main source of Germany's social problems.

The neo-Nazi German People's Union (DVU) managed to get 6.1 percent in Brandenburg, an increase of 0.8 percent. This party, which is the property of a Bavarian entrepreneur, scored the result by influencing people's minds with primitive, extreme right, intolerant, xenophobic slogans and by a huge outpouring of propaganda material across the state, especially in the countryside.

For the first time the different neo-nazi parties acted in a coordi-

nated way. All democratic parties, including the PDS, have to find more effective ways of showing the people the dangers and the uselessness of supporting the brown demagogues, the PDS warned.

The PDS has decided to give more support to the existing anti-fascist organisations, to take initiatives and undertake projects where many members of the Party are actively involved.

The PDS statement said that the Party, together with the social movements, would stick to its line of consistent struggle against government policies. It will defend the interests of the working people and the unemployed and put forward concrete proposals to change the disastrous neo-liberal course of the government. ☺

Public workers hit the streets in South Africa

Hundreds of thousands of South African public workers held a one-day strike September 16 over the government's rejection of their demands for a seven percent wage rise, an across-the-board medical aid and housing allowance, and review of a provision linking salaries to inflation for the next two years.

Nearly all South Africa's 1.1 million public workers are represented by unions affiliated to the three major trade union federations – the Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU), the Federation of Unions of South Africa and the National Council of Trade Unions.

Over 700,000 reportedly joined the strike, and hundreds of thousands marched in some 25 cities around the country. In Pretoria, the capital, over 50,000 unionists,

led by COSATU President Willie Madisha, marched to the government headquarters, where they blew whistles and sang songs from the anti-apartheid struggle before presenting a memorandum to Public Service and Administration Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi. COSATU spokesperson Patrick Craven called the demonstration a "show of unprecedented solidarity across the board".

Calling the government's offer of a six percent increase "unacceptable", COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi said the proposal amounted to a wage freeze in real terms and failed to recognise the increased productivity of public workers. He also cited the recent victory by the metalworkers union, which won a 7.5 percent increase, plus better benefits.

Noting that the South African Communist Party does not involve itself directly in details of collective bargaining, and sharing the expressed wishes of both sides to have avoided the strike, General Secretary Blade Nzimande pointed to "a disturbing tendency to headline disruptions to services to learners, pensioners and other recipients, while the legitimate concerns of public services workers are entirely marginalised".

In a statement on the eve of the strike, Nzimande warned against pitting the interests of workers against the rest of the population, "as if public service workers and their families were not also citizens, learners and pensioners". He called attention to an "incessant campaign of denigration of the public sector by the privileged" who do not depend on it for education, health care or pensions, and said the strike needed to be understood against the daily pressures public workers face at "overburdened and under-funded" public institutions.

"The SACP calls for a holistic approach in dealing with the current dispute", he said. "Much as the SACP would not like to see the disruption of public services, we fully support the right of workers to strike", he said. ☺

Abortion ban struck down

US District Court Judge Richard Kopf, ruling in Carhart v. Ashcroft, joined two other judges in finding that the so-called "Partial Birth Abortion Ban", passed by Congress and signed into law by George W Bush in 2003, is unconstitutional and cannot be enforced.

"President Bush stands zero for three – his federal abortion ban has now been struck down for the third time", Elizabeth Cavendish, interim president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, said in a statement.

"However we know this administration will not be deterred – they will continue plotting to change the federal courts so they can reach their ultimate goal of eliminating a woman's right to choose. Their strategy is clear – they can't stop striking out, so they're going to hire umpires who share their disastrous vision."

In his 476-page ruling, Judge Kopf wrote that the act "does not allow, and instead prohibits, the use of the procedure when necessary to preserve the health of a woman." He also noted that the abortion methods banned in the law are necessary when a woman's health is in jeopardy.

Carhart v. Ashcroft is one of three district court cases striking down the Bush administration's attempt to impose extreme and overreaching legislation with complete disregard for women's health and the law.

Last month, a federal district judge in New York struck down the same ban in *NAF v. Ashcroft*, and in June, a San Francisco federal district judge in *Planned Parenthood v. Ashcroft*, also barred the US Department of Justice from enforcing the ban. ☺

Endthelies rallies

Three years after the truth was thrown overboard at the last federal election, now is the time to say end the lies and to start a new path to a better country and a more peaceful world. People will gather in every capital city and many regional centres the week before the election.

