

HOWARD HAS NO MANDATE

Preference deals may deliver Senate majority

As the counting in the Federal election proceeds it has become more and more apparent that the Howard Government did not win a mandate from the Australian people. The Coalition's combined primary vote in the House of Representatives is only 46.55% (AEC figures 17/10/04) and about 46.3% in the Senate. But with this minority of primary votes the Coalition parties have gained 58% of lower house seats with 5 seats still on the doubtful list.

Furthermore it was the unprincipled allocation of preferences by the leaderships of the ALP in Victoria and SA and the leadership of the Democrats that may give the Howard Government a disastrous majority in the Senate.

Preference patterns have been revealed in hard-hitting statements from NSW Upper House Greens member, Lee Rhiannon and by Geoff Ash the campaign director for the Greens in NSW.

Lee Rhiannon says that the 2004 election will be remembered for the fact that the Victorian ALP and the Democrats, through odious preference deals, [may] have delivered the Howard government control of the Senate.

In Victoria Labor and the Democrats are responsible for the Family First candidate winning the last Senate seat instead of the Greens. Family First received preferences from both Labor and the Democrats. The Greens polled 8.5% of the Senate vote, more than four times the 1.88% that Family First picked up. Nationally, The Greens won 7.45% of the total Senate vote an increase of 3% of its 2001 vote.

Preference flows

Tim Colebatch in the Melbourne Age (11.10.04) summed it up:

"How can Steve Fielding of Family First win one of Victoria's Senate seats with just 45,260 votes? In short, because virtually every other party – including Labor and the Democrats – preferred Family First to the Greens and practically every other party."

In South Australia, Family First also received preference flows from Labor and the Democrats. Democrat preferences could put Family First in front of the Greens preventing the Greens leapfrogging Labor. Labor looks like winning the last seat on Greens preferences. The Democrats preference decision is likely to cost the Greens another Senate seat.

Even Christine Milne who polled over 12% of the vote in the Tasmanian Senate ballot and looked to be a certainty may lose out as a result of preference flows.

The Greens crossed the 4% threshold for public funding in 43 seats out of 50. Last time, it was only 25 out of 50. This will give the party the funds to grow and fight even bigger and better election campaigns in the future.

The Greens polled a solid 7.16% of the Senate vote in NSW, an increase of nearly 3% on the 2001 vote.

The Green's statement says, "Despite this, Labor looks like winning the last Senate seat in NSW on the Greens' preferences. The scenario may have been reversed if the Democrats had preferred the Greens instead of Glenn Druery from Liberals for Forests and Fred Nile's Christian

Democrats. Without Democrat preferences, the Greens were unable to get in front of Labor. Labor also directed preferences to Liberals for Forests and then one-third to Fred Nile; so even if we had got in front of Labor we were no certainty to receive their preferences.

"Our cause was also not helped by the Progressive Labour Party and HEMP who also preferred Liberals for Forests ahead of the Greens. The decision by HEMP was not the fault of their lead candidate, who opposed the unprincipled decision. If Labor, Democrats, PLP and HEMP had preferred in a principled way, John Kaye would have been elected."

The Greens polled in double figures in 14 NSW seats, including over 20% in 3 seats (Cunningham, Grayndler and Sydney). At the 2001 election, there were only 3 seats in double figures.

North Shore: The Greens have a new emerging heartland on Sydney's North Shore. In the six North Shore seats (Bennelong, Berowra, Bradfield, Mackellar, North Sydney and Warringah), the Greens polled an average of 12%. This compares with 5.9% in the 2001 election.

Hunter/Central Coast: With a very strong showing in Newcastle and Charlton The Greens averaged 4.3% last time, and is now at 7.4% in this region.

Western Sydney: In Western Sydney the message from The Greens is also starting to be heard. In 12 Western Sydney seats in 2001, they polled an average of 3.7%. This time, that average is 5.9%.

Rural/regional: The Greens gathered strength in rural areas. Lyne, Gwydir, Paterson and (hopefully) Riverina have topped 4% for the first time. Their rural vote went from an average of 4.2% in 2001 to 6.1% this time.

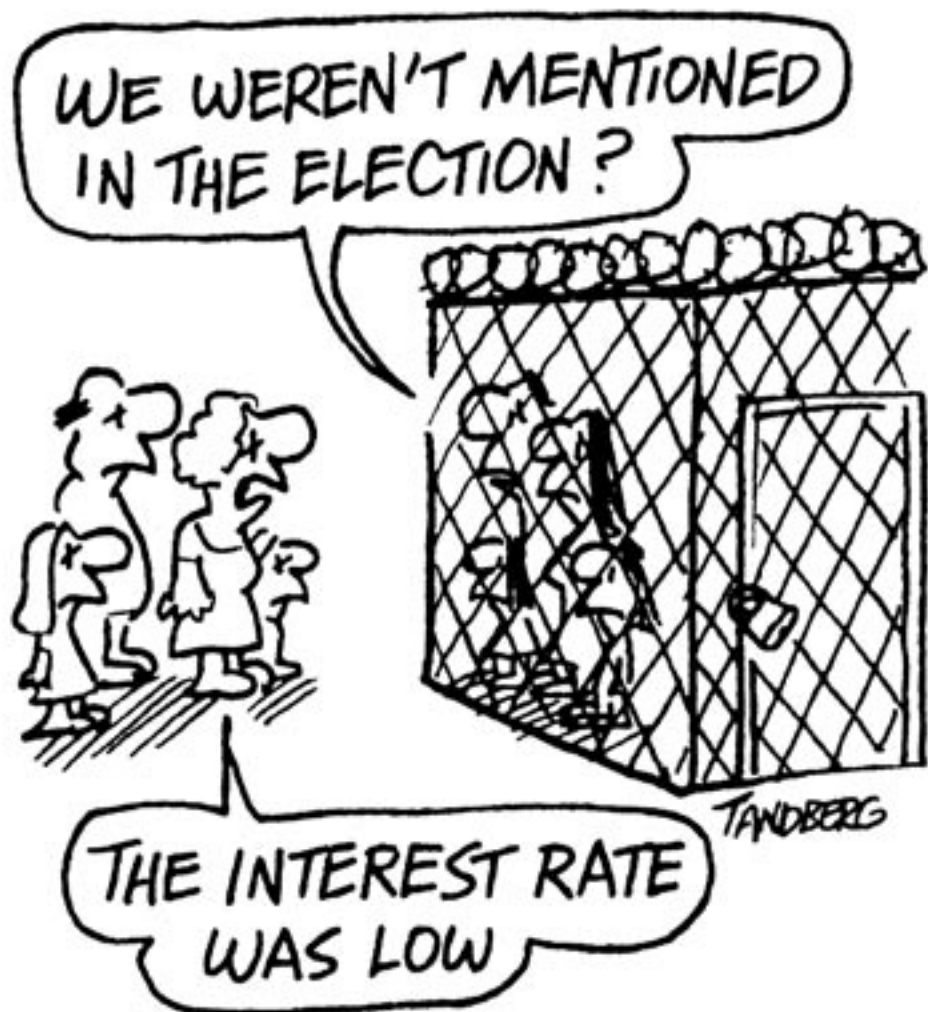
Preferences: In certain key seats, Green preferences may have helped defeat sitting Coalition members or protected vulnerable Labor members. These include Banks, Lowe, Parramatta and Richmond, according to the Greens statement.

Commenting on these figures and the preference deals, CPA General Secretary, Peter Symon told *The Guardian* that "the significant increase in the Green vote is one bright spot in the election. Another is the fact that the Coalition with 46.55% of the primary vote in the House of Representatives **does not have a majority mandate** and this should be shouted from the rooftops. Their big majority in the House of Representatives is brought about by the undemocratic single member electorate system. It must be democratised", said Mr Symon.

"The shameful preference deals by the ALP and Democrats shows how unprincipled the leaders of these parties are. The membership of these parties cannot be let off the hook either but I do not believe that rank and file members will agree to their leaderships making these shoddy deals that may result in giving Howard a majority in the Senate.

"These leaders prefer to support reactionary parties, even the most right-wing religious fundamentalists like Family First rather than the much more progressive Greens."

See editorial page 2



The Guardian

No 1203

October 20, 2004

Howard will thank Labor, Democrats

Many readers will be shocked and angered if, when the allocation of preferences are finalised, a government majority in the Senate has come via the preference decisions of the leadership of the ALP in several states. The leadership of the Democrats will also have added to this likely outcome. By their preference decisions they have, yet again, exposed their unprincipled, irresponsible and untrustworthy characteristics.

Some of the real nasties that the Howard Government may now be able to roll through the Senate are listed on page 12 of this issue of *The Guardian* – “Howard’s Explosive Agenda” – although this list is far from comprehensive as, in a three-year term, hundreds of different bills will be implemented.

The leaderships of the ALP and the Democrats knew exactly what they were doing. They knew that their preference decisions were likely to keep Green Senators out and put Family First candidates in. They knew what Family First stood for.

The leadership of the ALP machine in most states is firmly in the hands of the right-wing of that Party. This faction not only feared the growing support for the policies of the Greens and their principled advocacy, but are also intent on maintaining the dominance of the two-party system which allows the ruling class to maintain its absolute sway over the political and economic life of the nation.

The ALP right wing is just as conservative as the leadership of the Liberal and National Parties. Their differences are marginal. Their ideology is very similar even though Howard tries to persuade everyone that the Labor Party pursues a different ideology to his own, while right wing Labor promotes itself as an “alternative”.

It was the ALP leadership of the 1980s that introduced “competition policy” and started in earnest the process of privatisation of public enterprises.

The ALP leadership supports the privatisation of health and education, and it should be recalled that in government it was Labor that privatised the Commonwealth Bank and Qantas, reduced funding to the ABC by stealth, and a whole host of other sell-offs.

Labor’s Medicare Gold policy, announced during the election, would have actually poured millions into the private hospital system and would not have restored Medicare to a universal health service.

It was Federal Labor that started the process of undermining the award system while promoting not only enterprise bargaining, but also individual work contracts.

Given all this, is it any wonder that the current ALP leadership could so easily preference the Christian fundamentalist and conservative Family First Party that they knew would, if elected, be a ready ally of Howard’s men and women in the Senate.

It is also no wonder that the same ALP leaders should look askance at giving any support to the progressive Greens whom they see as a threat to the electoral base of the ALP.

The idea of a two-party system has and is being promoted worldwide by the ruling classes of many countries as an effective way of appearing to make a qualitative change at election time every few years, while in fact changing practically nothing. It is a device that has been used in many European countries and is currently being implemented in Japan (See article page 8)

The two-party system is a clever fraud. Both of the Coalition parties and the ALP want to “reform” the Senate voting system to ensure that never again are they restrained by others having an effective voice in the Senate.

Putting in motion a process of disempowering the Senate, with the objective of scrapping it altogether, is almost certainly one of the agenda items of the Howard Government in this term of office. The Labor Party leadership will be sympathetic to such a move which will ensure one or the other of the two major parties keeps a grip on parliamentary power.

They also understand the wider, longer-term possibilities of the development of a *real* alternative, of which the election of Senators from other parties and organisations is but one aspect. They will do whatever they can to snuff out, in its infancy, the emergence of any such alternative – on the streets or in the parliament.

PRESS FUND

With the election over, it’s even more important that we do everything we can to counteract the vicious and cynical propaganda that led to the Howard government being returned to office. It’s a very big job. The government will now be free to alter the cross-media ownership laws to enable the most reactionary mass media moguls to take over even more publications and broadcasting channels. The role of *The Guardian* and the progressive media will therefore be of crucial importance in this struggle, which we can and must win. You can help! The Press Fund covers the day-to-day costs of production of *The Guardian* so please send us something for the next issue.

We also need many more readers and subscribers. Can you sell a copy to a friend or workmate each week?

Warmest thanks to those who contributed this week:

Anonymous \$120, T Bartlett \$100, D Mudie \$10, Peter C Reed \$50.

This week’s total \$280. Progressive total: \$9680

Taking issue Election 2004

Joan Coxsedg

How best to describe the election? A win for greed, selfishness, ignorance, straight-out lies, media manipulation and blackout of the most important issues of our time, confirmation that Australia is one of the most conservative countries in the world and is becoming more Americanised by the minute. Where the Greens, for God’s sake, are now being described as the “extreme left”, giving us an indication of how far to the right the Australian body politic has drifted. Today’s centre is where old-style reactionaries would have felt comfortable. A society whose motto is “bugger you Jack”.

During the campaign, where was the wide-ranging debate on Howard’s grovelling role in the immoral, illegal Iraq war, which is causing unimaginable suffering to the Iraqi people and will haunt us for decades to come, or questions on the Middle East? Silence. The US Free Trade deal? Silence. Despite being a diabolical arrangement which will take what’s left of our national sovereignty. On these issues, Labor played a disgusting “me-too” role, lining up behind Howard’s mob with a few inconsequential amendments when policy was being pushed in the parliament.

And where was the debate on the raft of repressive “anti-terror” laws passed for phoney reasons in recent

years, rapidly turning Australia into a police state? Nothing. The environment? Despite the urgency of deforestation, water shortages and hugely damaging salinity, it barely rated a mention until the dying days of the campaign, when Labor’s “forest policy” was introduced – far too late in the piece – and used to beat them over the head, especially when Labor’s red-neck forestry union cheered Howard to the rafters. The Kyoto protocol, which Labor promised to sign, and the consequences for the global environment if Australia didn’t sign? Scarcely a whisper.

Latham’s campaign? Not worth two bob. Latham’s most attractive feature was his free-wheeling larrikinism, but this quickly vanished once the campaign proper kicked in, when he sobered down and sounded as if he was imbibing valium while droning on about “reading to children” etc, when he should have been tackling Howard head-on about the real state of the economy with verve and passion. I suspect there was far too much input from former incumbent Beazley (loves soldiers and the US alliance) and other yankee ideologues like Robert Ray, who kept Latham on a tight leash.

One of the most disturbing consequences of the election is the sudden rise of an ultra-right fundamentalist Christian party called Family First – its roots are in the Assemblies of God and in the

US of A – which no-one had heard of prior to the election, but which ran candidates in every seat and seemed to have money coming out of its ears.

On Saturday, Family First had its first crack at federal politics and due to our bizarre preferential voting system, could win the last Senate seat in Victoria despite getting only 1.9% of the vote! This is because virtually every other party – including Labor and the Democrats – preferred them over the Greens. As minor parties are eliminated from the bottom, their preferences are distributed. It now seems more than likely that a Family First creep will hold the balance of power in the Senate, allowing Howard to pass some draconian legislation, such as the full sale of Telstra and a parcel of anti-union laws, to name but a few.

ALP Policy:

Years ago, I wrote and said that unless Labor presented a clear progressive alternative to the conservatives it would become increasingly irrelevant. And so it is proving to be. I also said – and was not alone in saying – that our choice in the 21st century was between socialism and barbarism.

The barbarians are knocking at our gate and will break it down unless we fight back hard.

Joan Coxsedg is a writer, artist, left political activist and former Labor MLC ☘

Award for Bougainville activist

Vikki Johns, long-time activist for peace and human rights and National Co-ordinator of the Bougainville Freedom Movement, has been awarded the Elizabeth Hastings Memorial Award by the Sydney University of Technology in recognition of her work.

In a short response Vikki said: “I am very honoured and proud to have received the Elizabeth Hastings Memorial Award for Student Community Contribution at the UTS Human Rights Awards 2004.

“I would like to thank you all for your continued support of Bougainville.”

The award is given to a UTS student in recognition of a significant contribution to the community in the areas of equity, diversity, social justice or human rights.

Ms Johns’ tireless campaigning raised international awareness of Bougainville as an important political issue. For 11 years she has assisted the people of Bougainville on the political front and in practical matters.

She collected humanitarian aid in the form of medicines, school materials and clothing, and arranged for their transportation to the island with trade union assistance.

She has been a vital international link between NGOs, trade unions, political organisations, churches, activist groups and the Bougainville people.

She organised numerous fundraising functions, conferences, public meetings and protests over the years to raise the profile of the campaign.

Blockade

During the blockade of Bougainville in the 1990s four of Ms Johns’ fellow activists were



arrested. She then led an international campaign to have the charges dropped, with letters of support for the activists flooding in from all over the world. Many of the letters were read out during the court case and the charges were eventually dropped.

Vikki Johns has published numerous works on Bougainville, including authoring a chapter of the book *As Mothers of the Land* about the birth of the Bougainville

Women for Peace and Freedom movement.

In 1998 she was invited to Canberra to participate in the peace negotiations process, and finally made her first visit to Bougainville in 2002 as a participant in a Reconciliation Ceremony held on the island.

The Guardian staff extend their congratulations to Vikki and our appreciation of her tireless work. ☘

One year on, still no justice for Joel

Australand sites across Sydney were closed for 24 hours last Friday, October 15, to mark the first anniversary of the death of Joel Exner. Hundreds of building workers stopped work as a mark of respect for 16 year old Joel, who fell 15 metres to his death on only his third day of work at an Australand site in Eastern Creek last year.

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) called on union members and the general community to attend the memorial to support Joel's family and friends, as well as to continue the fight for industrial manslaughter laws so that bosses can be jailed if their negligence results in a worker being killed.

CFMEU State Secretary Andrew Ferguson said that politicians needed to be reminded of their responsibility to protect the lives of people in the workplace.

"No family in Australia should have to suffer the pain that Joel's family has gone through", he said.

"Workers and their families should expect to arrive home from work each day in one piece, and if the negligence and greed of bosses who put profits before their workers lives causes your death, your family should have the right to justice, and the bosses should pay for their negligence.

Fatality every two days

"Too many Australians still die at work, with one fatality every two days. This is unacceptable, and the CFMEU refuses to stand by and watch as workers continue to die and families continue to be torn apart, all for the sake of corporate profits."

Joel Exner's mother Sue Baxter still finds it hard to cope with the loss of her son, and is angry at how low a price the government puts on human lives because of their continued refusal to pass tough industrial manslaughter laws to protect workers lives.

"It is impossible to express the pain that comes from losing a

child", she said. "It is even harder when your child's life was so tragically ended in his prime, while his whole future lay ahead of him.

"I want to thank the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union for their support in this hard time, and for their campaign to make building sites safer so that other mothers and fathers don't need to go through this horrible experience.

"One year on, we still haven't received justice for Joel, and the government still hasn't learnt anything from our pain and suffering. If a driver is negligent and kills someone, that's a crime, but for some reason they are still refusing to create industrial manslaughter laws so that bosses who are negligent and kill innocent workers like my son, can be jailed for it.

"I will continue to support the union campaign for industrial manslaughter laws so that Joel's death won't be in vain, and it might prevent other families from suffering the pain of losing a loved one." ❖



Sydney action in October last year demanding manslaughter laws

Destroying TAFE

A new initiative of the Howard Government is set to pour \$289 million of public funds into supporting 24 private colleges in direct competition with our publicly funded TAFE system.

Now that the Howard Government has been returned to office it will continue with its ideologically driven privatisation of public services at the expense of sound economic management.

It intends to lavish public funds on elite private organisations of the government's wealthy supporters while axing funds to the public sector.

During the recent election campaign the Prime Minister belittled the work being done by TAFE and went so far as to suggest that TAFE had failed to address the current skills shortages.

This claim is absolute rubbish. Recent research (National Council for Vocational Education Research - NCVER statistics) shows that the Howard Government has cut funding to TAFE by 25% in real terms

per teaching hour over the past five years.

This represents a total cut of about \$1 billion urgently needed to address Australia's worsening skills shortage.

Because of the shortfall in funding over 50,000 people are turned away from TAFE colleges each year.

The same government now proposes to waste \$289 million of public money to support 24 private technical colleges, at a cost per student of nearly ten times that in TAFE.

These colleges are to be set up in competition with TAFE and schools, with performance-based pay for teachers and no union involvement.

The government also intends to establish an institute for Trade Skill Excellence, to provide industry endorsement of qualifications from training providers, including TAFE, to identify preferred providers.

After the Free Trade Agreement comes into force profit

driven American training companies will also be able to participate in the "auction" for government funds.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Australian Industry Group, the Business Council of Australia and the National Farmers Federation will lead this proposed institute.

These are the very groups who urged the Howard government to attack workers' rights and conditions of employment immediately after the election results were known.

The policies of the Howard government are clearly intended to undermine TAFE and deny Australians the right to quality vocational training.

Taxpayers' funds are to be used to generate profits for private providers at the expense of public education.

The NSW Teachers' Federation is determined to fight these attacks on TAFE and public education. All those who value public education are urged to join in the struggle. ❖

ABC management "intrusive"

Moves by the management of the ABC to register the political "affiliations" or "relationships" of staff are being challenged by the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU). The national broadcaster is demanding that radio division employees supply the information in annual performance reviews. Apparently the process began at the time Senator Richard Alston, then Federal Communications Minister, made allegations of political bias against the ABC.

CPSU ABC Section Secretary, Graeme Thomson, has written to managing director, Russell Balding, demanding that the organisation "cease and desist".

"The initiative is, in the eyes of the CPSU naïve, ill-considered and intrusive", Mr Thomson wrote.

"If the corporation has reason to believe an employee is acting improperly because they are allowing personal beliefs to interfere with their work, then that failure should be measured against the editorial policies. If their programs demonstrate bias, then they should be busted for improper conduct."

Thomson said the union had moved on the basis of strong membership reaction against the demand for political information.

"I am advising our people to write NOYB (none of your busi-

ness) in that section of the disclosure form", he said.

"Whether or not you are a member of a political party is not the issue. The issue, for a broadcaster, ABC or commercial, is, does it affect your work?"

BTN returns

Meanwhile, ABC staff are welcoming the return of iconic children's current affairs program, *Behind the News*. The ABC announced the week before last that *Behind the News* would again be produced from its Adelaide studios.