Sunday 3 October

Melbourne

1.30pm State Library, City

Sydney

1pm Town Hall Square, City

(train for Sydney leaves Wollongong at 10.44am)

(Inner west: meet at 11am at Summer Hill park and join the "Justice Train")

Canberra

Noon Garema Place, Civic

Brisbane

1pm Roma St Forum

Perth

1pm Perth Cultural Centre Amphitheatre (opp. Alexander Library)

Adelaide

1pm Victoria Square

Armidale

2pm Central Park (+ picnic)

Darwin

5.30 pm (October 1) Raintree Park

Hobart

noon (October 2) Domain Regatta Grounds

Lismore

10am (October 2) Magellan St Lismore (outside ACE building)

Newcastle

2pm (October 2) Wheeler Place, City (march to Pacific Park)

For further information, list of signatories and to indicate your support visit: www.endthelies.net

Important Iraqi vote

As part of the process of holding elections (due in January 2005), an Iraqi National Council comprising 100 Iraqis from various tribal, ethnic, religious and political groups was setup in August to oversee the elections and help make preparations for them.

Earlier this month this National Council held an election for the top positions in this body.

The delegate from the Supreme Assembly for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq came in first with 56 votes. This is a Shiite

group that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld lambasted as a tool of Iran during the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Another Iraqi even less attractive to Washington, the Secretary General of the Iraqi Communist Party, Hamid Majid Moussa, came in second with 55 votes.

The delegate from the Iraqi National Accord – the group once backed by the CIA and whose leader, Iyad Allawi, was recently warmly greeted in Washington by President Bush, came in third with 53 votes.

The delegate from the Iraqi Islamic Party, a Sunni group, sympathetic to the Ba'athist-based, anti-American resistance operating both west and north of Baghdad – came in fourth with 48 votes.

Freelance journalist Frank Smyth who posted this information (www.franksmyth.com) writing for *Foreign Policy in Focus* comments that, "By any count, getting only one ally elected out of four seats on this potentially all-important electoral oversight body does not bode well for the Bush administration". ☺

USA: Election boards swamped with new voter sign-ups

The broad-based coalition seeking to defeat George W. Bush has registered millions of new voters and the flood continues, swamping state election boards even as deadlines near for signing people up.

Just one of many groups, Rock the Vote, reports it has registered 789,905 new voters. The League of Women Voters warned that the flood has created a backlog that, if not cleared, could mean the disenfranchisement of thousands of newly registered voters.

"This may mark National Voter 'Rejection' Week", charged President Kay J Maxwell. "There is more work to be done after the citizen fills out the voter registration application. The application must be acted on by the appropriate government entity in a timely manner and in a way that enfranchises eligible voters." She called on election boards to hire more personnel to process the backlog.

Florida heats up

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), People for the American Way and other groups affiliated with the Election Protection Coalition (EPC) charged that in Duval County, Florida, election officials are threatening to terminate processing of voter registration forms the last week of September, even though Florida's deadline is October 4.

In the stolen 2000 election, 27,000 Duval County votes, mostly cast by African Americans, were thrown out.

Sabrina Williams, a spokesperson for the Advancement Project, one of the EPC groups, told the *People's Weekly World* (PWW), "We will file a complaint with Florida Secretary of State Glenda Hood and then go into mediation with Duval County election officials to get this resolved. This problem is not limited to Duval County. There were complaints by voters in Miami-Dade and Broward counties that they were denied a chance to vote in Florida's August 31 primary because their registrations were not processed."

Vicky Beasley, a field officer for People for the American Way, told Reuters that the problem is particularly serious in the swing states: "There is a very widespread delay in the swing states because there have been massive registration drives among minorities and those applications are not being processed quickly enough."

Hundreds of thousands sign up

An estimated 250,000 Ohioans have registered over the past year. In Cuyahoga County alone, which encompasses Cleveland, the backlog of applications at one point reached 25,000. The labour movement and its allies demanded that the Board of Elections put on more personnel. They did and the backlog now is down to about 6000.

The problem is that the 2004 election has energised millions who sat out elections in past years. Only 52 percent, or about 102 million, of those eligible to vote cast ballots in the 2000 election. America Votes, a coalition of 33 organisations with combined membership of 20 million, points out that 50 million eligible women did not vote in 2000. So on September 18, "Election Action Day", the coalition filled 50 buses with volunteers who fanned out in 17 battleground states to register thousands of women to vote.

"We're still compiling the numbers from the Saturday effort", said America Votes spokesperson Sarah Leonard. "We had hundreds of volunteers in Philadelphia and Manchester, New Hampshire, who registered thousands of new voters. Nationwide, we've registered hundreds of thousands of new voters."

Joelle Fishman, chair of the Political Action Commission of the Communist Party USA, said the Bush-Cheney campaign "wants everybody to believe the election is already over. Dirty tricks and voter suppression tactics are being used to discourage people. But that strategy is backfiring. Across the country, millions of people are determined to protect our democracy and expand it."

The movement, she said, must work vigilantly to protect the vote. "We demand that every voter registration application be processed before November 2, so that every vote can be cast and counted."

Activating the youth

The Denver-based, non-partisan New Voter Project (NVP) has the goal of signing up 265,000 new voters between the ages of 18 and 24. So far they have registered 242,697 new voters.