ABC employees were joined by teachers, principals, parents and school children in a concerted demand for the return of the program, axed last year for "budget reasons".

South Australian union shop floor representative, Martin Goodwin, thanked the community for rallying behind the program.

"Without that groundswell of support *BTN* would not have got back on air. I hope ABC management will learn not to be so dismissive of their audiences", Mr Goodwin said.

"It is hard to think of another program on the ABC, for this age group, that would better fit the description of core charter programming." ❖

Pete's Corner



Commemorating LEN FOX (1905 - 2004) COMRADES UP THE CROSS

LEN FOX the journalist, artist, social activist and Mona Brand, his playwright-partner, lived up The Cross for some fifty years. The exhibition of Len Fox's paintings, sketches and posters reveals his commitment to the Peace and Civil Rights movements, the Green Bans and workplace politics.

Exhibition opens Thursday, October 21
by JACK MUNDEY, pioneer environmentalist
and hero of the Green Bans
runs until 30 October.

The Cross Art Projects
33 Roslyn Street Kings Cross Sydney 2011

Ph: 02 93572058

Howard's IR world - rip-offs & lock-outs

Claims by the Howard Government that workers on individual contracts – specifically its Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) – are better off have been blown away by a university study. The new information has come to light as further research has exposed employers as the industrial bully boys of the past decade, with a dramatic rise in worker lock-outs by companies.

The study, by Kristen van Barneveld from the University of Newcastle, disputes the sweeping assertions that AWAs pay more, concluding that gains for the employer come at the expense of individual employees.

Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews quoted Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures proving that workers on AWAs are paid more.

But Ms van Barneveld has unpicked those figures with research highlighting that the ABS figures are being distorted by the high number of managerial AWA employees. Further, the research shows that collective agreement figures are also negatively distorted by a high number of part time and casual workers. In fact, the research suggests that non-managerial employees achieve

better wage outcomes through collective agreements.

Ms van Barneveld also refers to research from Sydney University's workplace research organisation, ACIRRT, showing that AWAs were less likely to contain provisions for a wage rise during the life of the agreement and, where they did, were more likely to be performance-based and at management's discretion.

More importantly, the research by Ms van Barneveld highlights that wages are not the only factor in determining the impact of an AWA.

AWAs one-sided

Looking at AWAs in the hospitality industry in detail, she finds that "most of the benefits which had been achieved through the introduction of AWAs were one-sided, with employers achieving wages and hours of flexibility at the expense of employee entitlements."

"There is little evidence of AWAs being used for complementary purposes – to foster positive employee relations or to encourage or reward employees for excellent performance", she writes.

"Rather than use the 'carrot' approach to managing employees, it seems that hospitality employers prefer to wield the stick."

Her case study findings "suggest that organisational efficiencies were often gained at the expense of the individual employee."

"This could occur not only in monetary terms but also in breaking down acceptable community standards such as the notion of a weekend ... or a substantial lunch break. In other words, under a system of individual contracts, inequitable outcomes for employees were often the corollary of provisions to enhance organisational efficiency."

Employer lockouts

Meanwhile, a study by Chris Briggs of ACIRRT has found strike action at historic low levels while employer lockouts were on the rise.

The study, which looked at the frequency of lockouts and strikes over ten years, found employer lockouts accounted for 57 per cent of all disputes between 1998 and 2003, compared with seven per cent between 1993 and 1997. In the same period, workers' ability to defend themselves against the bosses' onslaught has been curtailed by the Howard Government's anti-union legislation.

"Employers, not unions, are now responsible for most of the long-running disputes in Australia", noted Mr Briggs. ✪



AWA's let employers wield the stick

Govt flexes its anti-union powers

The Coalition Government intends bolstering the powers of an anti-union agency whose methods have been characterised as "undemocratic" and "authoritarian" by a Federal Court judge. Workplace Relations Minister, Kevin Andrews, said the Coalition would not back off from regulations that would compel people to give evidence or produce documents to Nigel Hadgkiss' Building Industry Taskforce, under threat of imprisonment.

Andrews was speaking after Justice Marshall said the Taskforce did not have the right to access the personal bank accounts of Construction, Mining and Energy

Union members on the Concept Blue site in Melbourne.

The Concept Blue case arose out of a Taskforce investigation of a safety audit, following the death of a Melbourne building worker in August, 2003.

Current penalties for breach of Taskforce-monitored building industry laws, rushed through after the Cole Royal Commission, include five-figure fines for unions and fines of up to \$2000, and possible imprisonment, for individual members.

Justice Marshall was critical of the Taskforce's failure to disclose the purpose of its investigation when it ordered Multiplex employ-

ees to produce the documentation.

"Such notices are foreign to the workplace relations of civilised societies, as distinct from undemocratic and authoritarian states", Justice Marshall ruled.

He challenged the Taskforce's approach after it admitted in court that it "might not have suspicion of anything".

Andrews is expected to re-float elements of the Building Industry Improvement Bill, knocked back after an exhaustive inquiry by the outgoing Senate.

The Bill seeks to further bolster Taskforce powers, including giving it the nod to investigate union activities with a view to facilitating potentially crippling damages claims on behalf of third parties. It would also remove the right to silence, during Taskforce interviews.

The union's Construction Division Secretary, Martin Kingham, called on the Howard Government to heed Justice Marshall's warning "and not journey down the path to an authoritarian state".

"This kind of intrusive behaviour into workers' private lives should have no place in Australian society. Workers should not be subjected to this intrusion purely because they want to make sure their work environment is safe", he said.

Mr Kingham said the decision reflected the union's contention that Taskforce was doing a "political job".

He said Taskforce officers gave no indication of interest in unsafe conditions that threatened workers' lives or underpayments or contractual breaches by employers. ✪

Job cuts leading to power cuts

The NSW Government booted out 42 highly-skilled electricity workers less than 24 hours before the state was plunged into the summer's first power crisis. On October 12 infrastructure specialists were given six hours to pack their belongings and vacate offices. By the next afternoon, dozens of northern Sydney homes had lost power as the system failed to handle 38 degree temperatures.

State Treasurer Michael Egan announced the forced redundancy of workers who had repeatedly turned their backs on severance pay offers. Axed USU (United Services Union) member, Mark Gill, said workmates hadn't wanted golden handshakes, they simply wanted to work but attempts to relocate to other areas had been thwarted by an apparent blacklist.

Mr Gill said the state's power system faced problems because "short sighted, market-driven" policies had driven skilled workers out of the industry.

He described his personal situation as ironic. On October 9 he was handing out how-to-votes for

federal Labor but by the following Tuesday a state Labor Government terminated his 30-year commitment to the power industry.

Million dollar debts

The Public Service Association's Steve Turner said Egan had loaded electricity generators with hundreds of millions of dollars of debt that would eventually be paid by consumers but had refused to deal with the attempts to relocate the workers.

"On Tuesday they sacked people with energy qualifications and on Wednesday we had blackouts because generators didn't have enough power to deal with a hot day", Mr Turner said.

He warned that NSW could find itself replicating the Auckland situation where the privatised system collapsed, after maintenance was neglected, causing businesses to lose millions of dollars.

Both the PSA and USU accuse the state government of breaking an agreement not to impose forced redundancies on public sector workers. ✪

Mercury Falling in Hobart

A Tasmanian woman has beaten off a seven year campaign by *The Hobart Mercury* to put staff on the Howard Government's individual, non-union contracts. Her workmates rallied to her defence. The graphic designer was offered an AWA as a cadet, worth half that earned by her colleagues.

The staff member, who has nine years experience in the job, was offered the lower rate of pay with no access to training, study time or professional development.

Cadets are paid less under the newspaper's collective agreement because they receive 10 hours of training weekly.

In addition, the AWA offered the reporter provided only \$1800 to compensate for loss of entitlements such as shift penalties, overtime, annual leave loading and allowances. These entitlements are estimated to be worth \$9000 to other workers.

The Mercury was forced to roll over when a copy junior who was

offered a cadetship insisted on going onto a collective agreement.

Andrew Muthy from the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) says *The Mercury* has been moving staff off collective agreements and onto common law contracts even before the Howard Government era of AWAs.

"*The Mercury* has been pushing AWAs for some time, they've become aggressive about it and really sneaky about it as well. They push them when people approach them for a job or an upgrade", said Mr Muthy. But, "if people stand up to this company they back down".

The MEAA recently took *The Mercury* to the Anti-Discrimination Board alleging a sub-editor at the paper, who had not been given a merit based increase in earnings for 15 years, was being targeted because "he was the face of the union" at this Murdoch owned newspaper. ✪

Melbourne ACFS invites you to the brilliant film

SACCO and VANZETTI

The US ruling class has always found judicial murder a convenient device to suppress those who are trouble-makers for the system, and to intimidate others. Joe Hill, Sacco and Vanzetti, and the Rosenbergs, all were judicially murdered to protect the State and its secrets. The ruling class has developed to a high art the use of circumstantial evidence, planted evidence, false identification, racism and political terrorism.

On May 5, 1920, two Italian radicals, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, were arrested and brought to trial, revealing obvious frame-ups. International protests developed.

Despite obvious illegalities and continued world-wide protests, Sacco and Vanzetti, still protesting their innocence, were judicially murdered on August 23, 1927.

20 November 7.30pm

Unitarian Church, 110 Grey St, East Melbourne

Cost: \$15/\$12 – Supper provided

Further information: Joan Coxsedg ph 03 9857 9249
Australia-Cuba Friendship Society

We're all rich – Oh Yeah!

Treasury and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) have released figures purporting to show Australians have greater personal wealth than ever before.

According to the figures, in the June quarter personal wealth rose 18 percent to \$5 trillion, and the average Australian (man, woman and child) now has a net wealth of \$250,000. Sounds impressive!

At the same time we are told that every person owes \$19,000, an increase of "only" 10.2% to a total of \$384 billion.

The rich and the destitute

Unfortunately, such statistics fail to differentiate between the wealth of the super rich and that of the destitute. They also fail to identify that component of wealth owned by those who own the means of production (the business men and women, and the major shareholders), and those who don't. The wealth of Kerry Packer is lumped in with that of the nation's poorest fringe-dweller.

This limits the report's significance. It is entirely possible for wealth as a whole to rise, because of an increase in the wealth of its numerically small ultra-rich citizens, even though the personal wealth of the vast majority of Australians – workers, small business owners, small working farmers – remains stable or even falls.

And what does the figure of \$250,000 mean for your average Australian? The cost of a house in one of Australia's largest cities (where most of us live) can easily reach three times that figure. Property prices have shot up over the last 20 years, including during the June quarter, when the ABS

compiled its statistics. A slight slowdown in the housing market in recent months has not brought relief for those seeking affordable accommodation.

Since the Howard government came to power in 1996, education costs have skyrocketed. Within the June quarter it was revealed that fifty currently-available university courses will cost the hapless student \$100,000 or more to complete.

Look out!

And if you happen to need lots of medication, look out! During the June quarter the Howard government introduced legislation to establish the US-Australia Free Trade Agreement.