The group's spokesman, Adam Alexander, told the *PWW*, "There are 500,000 people 18 to 24 years old in Wisconsin. To date, we have registered 120,000 new voters. It means we have signed up 20 percent of the people in that age bracket. If you walk down a street in Wisconsin and see five young people standing together, we registered one of them to vote."

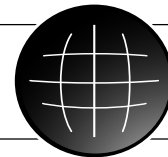
NVP, he said, has hundreds of full time staff and thousands of interns working to increase the youth vote across the nation. Historically, low percentages of youth have voted since 1972, when the voting age was reduced to 18. "Young people have been a neglected part of the political landscape. But we think this year we will break out of that cycle. We believe we're going to see an unprecedented youth vote."

Jane Fleming, executive director of Young Democrats of America and spokesperson for the Young Voter Alliance (YVA), told the *PWW*, "The candidates must speak to the issues that concern youth. They are the largest group without health insurance, the hardest hit by unemployment. They are the ones fighting and dying in Iraq. Many young people see it as an unjust war."

The YVA, she said, is mounting a major get-out-the-vote drive in Florida, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

"It is not enough to register them to vote", she said. "We have to have a strong effort to get them to the polls on Election Day."

People's Weekly World, Paper of the Communist Party USA ☪



Global briefs

GUADALOUPE: Christian Celeste, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Guadeloupe, has sent the Cuban people a message of solidarity from his party in the face of US aggression and the consequences of the hurricanes that recently swept the island. "We condemn all the aggressions and particularly those of your most obdurate adversaries, US reactionaries, and are in solidarity with the people over the damage caused by natural phenomena like cyclones", says the message. "We ratify our active solidarity in any circumstances, because Cuba is an example that allows the people of our America and the world to sustain hope in the reaffirmation of their sovereignty and the search for alternative solutions to the exploitation of human beings and the natural wealth of the planet."

UNITED NATIONS: Preceded by a special summit against hunger and poverty, the 59th session of the UN General Assembly opened last week with those two terrible scourges in its sights. A commission on the social dimension of globalisation concluded that this process has accentuated the gap between the rich and poor. Initiatives were set in motion by Brazilian President Luis Lula da Silva to fund the reduction of hunger and poverty on the planet. The agenda covers peace and security, combating terrorism, conflict prevention, AIDS, the external debt and discrimination in trade, among 35 listed points. US President Bush used his speech to try to justify the Iraq war. Opening the session, Secretary General Kofi Annan emphasised the rule of law in the international arena, violated by the invasion of Iraq in contravention of the UN Charter.

IRAN: Iran has reiterated its right to produce uranium fuel for nuclear energy, seizing on a rift between nuclear-weapon nations that want to slow the spread of such technology and developing countries that see the technology as the entitlement of every signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. "This right is enshrined in the non-proliferation treaty and we will not give it up", Iran's President, Mohammad Khatami, told reporters in Tehran. He promised full cooperation with the non-proliferation program if that right is internationally recognised. "There is clearly a double standard", said Hossein Mousavian, an official at Iran's Supreme National Security Council, pointing out that Iran was being unfairly penalised while Israel, which has nuclear weapons, had never signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty or accepted inspections.

USA: The US military has dropped spy charges against a Syrian-American airman who worked as a translator at the detention centre at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in the latest setback to the Bush administration's terror war. The government had alleged that a spy ring was at work at the base where about 600 prisoners captured during the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and other terrorism suspects are being held. In a plea deal, the government dropped the spying charges after Senior Airman Ahmad al Halabi, 25, pleaded guilty to four lesser charges.



A new CPA badge

with the official CPA logo in yellow outlined in black on a red background. Light weight, 3 cm x 1.5 cm, iron stamped, soft enamel with plating & butterfly clutch on back.

Cost: \$5 each plus \$1 p&packing. For CPA branches ordering 20 or more badges, the cost is \$4 each plus \$4 postage and packing. Please send orders with payment. Make cheques payable to CPA Port Jackson Branch to: CPA Port Jackson Branch, PO Box 40, Glebe NSW 2037. (No cash or credit card payments.)

WFTU says "Israel out!"

The World Federation of Trade Unions has called upon the United Nations General Assembly, which is currently in session, to take effective measures to secure the immediate implementation of UN resolutions calling for the withdrawal of all Israeli troops from the occupied Arab territories in Palestine, Syrian Golan and Shabba farms of South Lebanon.

In a statement issued on September 23, the WFTU strongly protested against the attempt by the US Administration to divert attention from this central issue and against the interference in the internal affairs of Lebanon and Syria. The independent and sovereign Government of Lebanon and all its institutions have rejected the resolution moved by US and France in the UN Security Council in this regard. The Israeli threats and US pres-

ures against Syria and Lebanon and a number of Arab countries will aggravate the situation and increase the violence and war, threatening the security of the people of the region and the world.