The Agreement will enable pharmaceutical manufacturers to demand reviews of the listing of subsidised medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme (PBS). The reviews will be carried out by a special Medicines Working Group, which will include members of the pharmaceutical industry, and will have powers to overturn the decisions of the PBS' advisory committee. The price of pharmaceuticals is set to soar.

And for many Australians the ABS statistics are almost totally divorced from reality. The Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) recently pointed out that the life expectancy of indigenous Australian males is 56 (compared to 77 for non-indigenous people), and 53 for females (compared to 83).

Aboriginal babies are 4 times more likely to die before their first birthday, the Aboriginal unemployment rate is 2.8 times higher, and the suicide rate is 3 times greater. For most Aboriginal people the idea of everyone having \$250,000 in the

bank must seem a very cruel joke indeed.

The fact is that half of all employees – around 4.1 million of those working – earn less than \$650 a week.

Part-time jobs

Part-time jobs have grown by almost a third (32.5%) in the last eight years, outstripping full time jobs growth (10%) by more than three to one. More than 600,000 part time workers (23%) want more hours of work.

Almost a million Australians now work unpaid overtime, an increase of 24% since 1996.

St Vincent de Paul Society said in a 2003 report that:

- 12% (838,000) of Australian households could only afford second hand clothing;
- 16% (1,144,000) households could not pay telephone, gas or electricity bills on time;
- 27% (1,949,000) households could not afford a holiday away from home for even 1 week in the year.

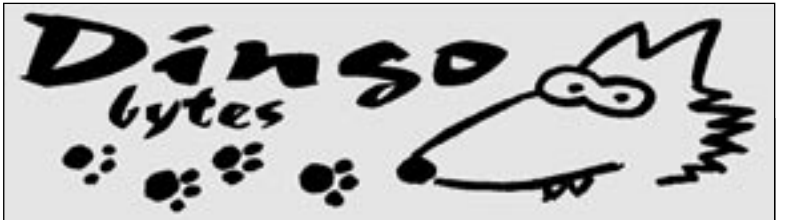
3 million poor

Then there are the figures from the University of Canberra's National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) that shows "In Australia today 3 million people are poor. Our nation is torn by inequality. Sixty percent of the nation's wealth is currently owned by 10% of the population".

The ABS report goes on: "The poorest half of the population will see their share of the wealth "pie" reduced. Over the thirty years until 2030, the wealth of the poorest half is projected to fall by one-third, from 7% in 2000 to 4.9% in 2030".

This is the true picture that ABS "averages" cover up. ☹

DON'T THINK OF IT AS A RENT INCREASE — THINK OF IT AS A RAISE IN YOUR STANDARD OF LIVING.



The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) are marking Mental Health Week with a massive banner campaign around Sydney to support schizophrenia research and raise public awareness. Construction workers raised around \$1 million for this research over the last three years. Schizophrenia affects one in every hundred Australians and is most prominent in young men between the ages of 15 to 25. The CFMEU is encouraging its members and the community to dig deep to help raise money to find a cure.

Unions have threatened to fight any proposals by the Howard Government to introduce performance based pay for university academics. It is believed that Industrial Relations Minister Kevin Andrews and the Head of the Department of Workplace Relations Peter Boxall held talks with university vice chancellors before the election about the \$69 million in funding that is tied to the imposition of the Government's anti-union laws, including Australian Workplace Agreements. National Tertiary Education Union spokesman Ken Alpine said university staff are concerned with changes to unfair dismissal laws and the government's agenda to limit industrial action.

NSW Labor Premier Bob Carr has called for greater cooperation between the states and the Federal Government following the election. "We stand ready to talk to the newly elected and strengthened Howard Government if they have the remotest willingness to engage with us on health, education, welfare and prisons. I hope the Prime Minister can be persuaded to a constructive federal system", Carr said. He should have no trouble working with Howard, the ideological divide between them being so small as to be virtually non-existent. Carr proved this in the lead up to the Sydney Olympics when he worked with Howard to introduce draconian police powers and give the military the right to shoot people in the streets.

The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society has warned of the danger to marine mammals posed by trawl net fishing. This followed the drowning of 14 dolphins in trawl nets in the Bass Strait last week. World-wide the toll on whales and dolphins is estimated by scientists to exceed 300,000 each year.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK is capitalism itself. The CSIRO's measurements for the southern hemisphere show that 2002-2003 brought the second highest rate of carbon growth in the atmosphere. And scientists are now concerned that there has been a sharp increase in global warming, fearing that as the earth warms, the forests and oceans which usually absorb carbon dioxide may be actually releasing it. The Howard Government has refused to sign even the relatively limited Kyoto agreement, because such measures would affect corporate profits. Capitalism is not only doomed, but is willing to take the rest of the world with it into oblivion.

East Timor still resisting over oil and gas resources

The latest round of negotiations between Australia and East Timor on September 30 over the ownership of the oil and gas fields in what is known as the Timor Gap ended in failure once again.

In earlier negotiations Foreign Minister Downer tried to bully the East Timorese Government into accepting Australian terms.

Then the Australian side delayed talks while the East Timorese Government lost much needed revenue and the Australian Government pocketed the tax revenue coming from the only operating field – estimated to be about \$US1 billion.

The 800,000 people of East Timor are among the most improv-

erished in the world, not that this is any concern to the Australian negotiators.

In the most recent negotiations the Australian Government attempted to bribe the East Timorese with an offer of an extra \$A3 billion and to take over responsibility for "security" in the area allegedly to protect the resources in the Timor Sea. The price for East Timor was to accept the borders laid down by the Australian Government.

Australia has refused to refer the dispute to the International Court of Justice which would almost certainly draw the border half-way between the land boundaries of East Timor and Australia in accordance

with the law of the sea. Such a ruling would give East Timor control of a much larger proportion of the oil and gas fields which would therefore reap much more revenue to spend on the impoverished East Timorese people.

On the other hand, acceptance of the boundaries claimed by Australia would give Australian companies the lion's share of the oil and gas resources in dispute.

Heavy pressure

Despite the heavy pressure coming from Downer the East Timorese Government continues to refuse to accept Australia's unfair and unprincipled demands.

After the September meeting the Australian media said coyly that the parties "were reportedly some way apart".

The re-election of the Howard Government means that the pressure will continue and even intensify with Downer remaining as Foreign Minister.

By grinding East Timor into even greater poverty and possibly destabilising its present government, Australia may well have the objective of turning East Timor into a "failed state" thereby providing justification for a continuing military occupation and the establishment of a government susceptible to Australia's demands. ☹



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.

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For CPA branches ordering 20 or more badges, the cost is \$4 each plus \$4 postage and packing.
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CPA Port Jackson Branch,
PO Box 40, Glebe NSW 2037.
(No cash or credit card payments.)

Communist and Workers' Parties put alternatives to imperialist aggression

Representatives of 64 Communist and Workers' Parties attended an international meeting of parties over the days of October 8 – 10. The conference was held in Athens on the initiative of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). The CPA was represented by Andrew Irving, a member of the Central Committee Executive.

Another 15 parties which could not attend sent written contributions or messages. The topic of the conference was *Resistance to Imperialist Aggression – Fronts of struggle and alternatives*.

A KKE press release said that there was a "creative exchange" of viewpoints on the significant experiences of the peoples' movements and the work of communist and workers' parties.

Many speakers referred to the situation that has developed following the military intervention of the USA and its allies against the peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq and the occupation of those countries. Participants condemned the dangerous heightening of imperialist aggression and the violation of the principles and regulations of international law that has led to an even further crisis in the UN and its role in safeguarding peace and promoting peaceful settlement of disputes between states.

Pre-emptive war

The doctrine of the pre-emptive strike and the pre-emptive war of the USA, also adopted by the EU, Australia and the Russian Federation in the name of confronting terrorism, is considered as being particularly dangerous for the world's peoples and world peace. The militarisation of Japan, which for the first time after World War 2, is sending an army outside its borders, was noted in particular.

The necessity for broad and

freedoms, especially in reference to "anti-terrorism laws", the intensification of oppression, and the problems of immigrants and refugees. Efforts to characterise the peoples' and national liberation movements as "terrorist" was rejected while upholding the legitimate right of the people to resist occupation.

Speakers expressed their concern about the rise in anti-communism and fundamentalism, racism and neo-fascist viewpoints and forces. The importance of solidarity in confronting anti-communist ordinances, prohibitions and restrictions was emphasised.

Many speakers noted the special role played by the decisions of the "G8" in international politics, the role of NATO with its new aggressive doctrine, guided by the concept of pre-emptive war, and the role of the EU with the creation of its own "rapid deployment force". It was emphasised that the new expansion of NATO essentially transforms it into a global policeman, under the leadership of US imperialism.

Participants from former republics of the Soviet Union drew attention to the recent dramatic events in the Russian Federation and expressed the view that those developments are linked with the interests of imperialist circles, first and foremost those of the US. They aim to weaken the unity of the Russian Federation.

Speakers referred specifically to the plan for a "Greater Middle East", promoted by the US and approved by the "G8" made up of the most powerful countries and NATO which foresees the "reformation" of the area in accordance with imperialist interests and which includes military action. The need to confront this plan immediately with co-ordinated mobilisations was emphasised.

Poverty has risen as has the concentration of wealth, while the increasing burden of the external debt suffocates the people of developing countries

coordinated action by parties and movements in order to confront this dangerous situation was emphasised. The necessity to change the current balance of forces on national, regional and international levels for the benefit of the forces of peace and socialism was underscored.

Many speakers noted the vicious attack of neo-liberal policies on the social and workplace rights of the working people, with the principal victims being young people and women.

Poverty has risen as has the concentration of wealth, while the increasing burden of the external debt suffocates the people of developing countries, said the KKE statement.

Attack on democratic rights and freedoms

Several speakers referred to the restriction of democratic rights and

Oil belt

The plan embraces almost the entire energy belt of those countries that produce oil or countries through which pipelines for oil and natural gas pass. It concerns countries in the Caucasus, Caspian Sea, Africa and the Arab countries of the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Gulf.

It was noted that threats against Lebanon and Syria by the US and its allies, have intensified in the recent period. Participants condemned these threats and expressed their solidarity with the people of these countries.

The aggression of the Israeli government against the Palestinian people was condemned as was their intensified barbarism against the Gaza Strip and the building of a wall that annexes the occupied ter-



Occupation – the remains of a house in Iraq bombed by US forces

ritories of the West Bank, enclosing the Palestinians in a ghetto.

Iran

The US government's threats against Iran and provocative statements by the Iranian regime, create the danger of conflagration and the total destruction of the area. A military strike directed by the USA against Iran will not only be catastrophic for the people of Iran but also for the movement for peace, progress and democracy all over the world. Such threats serve as a pretext for intensifying the repression of progressive and democratic forces. Conference participants pointed out that the future of Iran must be decided only by the Iranian people and the progressive and democratic forces and not by an "alternative solution" imposed by outside forces.

Several conference speakers noted the complicated situation in Africa where there is an emerging antagonism between the leading forces of the EU, namely France, and the US.

NATO is formulating plans for its military presence on the African continent, in the name of either confronting terrorism or the supposed "failed states". EU military forces are already present in the People's Republic of the Congo.

The events in Darfur, resulting from the policies of the Sudanese government, are being used as a pretext for the deployment of troops under the auspices of either the UN or NATO. Participants expressed their solidarity with the inhabitants of Darfur and they supported the idea of a solidarity missions to the area.

Solidarity with Cuba

Tensions are high in Latin America as well. The attacks of the US and the EU against Cuba are continuing. The participants of this conference emphatically condemned the plan "Initiative for a Free Cuba" and expressed their solidarity with the Cuban people. Speakers called for the intensification of the campaign for the release of the five Cuban patriots imprisoned in the US

because they fought against the terrorist groups in Miami.

Quite a few participants referred to the increased tensions on the Korean peninsula. They expressed their solidarity with Democratic People's Republic of Korea facing a US-led blockade, diplomatic isolation and threat of imperialist aggression.

It was noted that the "Plan Colombia", now renamed the "Andean Regional Initiative", constitute a great danger for the people of Latin America. Mention was also made of the "Puebla-Panama Plan" that aims at the exploitation of the natural resources of the region by North-American multinationals.

Some speakers, in reference to the situation in European Union countries, underlined the reactionary, neo-liberal and militaristic character of the EU "Constitutional Treaty" and the actions taken by parties and movements for its rejection.

Popular movements – sign of hope

Several speakers noted that, despite imperialism's increased aggression, the widespread popular movements and reaction against imperialist wars is a great sign of hope. In parallel, important struggles of the working class trade union movement and other social struggles are taking place. It was emphasised that it is necessary to develop activity in the workplaces.

Numerous speakers noted that despite its power, the US is encountering considerable difficulty in imposing its plans. A critical contribution in this has been the significant resistance of the people who defend their national independence and sovereignty in combination with international solidarity. It was underlined that the victory of the popular forces in the recent vote in Venezuela had a wide impact.

Iraq

The participants expressed their solidarity with the Iraqi people and the progressive and popular forces that are fighting for their right to

determine their fate with their free will: putting an end to the occupation and opening up prospects for radical democratic change.

They reiterated their support for the struggle of the Palestinian people and expressed their solidarity with the peace-loving forces of Israel. Special mention was made of the Israeli youth that refuse to serve in the army in the occupied territories which often results in their imprisonment.

The participants condemned the continuing occupation of Syrian and Lebanese territories and demanded the unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops and the return of all refugees, according to UN resolutions 242, 338 and 194.

The participants expressed their solidarity and support for the struggle of the Cypriot people, Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, for a federal solution on the basis of decisions and resolutions of the UN and its Security Council, for the removal of Turkish occupying forces, for the reunification of Cyprus and its people which will contribute to the establishment of peace in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Anti-globalisation

There was an exchange of opinion regarding the anti-war and anti-globalisation movements, the role of communists in these, as well as the struggle within these movements for their orientation.

It was noted that it is necessary to develop active political solidarity and support among Communist and Workers Parties, as well as in general among popular movements. Many speakers mentioned the need to support a series of initiatives taken by several Communist and Workers Parties or movements.

The need to continue and multiply similar meetings of Communist and Workers Parties was expressed by speakers. They mentioned, as an example, the meetings of the CPs of South America and the idea of holding similar meetings on the occasion of EU summit meetings.

The need for wider meetings on subjects of international interest and regional and local meetings was

Republicans, out of ideas, ask prosecutors to arrest Michael Moore

Wednesday, October 6, 2004

Dear Friends,

You may have heard by now that the Michigan Republican Party has called for my arrest. That's right. They literally want me brought up on charges – and hope that I'm locked up.

No, I'm not kidding. The Republican Party, yesterday, filed a criminal complaint with the prosecutors in each of the counties where I spoke last week in Michigan.

My crime? Clean underwear for anyone who will vote in the upcoming election.

Each night on our 60-city "Slacker Uprising Tour" through the 20 battleground states, I've been registering hundreds (and on some nights, thousands) of voters at my arena and stadium events.

I then ask for everyone over 23 who has never voted (or didn't vote in the last election) to stand up. I tell these slackers that I understand and respect why they think politicians are not worth the bother. I tell them that I may have been the original slacker, and that I do not want them to change their slacker ways. Keep sleeping 'til noon! Keep drinking beer! Stay on the sofa and watch as much TV as possible!

But, please, just for me, on November 2, I want you to leave the house and give voting a try – just this once. The stakes this time are just too high.

If they promise me that they'll do this, I give the guys a 3-pack of new Fruit of the Loom underwear, and the women get a day's supply of Ramen noodles, the sustenance of slackers everywhere.

I then close by having them repeat the 2004 Slacker Oath: "Pick nose! Pick butt! Pick Kerry."

It seems to have worked, as each night the volunteer tables are swamped afterwards with hundreds of new and young voters signing up to campaign for regime change for the next four weeks.

The satire of all this seems to

have been lost on the Republicans. Or maybe it hasn't. The state of Michigan (where we spent most of last week) reported that over 100,000 young people recently registered to vote, a record that no one saw coming. The Slacker Tour has turned into a huge steamroller with a momentum all its own.

So, the Republican Party, to show their gratitude that so many young people will now be involved in our system, has demanded that I be sent to jail for trying to "bribe" students to vote.

Of course, this would be quite laughable if they weren't so serious about their charges. But they are. I may soon be a wanted man in Michigan – simply because I convinced a few slackers to change their underwear and eat a healthy meal of artificially flavoured noodles.

I thought I'd seen it all this year – Disney refusing to distribute the film they paid for, right-wingers harassing theatre owners who showed *Fahrenheit 9/11*, conservative action groups trying to get the FEC to kick our film ads off the air, the unnecessary restrictive R-rating that forced teenagers to sneak in to see it, and all the stupid, crazy attacks on me and my movie that I've had to listen to as I watched the public ignore them and pack the movie houses anyway, where my



"Pick nose, pick butt, pick Kerry"

If they promise to vote ... I give the guys a 3-pack of new Fruit of the Loom underwear, and the women get a day's supply of Ramen noodles

film was being shown.

And when all that failed, five different Republican groups made five different attack dog tapes (oops, "documentaries") against me in a period of about six weeks. But they were all so bad, so boring, so right-

wing, no one wanted to watch them and they too went away, a sad waste of good videotape.

Now, after enduring all this, with no tricks left in their bag, they've just decided, "Let's toss his sorry ass behind bars – him and his noodles and his gift of clean underwear!"

My friends, they will not catch me. Though I may be on the run, and I may never be able to return home to my beloved Michigan, I make this solemn vow to you and yours: The slackers of America shall not be denied their noodles,

they will proudly wear their clean underwear as free Americans, and they will vote Bush out of office come November 2nd (though they will not show up to the polls until well after noon)!

Stay strong, stay slacker, and please remember to turn the underwear inside out every three days. As for the noodles, add boiling water, stir.

Yours,
Michael Moore
MMFlint@aol.com
www.michaelmoore.com

P.S. My favourite moment of the Vice-Presidential debate: Cheney saying to the moderator that this was the first he heard that that many black women in America had AIDS. Clueless. Cheney, for an entire 90-minutes, only mentioned Bush's name – that's his running mate, the "president" – once. They should have called this the "President (Cheney) – Vice President (Edwards) Debate." ☺



also noted. Such a meeting is the initiative of the Lebanese CP for the issues of the region.

It was also proposed to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the anti-fascist victory with an international event in Prague.

Events and campaigns

Some important events, campaigns and mobilisations were listed:

- the struggle against the EU constitution and the emerging reactions from the attack against the social insurance and benefits of the workers;
- the increase in work hours and firings;
- the continuation of anti-NATO mobilisations this year in Venice and during the NATO summit in Nice in 2005;
- the struggles of the youth, especially in view of the World Festival of Youth and Students next August in Venezuela.

The idea was put forward that parties meet at the time of important international events with the aim of achieving a more collective processing of proposals and a more united understanding and position.

Such an opportunity is offered by the initiative of the CP of Brazil that is organising a big international event in Porto Alegre in Brazil during the convention of the World Social Forum.

The view was expressed that the exchange of opinion and co-operation between Communist and Workers' Parties has a positive effect on the coordination and united action with wider anti-imperialist, anti-monopoly, democratic and patriotic forces.

Some speakers said it would be useful to widen the exchange of views and include theoretical discussions regarding the prospects for socialism under contemporary conditions.

There was a call to strengthen even more the internationalist solidarity of our parties with communists and other progressive people and parties that are facing persecution, imprisonment and illegality.
Athens, 10 October 2004 ☺

WMD: There were and there are

Juana Carrasco Martin

One can easily be connected to the other. The headline in *The Chicago Sun Times* read: "Looking for WMD?" That's easy enough, there are eight million chemical weapons stockpiled. They were not found in Iraq, but they are being warehoused in igloo-like concrete structures in the state of Oregon, USA. They have been a permanent fixture in the Panamanian rain forest since the US bases were installed in that country, and are also maintained in storage facilities in Australia in quantities far greater than the amount Bush claimed was in Iraq in order to justify the invasion.

These types of deadly weapons can also be found a scant four miles from the White House.

Meanwhile, Nguyen Van Quy, one of the three Vietnamese who are suing the manufacturers of Agent

Orange, the defoliant that the US aggressors used during the Vietnam war, survives with death knocking at his door.

The former North Vietnamese sergeant major gets weaker everyday as a result of a liver tumour caused by the dioxin he was contaminated by.

More than eight million chemical weapons are kept around the world. They threaten not only those who may in one war or another be labelled as "the enemy", but also the communities, sometimes without their knowledge, were they are harboured, including deposits of Sarin and VX nerve gas, or other nerve agents prolifically produced by US laboratories.

Nonetheless, "chemical terrorism" is usually referred to only as a threat that could come from some deranged warlord, ignoring the fact that the well-organised and mighty US Army is the holder of the larg-

est stock of chemical weapons and hasn't hesitated to use them.

Quy and the other Vietnamese plaintiffs are living examples that these weapons existed and were used, and they are denouncing Agent Orange's effects on their children. These substances were manufactured by the Dow Chemical and Monsanto corporations. They are the same consortiums whose herbicides are still being used against cocaine fields in Latin America, contaminating vast extensions of farmland in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia.

Another 30 companies are named in the case brought by the Vietnamese, which is scheduled for a hearing in a New York court in December.

In an effort to deprive the Vietnamese fighters of food and the shelter of the jungle, the US forces used chemicals that contaminated the soil and the water. The after-

effects of this chemical warfare continue to be felt today. In Vietnam there are more than three million victims of the 20 million gallons of herbicides that were sprayed between 1962 and 1971, including Agent Orange, which contains dioxin.

Nightmarish birth defects are common in Vietnam and have yielded babies without eyes or arms, others with two heads and many with vital organ dysfunctions.