The WFTU called upon its affiliates and friends all over the world to:

- further strengthen their solidarity with the workers and people of Palestine, Syria and Lebanon;
- insist that Member States of the UN take effective measures to secure the immediate withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories;
- put an end to the pressures and aggressive acts of USA and Israel;
- stop the practice of hegemony in the Middle East and the world;
- act for peace and security. ☪

Letters to the Editor
The Guardian
74 Buckingham Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010



email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Transition to socialism

"Chinese Unions ..." (*The Guardian* 22/9/04 – incorrectly dated 15/9/04) gives some details of the problems of "building socialism with Chinese characteristics". Although the Right and sections of the Left regarded the process as "restoration of capitalism" there is another range of views. Some see the process as a return to a Chinese version of the "New Economic Policy" (NEP) of 1921-29 as introduced by Lenin and the Soviet State. Not a slavish version. "Do not copy our tactics ..." (V.I.L.)

In this regard, it seems that Lenin had two degrees of NEP in mind. One, in the European region – Russia, Ukraine, Belarus where "islands" of industrialisation existed, kept a strict watch on the degree of private enterprise in the community, and a firm grip on the "commanding heights". (*Georgian Pravda*)

However, in his article in "*Pravda Grazii*" No 55, 8-5-21 he expresses the view that the Caucasian republics, and, one supposes the other underdeveloped Soviet republics in Asia, should "establish co-existence and commercial intercourse with the capitalist West more quickly and easily. ..."

"More mildness, caution and readiness to make concessions to the petty bourgeoisie, to the intelligentsia, and particularly to the peasantry. Make the utmost, intense and speedy economic use of the capitalist west by means of a policy of concessions and commercial intercourse. ..."

"This must be done on a wide scale, firmly, wisely and circum-spectly and it must be used in very possible way for the purpose of improving the conditions of workers and peasants ..."

"A slower, more cautious, more systematic transition to socialism – that is what is possible and necessary for the Republics of Caucasus, as distinct from the RSFSR This is what must be understood, and what you must be able to carry out as distinct from our tactics". Perhaps those views of Lenin have some application to China today.

Some features of the Chinese transition have been startling to socialists in other countries. Uneasiness about multinationals' branches, concern for the (economically) bottom 20 percent of the workforce, user-pays medicines – all these affect two generations of socialists who had another mental picture of what contemporary socialism should be.

But the other side of the scale is very impressive indeed.

S Cooper
Annandale, NSW

Russia not finished

The Guardian's always a good read, but naturally some issues are better than others depending on your interpretation.

One such issue – to me was that of August 11, 2004, with three outstanding articles, two on Russia and one on Venezuela. To me the two on Russia were confirmation of a statement I had made in a previous letter in regard to the "collapse" of Russia and socialism. I said that it was just capitalist talk and that to accept it as true was merely playing the capitalist's game.

It was real fairies at the bottom of the garden, wishful thinking. Close your eyes – repeat it three times – open your eyes and Presto! It will have happened.

Yet despite their best efforts and intense propaganda, those stubborn, stupid Russians are not convinced they are better under capitalism. "Poor" Proffer types – alarmed at the result of the polls. And what a misnomer for his article "Flight from freedom". What freedom? Free to be exploited, to have the choice every three years as a capitalist between A or B, freedom to live in poverty! Some freedom!

And article two on dirty tricks shows the battle still rages behind the scenes and even before this I was collating such points as if Russia's views and opinions were still sourced and given consideration.

And then there was the case of relieving the crew on the space station. The world super power seemed unable or unwilling to tackle the job. So without any great fanfare or hullabaloo, almost as a matter of routine, what nation took the relief crew up and brought the others safely back. Why none other than that "collapsed" nation Russia. So much for fairies at the bottom of the garden and wishful thinking. The

capitalists will have to come up with something better than that.

B Appleton
Woy Woy, NSW

Narcoleptic Nationals and Legerdemain Liberals

John Howard boasts that his government are great economic managers and that keeping interest rates down is the ultimate test of good government. This claim is falsified, however, by the reckless decision to participate in the illegal invasion of Iraq without considering the opportunity costs.

We have to make a choice between bread and bombs but it is clear that the Coalition not only ignored the anti-war wishes of a majority of Australians they also did not do their sums. They ignored what a billion dollar boost to health could do (how many hospitals is that, Mr Howard?) or how education, the environment, alternative energy research, rail infrastructure etc could benefit.

There are more subtle costs to take into account though. Take health, for example. It is well known that sporting success or failure affects the national mood so that illness rates rise when important matches are lost.

In similar fashion, images of limb-torn children cause guilt and disgust in most people and will probably exert a deleterious effect on our immune systems leading to higher risk of infection and direct economic costs through loss of productivity and health subsidies.

In meet the candidates forums on health and rail only the Nuclear Disarmament Party spelled out the true costs of the war, not only on Australia, but on Iraq itself, where 70% of the population is under 18.

Clearly this is a war of infanticide paid for by denying our children the benefits of at least a billion dollars. Despite the promise of Bob Hawke, many of our children are still living in poverty but perhaps Larry Anthony, Minister for Children and Family Affairs, is unaware of this fact. Certainly he complained bitterly when I asked him a question about these issues which he refused to answer.

"Without vision the nation perishes", said the prophet Isaiah, who must have been thinking of narcoleptic Nationals like Larry Anthony and legerdemain Liberals like John Howard!

Gareth Smith
Byron Bay, NSW

Pre-emptive

Why is it easy for John Howard to roll the term "pre-emptive strike", off his tongue? Because Australia has already done it to Iraq.

US and Oz "special forces" attacked Iraq 12 months before George Dubya's "declaration of war".

Maybe it was more a "pre-emptive invasion", than a "pre-emptive strike", but it was "pre-emptive", and it did not have parliamentary or popular approval.

Denis Kevans
Wentworth Falls, NSW

Culture & Life

by
Rob Gowland

Position, position, position

My wife and I were walking down a residential street in the Sydney suburb of Newtown recently, accompanied by one of our sons and his partner. A large sign caught my attention, attached to a wire fence surrounding a small block of land.

The block was in fact very small, no bigger than your average terrace house. It was occupied by one large and exceptional gum tree together with ferns and other bush vegetation. A "pretty little sort of wilderness" as Lady Catherine de Burgh says in *Pride and Prejudice*.

The sign on the fence proclaimed that it was "Newtown's oldest bush garden". The sign, however, had not been erected by the local Council or some community group. Oh, no.

It was a real estate agent's sign (L J Hooker to be precise). The wording in full said:

- "Vacant Land –
Position, position, position
• Newtown's oldest bush garden
• One of the last residential building sites in Sydney's Inner West
• Approx 91m2
• Build your dream home For Sale
L.J. Hooker Leichhardt"

At 91 square metres, your dream home would have to be fairly small. But, in order to build ANYTHING on this little block, the garden would have to be destroyed to make room.

The large tree, which is right in the middle of the plot of land, would have to be chopped down and uprooted. As my son observed, "It's one or the other: garden or house – there simply isn't room for both."

Isn't it typical of capitalism, of a system that views things in terms of profit and private ownership, that an inner city suburb's "oldest bush garden" would be seen solely as an opportunity for an "entrepreneur" to make a buck by bulldozing the garden and building on its remains?

And that the entrepreneur in question would see nothing peculiar about using its status as the area's oldest bush garden to advertise it as a building site?

Ah, capitalism. Doesn't it just make you feel good all over?

On September 14 we received a fax from a firm of auctioneers announcing a "unique animal trophy auction". The problem is, I don't think it's unique enough.

The base story is that Bob Penfold, Managing Director of an outfit called Hunt Australia, is retiring and is "selling his collection" which comprises more than 50 "unique items including a complete collection of North American sheep mounts plus additional European trophies".

A look at Hunt Australia's website shows it to be what you would expect: a "safari" outfit catering to gun nuts seeking an adrenalin rush from sneaking up on an unsuspecting wild animal while carrying a high-powered rifle with telescopic

sights and shooting it dead from a long way away with a very big bullet.

Judging by the photos on the website, the protocol is then to go and sit or kneel right beside the animal's corpse, holding your rifle erect, while a photographic record of your triumph is made for you to proudly show other easily impressed folk.

If you like, the beast's horns, head or presumably other parts of its anatomy can be cut off and mounted for display on your wall or in your "den". Bob Penfold certainly regards his collection of "trophies" the way normal people these days regard photographs.

Apart from the heads of North American sheep he has shot dead,

his trophies include "bobcats, deer, bears, buffalo and, of course [says the auctioneer], a moose". The fax does not say whether they are all heads or whether some are complete animals.

But one thing is for sure: they have all been killed. For the pleasure of Bob Penfold and his clients.

Says Bob: "It will be strange not having these around to remind me of different trips I've taken over the years ..." Just what sort of memories would they be, I wonder?

Presumably not of the beauty of nature. I can just imagine him reminiscing with friends while showing them his trophies: "It was a glorious, misty morning in the Canadian Rockies.

"A magnificent black bear was

fishing in a stream. It was just perfect. I got him in the back of the head with a .405 – blew the whole back of his head off, of course, but the taxidermist was able to cover that up."

No, I think his memories would be more to do with the excitement of killing things and the large amounts of money to be made showing macho gun nuts in military fatigues the "right" way to drop a large herbivore with a single shot.

The auctioneer has the last word on the fax, with unconscious irony: "The collection is in excellent condition and, of course, each piece has a story".

A story brutally cut short by Bob Penfold's high powered gun – for sport. ☺





Rob Gowland
previews
ABC & SBS
Public Television

Sun October 3 ~
~ Sat October 9

When there are big profits involved, capitalist corporations do not believe in leaving things to chance. This is especially so when the profits are spectacular, as in the case of the so-called ethical drugs or pharmaceuticals industry.