But the Vietnamese adversaries were not the only victims. As if a punishment from hell, US war veterans have also suffered from the effect of the chemicals. In 1984, Dow Chemical and Monsanto were forced to pay \$180 million to US soldiers, who had ironically become their own "collateral damage."

Weapons there were, and there are...
Granma ☺

In US record numbers register

Leaders of the nationwide voter registration movement are reporting that millions of new voters have registered for the November 2 election, breaking records. This has taken place especially in swing states like Ohio, where the determination to remove George W Bush has inspired a record sign-up.

In Cuyahoga County alone, which includes Cleveland, 235,000 Ohioans have registered, more than double the number in 2000. That includes 100,000 people who registered for the first time.

"I think it is absolutely unprecedented both in the numbers of people who have registered and in the number of groups involved in the registration effort", said Judy Gallo, co-convenor of the Greater Cleveland Voter Registration Coalition. "To the extent these newly registered voters turn out to vote – and are not disenfranchised – they will have a tremendous impact on the election in Ohio."

Bush carried Ohio by only 165,019 votes in 2000. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reports that the new registrations are 10 to 1 Democratic.

Gallo said about 600 grassroots volunteers with her group registered 10,000 new voters, while the AFL-CIO, NAACP, America Coming Together, ACORN, and other groups signed up even more, concentrating on African Americans, Latinos, youth and women in working-class neighbourhoods that vote Democratic but with low voter turnouts.

In Ohio, 69 out of 88 counties will use the old punch card machines because of the state's non-compliance with a new law requiring a voter-verifiable paper trail on all electronic voting machines.

In Florida, another battleground state, ACORN announced it has registered 212,317 voters.

People's Weekly World
Newspaper (Abridged) ✪



Determination to remove George W Bush has inspired a record sign-up

Russia-Iran strategic ties

Recent talks between the Russian and Iranian Governments herald deepening strategic ties between the two countries.

Moscow has attached great importance to promoting its partnership with Iran and considered it to be a weighty factor of stability and peace in the adjacent region.

Lying between the two countries on the east side of the Caspian Sea are Armenia, Azerbaijan and the current flashpoint of Georgia. Iran also lies directly between the two US-occupied countries of Afghanistan and Iraq.

The growing US interference in the region, including the setting up of military bases in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, is a major concern of both countries.

The talks, held in both Moscow and Teheran last week, focused on international security, the struggle against terrorism and the illegal drugs trade.

"Moscow and Teheran proceed from the need to develop close co-operation in the struggle against

this global evil without double standards", said the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Another feature of the talks is an agreement for Russia to supply nuclear fuel to Iran and the processing by Russia of spent fuel rods.

Nuclear power plant

The Russians have promised to assist in constructing a new nuclear power plant in Iran, but have insisted the agreement excludes Iran's use of Russian technologies for military purposes.

When in the Sudan recently, the Iranian President Mohammad Khatami said that Iran will not pursue nuclear weapons but that Iran has the right to use particular technologies related to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. He said that Iran has worked out a program for nuclear electricity production.

Other areas of co-operation include the construction of a gas pipeline and the launch by Russia of a communications satellite. ✪

Indonesian Military "unreformed"

Citing "grave concerns over the prospects for real military reforms", 45 members of the US Congress called possible State Department plans to provide foreign military financing for Indonesia in 2006 "premature, unwarranted, and unwise".

In a letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell, the members of Congress wrote that "impunity remains firmly entrenched" and justice has not been served for past human rights violations in East Timor and elsewhere.

"Crackdowns against civilians have escalated in West Papua. The end of martial law in Aceh has not led to improvements on the ground", they wrote.

They called the Indonesian military "a massively corrupt institution", much of whose income "comes from illegal and semi-legal activities, including prostitution, drug-dealing, environmentally

destructive logging, and trafficking in people".

At a briefing recently, the departing US Ambassador to Indonesia Ralph Boyce told the foreign press that he was disappointed that US-Indonesia military relations remain restricted due to Jakarta's failure to prove that it had improved its human rights record. Boyce stated, "we don't have the material with which to seriously go to Congress and do that".

Foreign military financing provides grants and loans for weapons and other military equipment and training. Congress is set to renew the restriction for the 2005 fiscal year.

A copy of the Congress Rep's letter and the signatories can be found at <www.etan.org/news/2004/10housefmf.htm>.

East Timor Action Network (ETAN) ✪

Professor sues for release of coffin photos

US military photographs and videos of the honour guard arrival and transfer ceremonies at Dover Air Force Base for servicemen and women killed in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars will be released to the public if a journalism professor's Freedom of Information (FOI) suit is successful.

"It's all about allowing the American people to accurately and completely assess the price of war", said Professor of Journalism Ralph Begleiter of the University of Delaware.

"This is not a partisan political issue. The ban on releasing such photos has been imposed and supported by governments of both parties.

"The Pentagon's claim that personal privacy is the reason for blocking release of pictures of soldiers' coffins doesn't make sense. The pictures do not identify any

individual soldier, and the Pentagon has selectively allowed or released pictures when the political equation has been different, including when Americans were killed in terrorist attacks in Kenya and Tanzania and in the attack in Yemen on the *USS Cole*.

"They even permitted the release of some pictures of returning casualties from the Afghanistan conflict", said Professor Begleiter.

The lawsuit challenges the censorship policy initiated in 1991 by then-Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, and continued by the Pentagon under the Clinton and Bush Administrations.

The 1991 policy reversed the traditional American practice of honouring the fallen in solemn public ceremonies centred on flag-draped caskets. In April 2004, the Air Force Mobility Command released under the Freedom of

Information Act 361 photographs of recent Dover ceremonies, only to have the Defense Department call the action a mistake and hold up any further releases.

A Department of Defense Spokesperson, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy Molino, explained "[if] for some reason we find that the policy is inconsistent with the FOI Act we'll look at whether or not the policy needs to be changed".

Working with the National Security Archive, a research institute in foreign affairs that uses the FOI Act to obtain information about US government operations, Professor Begleiter has systematically requested all still and moving images of the return of fallen soldiers to Dover Air Force Base from October 2001 to the present. ✪

Koizumi's government in decay

Disintegration, corruption and confusion – these are the signs of the downfall of a government, and the Japanese Government of Junichiro Koizumi is showing all the symptoms, says an editorial in *SignPost*, the newspaper of the New Socialist Party of Japan.

Koizumi's three-year tenure as Prime Minister has been marked by job losses, privatisation of public enterprises and deregulation aimed at allowing giant multinational corporations a free-for-all in the domestic arena.

Japanese workers have been hit with wage cuts, longer working hours and deteriorating conditions. Competition with transnational corporations has forced the closure of many small businesses, particularly in agriculture.

Attempts are being made to cut pensions, raise the consumption tax [Japan's GST] and privatise the postal service. Even the middle class is being decimated.

Corruption and bribery abound. The trial of an accountant of the

ruling Liberal Democratic Party has been suspended in an attempted cover-up. "We know that these revelations represent only the tip of the iceberg" says the editorial.

People are becoming increasingly disillusioned with politics, resentful at having been deceived by the government and manipulated by the media over the recent economic reforms.

With the smell of decay hanging over it the Koizumi administration suffered losses at the recent Upper House elections.

The mass media promotes the concept of a "two party system" and at the elections directed people to vote for the opposition Democratic Party of Japan. Yet this "opposition" presents the same ideology and program and does not offer the people an alternative government at all.

In its turn to the right the ailing LDP Government is implementing unconstitutional policies. They include:

• Aggressive actions in the name "national defence" with solely par-

liamentary approval, ignoring public opinion;

• Increasing the capabilities of Japan's Self Defence Forces and deploying them overseas;

• The manufacture and export of weapons;

• Pursuing stronger military ties with the United States and participation in the United States' Missile Defence Shield;

• Seeking a permanent seat on the UN Security Council so as to provide another pro-US voice.

The Government is planning a referendum in 2007 to amend the anti-war and non-aggression provisions of Japan's constitution.

The major task of the people is to prevent the amendment of the constitution in 2007 says the newspaper's editorial.

"We must continue to exert our utmost efforts to defend our people's rights and living standards. We must pursue our program throughout everyday life, organising in our workplaces and communities." ✪

Halliburton scandal investigated

The Bush administration and Halliburton have been included in an expanded US Congressional investigation into the United Nations' oil-for-food scandal. The subcommittee, chaired by Connecticut Republican Christopher Shays, will subpoena documents on the management of oil revenues by the now-disbanded US Coalition Provisional Authority, which governed Iraq from May 2003 through June 2004.

Shays' subcommittee will also subpoena Pentagon audits on Iraqi reconstruction contracts, including the audits on Halliburton's no-bid oil contracts that were financed through revenues obtained by the UN's oil-for-food program during the period when Saddam Hussein governed Iraq.

Some of the funds obtained by Saddam Hussein via the UN's oil-for-food program were used to finance Halliburton's no-bid contracts after the US-led invasion toppled the Iraqi government in March 2003.

Former Halliburton employees have described multiple abuses of US taxpayers' money in Iraq, but a congressional investigation of Iraqi oil funds paid to US contractors had not been proposed until now.

The subcommittee intends to subpoena the Federal Reserve Bank of New York for information on the management of Iraq's oil revenues and to request that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld provide audits on non-competitive contracts.

So far, the Bush administration has admitted that US companies bribed Saddam Hussein's government in order to win business from the dictator. The US ambassador to the United Nations, John Negroponte, told Congress last April that US companies had paid the bribes in exchange for government contracts during the 1990s. Senators Richard Lugar (Republican, Indiana) and Joseph

Biden (Democrat, Delaware) urged Negroponte to disclose the names of US companies involved in the bribes, but he refused.

The congressional General Accounting Office estimated that Saddam's regime acquired US\$10.1 billion illegally through the sale of US\$5.7 billion in oil smuggled to Syria, Turkey and Jordan, and \$4.4 billion through kickbacks paid by firms selling food, medicine and other goods to Iraq. The illegal sales occurred between 1997 and 2002.

Ironically, some of that money ultimately was paid to Halliburton to finance Iraq's reconstruction after Saddam's downfall.

Meanwhile, Halliburton is going to great lengths to ensure its influence on the White House is maintained.

According to filings with the US Senate Office of Public Records Halliburton spent \$770,000 lobbying Washington in first half of 2004, a 400 percent increase from the \$150,000 spent during the first six months of 2003.

Halliburton's in-house lobbyists include retired Army Lt Gen Charles E Dominy; Donald A Deline, a former counsel to the Senate Armed Services Committee; and George P Sigalos, a former press aide to Republican Congressman Philip M Crane.

These people pushed for favourable (to Halliburton of course) legislation on asbestos, tort reform, the World Trade Organisation, energy policy, the Export-Import Bank, the Overseas Private Investment Corp., government procurement, military contracting, immigration and homeland security.

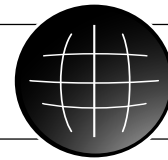
Earlier this year, Halliburton hired an outside lobbying firm, Covington & Burling, to lobby Washington on behalf of its KBR Government Operations division, the same division being pummeled by the media, the Pentagon and Congress for its handling of Iraq



contracts. Covington & Burling was paid \$520,000 to handle "inquiries concerning company's construction and service contracts in Iraq", the firm said in a filing.