Instead, the drug companies now spend some of their profits on devising ways of convincing people that normal, everyday conditions that affect most people in some way (such as shyness) are in fact diseases – for which the drug giants just happen to have a new miracle cure.

Then they spend an even bigger chunk of their profits in direct marketing of their new “disease” and its cure – in sure and certain knowledge that they will reap huge rewards in the form of even bigger profits.

GlaxoSmithKline greatly expanded the market for its popular anti-depressant, Paxil, by identifying shyness as a new psychiatric condition, “Social Anxiety Disorder” (SAD), for which Paxil was the revolutionary treatment. Direct marketing did the rest.

In 2002 drug companies spent close to US\$3 billion in the United States alone on direct-to-consumer advertising.

The *Cutting Edge* documentary *Selling Sickness* (SBS 8.30pm Tuesday) examines accusations that aggressive drug marketing is blurring the boundaries between medi-

cal conditions and ordinary life with potentially deadly consequences.

Selling Sickness explores the intensifying conflict over the very nature of illness itself and tracks the sophisticated ways in which pharmaceutical companies market their drugs.

Throughout the program, drug marketer and industry insider Vince Parry explains the intricacies of how to “brand a condition” or define what an illness is in order to create and expand the market for a drug. There is now an ill for every pill.

Patients’ stories are intercut with Dr David Healy who now travels the world speaking out about the potential risks of these medicines, concerned that a decade of mass marketing has transformed once rare conditions into modern epidemics. Healy is also alarmed about potential links between SSRI anti-depressant drugs and suicidal behaviour among adolescents.

Selling Sickness was commissioned by SBS and directed by Catherine Scott.

SBS is repeating *The President Versus David Hicks*, screening in the *Hot Docs* timeslot (SBS 10.00pm Tuesday). It seeks to uncover how a 26-year-old former stockman from Adelaide, Australia, ended up as a Taliban fighter and now an inmate of the US concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay.

It is worth remembering that David Hicks was already fighting in Kosovo before he became interested in Islam. He was an anti-communist mercenary, seduced and grievously misled by the same imperialism that now denies him his basic democratic rights.

Our support for Hicks now is part of our rejection of imperialism and all its evil deeds (including its use of mercenaries in Kosovo).

Jonathan Creek is briefly back this week and next (ABC 9.20pm Fridays). This was a series that never fulfilled the promise of its ingenious concept; however, it hung in there doggedly and is beginning to improve at last.



Support for David Hicks is part of our rejection of imperialism (*The President Versus David Hicks*)

Alan Davies continues his less than dynamic portrayal of Creek, whose job is to plan spectacular magic acts for an undeserving slob of a magician. His skills in deception and illusion supposedly give him the edge in solving “baffling” crimes.

For the new series he has been given a new female foil, TV crime series presenter Carla Borrego played by Julia Sawalha (Saffi, the daughter in *Absolutely Fabulous*).

Sawalha’s bosom is given even more prominence in this week’s episode than it was in *Pride And Prejudice*: “Cleavage is very in, at present”, she tells a disapproving (and slightly alarmed) Creek.

The supporting cast has been racked up a notch too, with some top comedy acting talent added including Adrian Edmondson from *The Young Ones* (and regular cameos as the food critic in *Ab Fab*), now a regular as Sawalha’s insensitive TV producer husband.

Also added is Bill Bailey, the scruffy-looking odd-ball from *Black Books*, as a very cut-price “magi-

cian” who works the crowds at street markets.

Although Creek is given not one but two “inexplicable” mysteries to solve in this week’s episode, the producers – as well as writer/creator David Renwick – clearly see the Davies-Sawalha relationship as the main appeal of the new series. They may be right.

One of the program’s strengths, however, remains its blunt rejection of the fashionable trend for supernatural explanations and plots, insisting instead on prosaic observed fact, logic and scientific reality (this is particularly explicit in next week’s episode).

The importance to governments of having successful national sporting teams has been recognised for centuries. Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics, sought to promote this national sporting competitiveness as an alternative to war.

However, bourgeois governments were quick to bypass de Coubertin’s lofty ideals in favour of marshalling sporting fervour in their own interests. As early as the second Olympic Games in Paris in 1900, de Coubertin lost control of the Games to the French Government, which wished to use them to promote “the glory of France” rather than the glory of sport.

Later, the 20th Century’s three most prominent fascist dictators – Mussolini, Hitler and Franco – stopped at nothing to secure sporting glory for their countries in order to foster domestic support for their rule, boost their own egos, “prove”

their racial theories and bolster their ideological position.

All three seized upon football’s massive popular appeal and ruthlessly exploited it as a vehicle for propaganda. *Fascism And Football*, a BBC documentary screening in the *As It Happened* timeslot (SBS 7.30pm Saturday), shows how Mussolini, Hitler and Franco used their power to shape the destinies of the world’s most important clubs, and intervened in international competitions for their own gain.

Poignant archival footage and dramatic reconstructions of key moments tell the stories of players whose lives were profoundly affected by Fascism’s foray into football.

It has been claimed that the entire 1934 World Cup competition was nothing more than a stage for Mussolini’s fascist propaganda while Hitler was just as involved in the 1938 World Cup, which he saw as one of the defining moments of the superiority of his Fascist regime.

The Nazis’ efforts to get the best players for Germany’s national team, the newly combined Austro-German team, suffered a serious setback when Austrian football star Matthias Sindelar – the David Beckham of his day, who hated the Nazis – refused to play for them. He soon met a suspicious death from carbon monoxide poisoning.

In post-war Spain, Franco used Real Madrid and the talent of Alfredo di Stefano – arguably the greatest player of all time – to cement his power and orchestrate Spain’s “re-integration” into Europe. ⚡

BOOKSHELF

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

by Roger Keeran and Thomas Kenny
About the break up of the Soviet Union and the collapse of socialism. Bahman Azad who wrote the book “*Heroic Struggle Bitter Defeat*” says, “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 Jesús, 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

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Editor: Anna Pha

Published by
Guardian Publications
Australia Ltd

74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010

Printed by Spotpress
105-107 Victoria Rd
Marrickville 2204

Responsibility for electoral comment
is taken by T Pearson,
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Defence and Security – the Real Alternative

Dr Hannah Middleton

For Australians to live in peace and security, the Australian Government must break with the US alliance, develop friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all countries, and adopt an independent and non-aligned defence policy which will be efficient, affordable and genuinely serve the defence needs of our country and the need for peace and stability in our region.

Above all, Australia must break with the policies of the United States which are so appallingly dangerous and damaging for the American and Australian people and for people in every nation on earth.

The central US goal is control of the planet, power to install governments subservient to its demands, power to privatise and deregulate the economies of every nation in the world, power to inflict on peoples everywhere "free market" corporate capitalism, power to dominate and plunder.

To achieve this, the Bush administration has policies for "pre-emptive" strikes, to send weapons into space for the first time in human history and to develop new, "usable" nuclear weapons.

The Howard Government has signed up Australia as a front line collaborator with US global war plans, providing specialist military forces and a secure base for US electronic and satellite spying activities, and adopting policies of "pre-emptive" strikes, interference in "failed" states and inter-operability, the process of turning Australia's forces into a de facto arm of the US military.

Security

Security is often defined as just military security – the capacity to identify and meet threats to a nation by the use or the threat of the use of force.

However, security cannot be guaranteed by ever greater numbers of more sophisticated weapons. Real security comes with jobs, steady food supplies, homes, clean water, warmth, education and health care, democracy and human rights.

Australia's security can be enhanced by attention to social, political and humanitarian issues which affect the people of this country as well as in neighbouring states.

The over-emphasis in casting the military as Australia's guarantee of "security" has meant fewer resources available for constructive work such as preventive diplomacy and aid.

Overseas aid is a cost effective means of contributing to security by assisting sustainable development among people in our region and helping them to overcome conflict – inducing social and economic problems. However, our contribu-

tion is minute compared to military spending.

Terrorism

Terrorism is a violent response to severe grievances.

The "war on terror" is a myth for terrorism is not a society or community, not a country or a government and there is no place or army which can reasonably be attacked to overcome terrorism.

The use of force in the "war against terror" increases the threat of terrorism. Suicide attacks in 2003 reached the highest level in modern times. Iraq suffered its first since the 13th Century.

Fidel Castro said: "No one can deny that terrorism is today a dangerous and ethically indefensible phenomenon, which should be eradicated regardless of its deep origins, the economic and political factors that brought it to life and those responsible for it."

"But who have profited? The extreme right, the most backward and right-wing forces, those in favour of crushing the growing world rebellion and sweeping away everything progressive that is still left on the planet."

The best ways to address terrorism is to deal with the many legitimate grievances that are its root causes.

Police work to track down specific law-breakers and enhanced security measures are also needed. But this does not mean the anti-terrorism laws we face in Australia today.

Legislation passed by the Australian Parliament constitutes a major attack on democratic rights in our country and must be repealed.

The threat of "terrorism" is being exploited as a pretext to legislate for the loss of rights and liberties and to criminalise opposition

Non-offensive defence strengthens peace and security by ruling out pre-emptive attacks and "preventive" wars.

– militant unionism, direct action by social movements and so forth. Terrorism replaces communism or subversion as the justification for shutting down political dissent.

Aggression or non-offensive defence

The Federal Government is spending billions on the biggest military build-up for decades and making us a cog in the United States war machine.

This equipment is not for Australia's defence. It is designed to fight high-intensity conflicts overseas under the direction of the US.