According to the filing, Covington & Burling listed the following people as lobbyists for Halliburton/KBR: Roderick A DeArment, who was chief of staff to now-retired Republican Senator Bob Dole; Martin B Gold, former counsel to Republican Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist; Stuart E Eizenstat, US ambassador to the European Union during the Clinton administration; and David M Marchick, who served in various posts in the Clinton administration.

www.halliburtonwatch.org



Global briefs

CHINA: China's State Council (cabinet) has outlined measures to ease the growing gap between rich and poor, and urged local authorities to improve their systems of welfare and disaster relief. "The meeting also discussed ways to improve the medical system in the countryside, support poverty-stricken areas and help support those laid off from state factories", Xinhua news agency said. The State Council also pledged to strengthen support for poor farmers, including training in production methods and possible small loans, as well as more job training to laid-off workers.

THE NETHERLANDS: Some 200,000 protesters marched in Amsterdam against cuts to welfare and health coverage, as well as a freeze on civil service salaries and the minimum wage. "They're taking away our social security, which we're very proud of in The Netherlands", said trade union negotiator Sierp Holterman. A poll by the national radio network found 60 percent of the Dutch public opposed to the cuts. The unions accused the government of abandoning the country's tradition of consensus-based labour relations. Union federations have boycotted talks with the government and employers, and have demonstrated in parts of the country where strikes are rare. Last month 50,000 protesters brought the Port of Rotterdam to a halt for a day.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA: High-ranking US military officials have been linked to accused plotters of a coup attempt earlier this year that sought to overthrow oil-rich Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang Nguema. Theresa Whelan, a Pentagon official responsible for African affairs, met twice in Washington with London-based businessman Greg Wales before last February's coup attempt. Wales is an alleged coup organiser, though he has denied the accusation. Washington has denied Nguema's charges. Shortly after he was allegedly paid \$US8000 by Simon Mann, now jailed in Zimbabwe on coup-related charges, Wales participated in a Washington conference of the International Peace Operations Association, made up of US private military companies. There, Whelan told the group the Pentagon was eager to see them operate in Africa, saying they were cheaper and spared the US the need to be visible on the ground. Wales met with Whelan again shortly before the failed coup.

USA: In a strange post-industrial twist, most people who have lost their jobs in the garment industry are first-generation Mexican women. They typically are illiterate and speak little English. They came to El Paso in the 1960s, '70s and '80s, when the American factories moved down from the northern states in search of cut-rate border labour. With those factories having moved out of El Paso, these American citizens find they are members of the obsolescent class. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has had a big impact on the low-skilled, low-wage Latino workers near the border. California lost 116,000 jobs from 1993 through 2002 because of NAFTA, many of them textile jobs.

Cuba: US rice imports would exceed 500,000 tons

Ivan Terrero

Despite US Government restrictions on Cuban trade, the island has become the second-largest importer, after Mexico, of long grain rice from the United States after signing a letter of intent at Havana's Nacional Hotel on October 7, which also anticipates further purchases from this country.

This year, the island will buy approximately 93,000 tonnes of rice from the United States through its main food import company, ALIMPORT. This amount is in excess of 15 percent of the total volume purchased abroad every year, 550,000 tonnes.

ALIMPORT President Pedro Alvarez Borrego explained that this contract demonstrates Cuba's intention to increase rice and rice seed purchases.

Alvarez also pointed out that Cuba could overtake Mexico (currently importing over 600,000 tonnes of rice per year), the top buyer of US rice, and even become partners with the United States in its national rice production if the current limitations on trade imposed by the White House did not exist.

Dwight Roberts, director of the

US Rice Producers Association and the counterpart in the Cuban letter of intent, highlighted that Cuba has the potential to import more than 500,000 tonnes of rice per year, but the main obstacle to this transaction as well as the purchase of other crops is the impossibility to grant credits to Cuban import companies, a common practice in worldwide trade.

Alvarez explained that, in addition to this obstacle, US business people and cargo vessels have to request special licences from their government to travel to Cuba. Moreover Washington obstructs Cuban foreign trade and tourism, diminishing its foreign currency income and limiting the country's purchasing capability as a result.

Hurricane Michelle severely damaged agriculture on the island, and in December 2001, as an exception, the United States authorised limited sales of food items under harsh conditions such as cash payment.

In that year, Cuban purchases in the agricultural sector reached US\$4.4 million, increasing to US\$175.8 million in 2002, and US\$343.9 in 2003.

The ALIMPORT president

explained that up to September 2004, his company has closed deals worth US\$370.6 million, thus placing it among the 26 main purchasers of U.S. agricultural produce.

Approximately 3500 companies contacted ALIMPORT regarding the so-called "opening," and 1500 have visited the island. Most of these delegations signed agreements, and in some cases letters of intent – such as the one on October 7 – which included a clause expressing both parties' commitment to fighting US sanctions against the island.

The US Government, however, has insisted that these commercial transactions do not open up new possibilities within the frame of the blockade's regulations in force for over 40 years, nor they mean a change in the hostile policy towards Havana.

Current transactions are only in one direction since Cuba can purchase US food items, but it is prohibited from exporting its goods to US territory.

In addition, the island is obliged to pay in cash and utilise banks from third countries. Cuba cannot ask for credit from US agencies or use its merchant fleet to transport the goods it buys.

Granma

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



email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Black Saturday 9th October 2004

I think the most frightening thing about the election results was the emergence of the religious right in the form of Family First.

If they are really concerned about the family, they should be taking a stand on the question of problems in the health service, as well as education. They should be campaigning in support of Medicare as well as such issues as After School Care. They should be looking at the standard of living of the average family.

It is no good talking about family values if the material conditions of the family are not taken care of first. If these people read their Bibles, they would know that Jesus paid a lot of attention to material needs. Take the stories of The Loaves and the Fishes,

Turning Water into Wine and The Good Samaritan (the best known) as examples of Jesus meeting the material needs of people.

It has been reported that some members of Family First advocate burning lesbians and blowing up Mosques. Do they really see such ignorance, intolerance and bigotry as family values?

A great church man once said that communists are Christians who put Christianity into practice. It is likely that not many young people today have heard of Dr John Hewlet Johnson, The Red Dean of Canterbury. I think it will be a good idea to propagate some of his works to answer the anti Christian ideas of Family First and other right wing groups.

**Ron Barrett
Mt Druitt, NSW**

"For the Term of His Natural Life"

No, this is not an historical novel. This is reality being played out in present day Australia. Locations involve isolated islands, high security camps, the Parliament and Law Courts of Australia.

Sydney

POSTPONED!

**What future for South Africa?
a forum with Zico Tamela of the SACP**

**scheduled for October 28
has been postponed due to visa difficulties.
Keep reading *The Guardian* for future dates**

Characters include people who have fled torture, small children, a Prime Minister and possibly yourself if you voted last Saturday for the government that has passed legislation that allows people to be detained indefinitely.

Did you think it was not really happening?

Did you forget there are over 80 kids still locked up?

Were you thinking of interest rates?

Did you think this could not possibly be true in present day Australia?

Well, it is true, and you may have voted to make it stay true. There are people who have no country, who cannot be sent back to areas of danger, but who cannot prove their refugee status. They have committed no crime, yet have the maximum sentence. This applies to even the smallest child.

Will you settle back on the couch to watch this drama unfold, close your eyes, or maybe raise your voice for compassion and a "fair go"?

**Elaine Smith
West Haven, NSW**

Prosperity influenced voters

Where did the wandering voters go? The WA Senate figures and percentages give some idea where they went.

The Democrats lost 1.97% of the total vote and One Nation lost 4.92%, a total of 6.92% that built into the Liberal's increase of 7.88% – an early cashing in of preferences. The Greens increased by 1.65%,

probably taken from Labor which lost 2.47%. Some of the Greens' increase could have come from the Democrats.

On a rough calculation about 1% of the total vote of previous Labor supporters swung to the Liberals. At a quick look it appears to be somewhat the same story in other states. The relative prosperity of the economy, helped by oil, iron ore and coal, would have made a lot of people see no need for major change.

**Vic Williams
Perth, WA**

The Church and the State reject women

Looks like the ALP and the Anglican Church have both rejected the skills and quality of women.

In WA there wasn't one woman candidate on the ALP Senate ticket. WHY?

Organisations that reject the value of women will find that women reject them. They stay away from the Church and political parties that ignore their valuable contribution.

I sat through the debate on women Bishops at the General Synod last week and my impression was that the room was stacked against women. Even some of the men who said they supported the proposition "in principle" eventually voted against it. It was the same at this last election.

Women were blatantly patronised throughout the Synod debate as they were during the ALP election campaign.

Where was the passion? Where was the vision? Where was the

progress? Where was the inclusive support for women's skills and contribution?

Women are subjected to insidious tokenism by being given the illusion of partial success, while at the same time making real success appear to be a far distant, extremely difficult to obtain "elusive objective".

In my experience strong female-identified women frequently find themselves isolated in patriarchal institutions, like the Church and the State. When surrounded by token women many women just opt out and get on with life at the coal face. Our inherent strength comes from knowing the difference from separation and separatism.

**Mary Jenkins
Spearwood, WA**

A bouquet

I am writing to congratulate the comrades responsible for the good, informative reading contained in the latest issue of *The Guardian*. The members of the Party also need education so that they, in turn, can pass the lessons on to whomever they contact. In this way, like the snowball, knowledge will continue to grow ever bigger and bigger.

Howard certainly threw everything he could into the election campaign, no matter how dirty the tactics. Truth will bear this assessment out, so carry on with the good work. Truth stands out like a beacon and will prevail in the future no matter how long it takes. Best of luck to you all.

**Jim McKenzie
Adelaide, SA**

Culture & Life

by
Rob Gowland

Philosophically, Communists are materialists, that is, we believe that matter is primary, that as human beings evolved they created the concept of God (or gods) to help them make sense of the world around them.

So, matter came first, ideas (idealism) came later. But it puts us seriously behind the eight ball.

I mean, how can we compete with these idealists? Take the Mormon Church, for example. It is growing at an exponential rate, and yet, even among religious outfits, the Mormons' views are rightly considered particularly daft. So how are they getting all these recruits?

Easy. They are signing up (baptising) *dead* people. They have a huge staff engaged on compiling lists of the dead, from old cemeteries, parish records, electoral rolls, what have you.

Then they gather eager young Mormons together and "baptise" all these dead people *by proxy* into the Mormon Church. And the beauty of it is that, being dead, the new recruits cannot object to being enrolled in a Church they never bothered to join while they were alive.

Now how can we compete with that sort of thing? Sure, we could stage a proxy ceremony and sign up, say, all the diggers who fell at Eureka on the principle that if the CPA had been around in 1854 they would probably have joined it. But what would be the point?

As materialists, the idea of sign-

ing up dead people is just too far removed from reality to be tenable. Common sense would tell us we were being inane.