The real alternative to this is non-offensive or defensive defence



The Howard Government has signed up as a collaborator with US global war plans

which takes advantage of cheaper but efficient alternatives, contributing to national security without diminishing military capability.

A key commitment in this new approach is for Australia not to possess more military force than is necessary to defend its territory against likely military threats. Australia's military capability and doctrines will be altered so that our country cannot threaten the territory of other states.

Non-offensive defence strengthens peace and security by ruling out pre-emptive attacks and "preventive" wars. If a state can strengthen its defensive capabilities in times of crisis without posing an increased threat to other states, the vicious circle of competitive military escalation can be avoided.

Non-offensive defence is intended to facilitate arms control and disarmament by eliminating one element in competitive arms build-

ups – mutual fear and insecurity.

Collective security may be a safeguard for many countries. However, collective security can require forces with offensive capabilities. This dilemma can be resolved by ensuring that only multinational task forces are capable of offensives while the national components are not.

Non-offensive defence should be based on affordable low to medium technology as compared with the current high tech and expensive equipment purchased by the Australian Government.

This could in turn generate a "peace dividend" which would provide major financial resources to satisfy the needs of the people

for jobs, housing, education, health care, welfare services, environmental protection, transport and communications, culture and leisure.

It can also fund social, economic, educational and sustainable environmental projects that can help build peace, confidence and security in the Asia-Pacific region.

Costs

Resources committed to the military mean less money for developing strong social cohesion and stability within the nation through employment programs and meeting the health, education and housing needs of Australians and our neighbours.

Military expenditure reduces public and private investment, diverts funds and personnel from civilian research and development, increases the current account deficit, and tends to distort and hold back economic development.

Studies from Germany have shown that one billion marks transferred from the military budget and spent on alternative civilian programs would create at least 800 and possibly up to 6500 more jobs than would be lost in the military sector.

The World Bank has reported that "evidence increasingly points to high military spending as contributing to fiscal and debt crises, complicating stabilisation and adjustment, and negatively affecting economic growth and development".

Australian Government is currently spending over \$55 million every day on the military. Many shortages in our public health and public education systems could be overcome with just two weeks' military spending – about \$700 million.

Some practical steps forward

We look for a new world security order. This new approach includes such policies as:

- An end to the hosting of US military-bases on Australian soil and termination of the ANZUS Treaty. No involvement in Star Wars (the US anti-missile system). Adoption by the Australian Government of an independent foreign policy.

- A change in Australia's defence policy and military capability to one of defence of our own territory, ruling out aggression against the territory of other states. A focus on dual-use equipment (for example, aircraft which can be used for water bombing bushfires as well as for coastal surveillance and interception).

- A substantial cut in the military budget. Conversion of military-related industries to socially useful and environmentally sustainable production with the consequent creation of additional employment.

- Uphold the nuclear weapons free status of Australia. Work for nuclear free zones throughout Asia and the Pacific.

- Forbid foreign warships and military aircraft to call at Australian ports and airfields or transit through Australian territorial space.

- Work to develop transparency and confidence building in the region and to restrict a regional arms race.

Conclusion

The government's goal must be to minimise military expenditure as far as responsible defence strategy allows. Subservience to the US makes Australia poorer, not safer.

The drive towards war is being paid for by the peoples of the world. The price of failure in the struggle for peace will be not just global dictatorship, human misery, and environmental destruction but also the possibility of human and planetary annihilation.

A just and peaceful world is possible. The Australian people can and must play their part in imposing it on US imperialism. ✪



Communist Party of Australia

Central Committee:
General Secretary: Peter Symon
President: Hannah Middleton
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833
Sydney District Committee:
Rob Gowland
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833

Newcastle Branch:
303 Hunter St
Ph: ah 02 4926 1752
Wollongong Branch: Leanne Lindsay
PO Box 276 Corrimal 2518
North Illawarra Branch: Janice Hamilton
16/26-30 Hutton Ave
Bulli NSW 2516
Ph: 02 4283 6130

Website: www.cpa.org.au
Email: cpa@cpa.org.au

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Website: www.cpa.org.au/guardian/guardian.html
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Riverina:
Geoff Lawler
PO Box 1016 Wagga 2650
Ph: 02 6921 4316 Fax: 02 6921 6873
Melbourne Branch:
Andrew Irving
PO Box 3 Room 0 Trades Hall
Lygon St Carlton Sth 3053
Ph: 03 9639 1550 Fax: 03 9639 4199

West Australian Branch: Vic Williams
5B Jemerson St Willagee Perth 6156
Phone: 08 9337 1074
Brisbane Branch: David Matters
PO Box 2148 Salisbury East 4107
Ph: 07 3398 9623
South Australian State Committee:
Marie Lean Rm 5, Lvl 1, 149 Flinders St,
Adelaide 5000 Ph: 08 8232 8200