A Communist party is a party of activists, and if there is one thing you can say for certain about dead people, they are not all that active.

But some idealists (in the philosophical sense) who are not yet dead are definitely active. The recent Federal election showed that very clearly.

US-style evangelical Christians, in the form of the Assemblies of God, entered their own political party (the Family First Party) to strengthen the conservative side of politics.

These self-proclaimed custodians and protectors of what they are pleased to call "family values", are socially very dangerous. Comprised of self-righteous zealots and bigots, they pursue policies that are in fact cruel and inhumane.

A Queensland National Party MP was rebuked by his Party's leader for having the temerity to allude to Family First as "the lunatic Religious Right". The MP was perfectly correct in his assessment, but the Nats and the Libs (like Bush's Republicans in the US) want the Religious Right as their political ally.

Hence criticism of Family first is verboten; their polarising of Australian politics along religious lines must be denied and ignored; their narrow, bigoted and anti-human concerns must be camouflaged and misrepresented.

When questioned during the Federal election about their close association with a church-based party of this type, Liberal Party spokespersons were wont to declare that the Family First members that they had dealt with were all "decent" or even "nice" people, committed to "Christian values".

Spokesmen for Libs and Nats

alike were quick to declare they shared those same "Christian values". Regrettably, perhaps, they did not specify whether that meant adopting the principle of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" or renouncing all worldly wealth or what.

Significantly, the values actually espoused by evangelical Christians are totally compatible with the accumulation of wealth through capitalist business practices. Jesus, with his concern for the poor and downtrodden, would surely have viewed such activities in his name with alarm.

Libs, in bed with the most rapacious big business interests, and Nats representing big squatters and agri-business interests find this kind of religion very easy to live with.

One quickly notices that "family values" and "Christian values" are used interchangeably, which would appear to indicate a belief that Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and other non-Christians (including atheists, of course) lack "family values".

But what is that meaningless expression "family values" meant to convey, anyway? If Family First (and the Libs and Nats) were really concerned about families, you would think their first concern would be trying to make life easier for people with families.

Instead, the first concern of Family First is trying to prevent women from controlling their own reproduction: in other words, banning abortion.

A Family First leader, interviewed on the ABC on election night, said their aim was to get members into Parliament who had "a Judeo-Christian ethic". By which one hopes she did not mean "an eye for an eye" or the stoning of women taken in adultery.

Mind you, if Family First does get a presence in Parliament in the



future, we can confidently expect their MPs to press for legislative changes to make divorce harder to obtain (under the guise of "protecting families", no doubt). A Liberal/National Party government dependent on their support would also not be backward in proposing cuts to

single parents' benefits (to discourage sin, presumably).

All of which should mean plenty of scope for us to recruit new members, new fighters for the working people's cause – and all without having to sign up any dead people! ☺



Sun October 24 ~
~ Sat October 30

In episode three of *In Search Of Shakespeare* (ABC 2.00pm Sundays), Michael Wood explores Shakespeare's rise to fame and fortune in Elizabethan London, where tens of thousands of people attended the theatre every week.

Elizabethan England was still rent by religious persecution, and Shakespeare wisely ignored the advice (in print, would you believe) of a leading but secretly pro-Catholic poet to devote his art to "the Glory of God".

Instead, with a family to provide for and a theatre company dependent on his plays for their income, he wrote the hugely successful *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* cementing his place as England's greatest popular playwright.

Once again, Wood relates Shakespeare's works to the political and personal developments of the time, not least the sudden death of Shakespeare's only son Hamnet aged 11. The pain behind some of his greatest sonnets is made starkly clear.

With excellent help from the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), Wood shows how Shakespeare fought back against rival trends in the theatre. He also makes clear the reasons for the explicit anti-racist theme of *Othello* (Othello's murder of Desdemona is powerfully and graphically performed by the RSC).

And, as ever in this series, the photography is absolutely marvelous.

The ABC's preview tapes for the last few weeks have managed to get lost in the post (a consequence of our move to a new building), so I have not been able to preview most of the other programs of interest this week. I will have to take a chance and rely on the program notes issued by the ABC and SBS.

The new two-part series *Leonardo* (ABC 7.30pm Sundays) is a co-production between the BBC and US cable outfit Discovery Channel. It is presumably Discovery Channel's money that pays for the "state of the art" CGI [computer graphic interface] in this series.

As the notes tell us: "Dramatic reconstruction and CGI allow us to retread Leonardo's footsteps in Renaissance Italy - through some of its most beautiful landscapes and most historic cities including Florence, Milan, Venice and Rome."

"The construction of Florence Cathedral is reproduced, just as Leonardo saw it when he first entered the city. Huge canal schemes designed by Leonardo are brought to life for the first time."

"Virtual reality even allows the viewer to 'walk' into some of Leonardo's works of art - some of the most famous art in the world. By entering paintings such as *The Virgin of the Rocks*, the viewer experiences Leonardo's synthesis of observation, science and art."

I seriously doubt that last comment, but the series certainly sounds visually interesting.

South Park, the animated series that is barely animated at all, returns for a new series of 15 episodes this week (SBS 8.30pm Mondays).

An annoying mixture of right- and left-wing attitudes, the series presumably reflects the typically confused politics of the young anarchists who make it, and their belief that bad taste is "radical".

Once again the targets include

gun nuts and also teaching kids to kill (as in this week's episode, *Good Times With Weapons*). Next week, it is doing *anything* for personal success, as Cartman pretends to be handicapped in order to beat a kid in a wheelchair in a sporting event.

The episodes on November 8 and 29 deal with religious and racial prejudice respectively, with fans of Mel Gibson's *The Passion* banding together under Cartman's leadership to carry out its message.

When it comes to stories about graft and corruption or corporate interference in the political process, the US Public Broadcasting Service can be excellent (their program on Detroit's covering up of the vulnerability of 4-wheel-drive vehicles was a bottle).

Unfortunately, more explicitly political subjects seem to bring out all their inhibitions. Consequently, I do not expect much in the way of revelations or insight from *The Choice 2004* (SBS 8.30pm Tuesdays), PBS's two-part "in-depth look" at the two main US presidential candidates.

A PBS *Frontline* program, *The Choice 2004* has been made by "award-winning documentary filmmaker Martin Smith and correspondent Nick Lemann, former writer for *The New Yorker* and current dean of the Columbia University School of Journalism".

As PBS says in its handout, *The Choice 2004* "will go beyond political rhetoric and campaign packaging to explore how the candidates and their values have been shaped by their family background and by history, victory and defeat."

"Eschewing political pundits in favour of insightful comments from friends, mentors, historians, and advisors, *The Choice 2004* will be filled with rich personal stories and first-hand observations giving a rare glimpse of the presidential contenders before heading to the polls in November."

Uh huh. *Sure* it will.



Should be visually interesting (*Leonardo*)

Daughter From Danang (ABC 9.30 Wednesday) is a rather sad film about longing and cultural differences.

In 1975, when the Vietnam War was ending, seven-year-old Heidi Bub (aka Mai Thi Hiep) was one of the thousands of Amerasian children brought to the United States. Her mother, Mai Thi Kim, had feared rumours that such children would be in danger after the Americans left, so she sent her daughter away hoping to save her life.

In the US Heidi was adopted by a single woman in Tennessee who made her hide her Vietnamese background. She became in her own words "101 percent American".

But after relations with her adopted mother deteriorated, she began a search for her Vietnamese mother, motivated by a longing for a mother-daughter bond and unconditional love. When the mother and daughter finally reunite 22 years later in Danang, filmmakers Gail Dolgin and Vicente Franco were there to film it.

Expectations of a deep connection are quickly shattered by cultural dissonance. Dolgin and Franco's film of the tragic climax of misunderstanding between Heidi and her

family won the Best Documentary prize at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival and the San Francisco Film Festival's Golden Gate Award the same year.

This week's episode of the Australian series of observational documentaries *Stories From A Children's Hospital* (ABC 8.00pm Thursdays) is called *The Cost Of Living*. It deals with the huge costs - financial, emotional and psychological - of keeping very premature babies alive and well with the help of complex medical technology and 24-hour intensive care.

Produced by Andrew Ogilvie and written and directed by Steve Westh, the episode focuses on obstetric Professor John Newnham, for whom pre-term birth is "the single greatest problem facing human reproduction today".

Consequently, Professor Newnham has embarked on a study of pregnant women to determine why pre-term birth occurs and what can be done to reduce it.

Amazingly, he thinks he may have found the answer by concentrating not on the reproductive organs of his subjects, but by measuring the extent of the bacteria they carry ... in their mouths ...

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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TRAVEL AGENT: Flight Centre, David Gardette.
Shop 13, Lygon Street, Carlton VIC 3053

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The Guardian

74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
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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,
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010

Sydney

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Gaelic Club, 64 Devonshire St, Surry Hills

Dinner afterwards in the Royal Exhibition Hotel across the road

October 22

UNITED STATES' INFLUENCE ON AUSTRALIAN PARTY POLITICS

Prof George Parsons Prof History, Macquarie Uni

Greg Pemberton Dept of Politics, Macquarie Uni

October 29

NEW ZEALAND; WHY IS IT POLITICALLY SO FAR AHEAD OF AUSTRALIA? WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THEM?

Ken Johnston Sociology, Macquarie Uni (Recently retired)

Prof Ian Burnley Geography UNSW

November 5

US BASES IN AUSTRALIA THE SOCIAL IMPACT

Hannah Middleton Australian Anti Bases Campaign Coalition,
Board Member of Global Network Against Weapons in Space

Jane Brock Migrant Philippines-Australia;
President Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Inq: Pat Toms 02 9358 4834 pbtoms@bigpond.com; Janet Fischer 02 9398 8891;
PO Box 325 Rozelle NSW 2039; Win Childs Fax 02 9660 6554

www.politicsinthepub.org

Howard's explosive agenda

Bob Briton

One week after the election Howard is doing his level best to sound humble and moderate. He insists the Government will not ride roughshod over its opponents to enact its reactionary program. "We're not going to allow this enhanced position to go to our heads. That would be a big mistake and the Australian public would not appreciate it", he told the media recently. Howard, who is not noted for his honesty even in small things, wants the Australian people to believe that his majority in the House of Reps and the likelihood of his control of the Senate will not lead to his turning Australia into a neo-liberal laboratory with fearsome legislation.

The fact is that Howard and his soon-to-be-announced ministerial team would not have to dream up even one new piece of anti-people legislation to achieve that goal. The passing of the various bills previously rejected by the Senate would see to that.

The list is a long one. While the public was generally aware that the full privatisation of Telstra and unfair dismissal laws were being put back on the agenda, the controversy surrounding many of the other thwarted bills had subsided by election day. This undoubtedly helped the Government's re-election cause.

Parliament resumes on November 16 with the old Senate still in place. Initially, Howard & Co may well choose to concentrate on relatively less contentious (though still very damaging) legislation to bring about changes to Medicare and the Private Health Insurance Rebate. They might wait until the new Coalition-dominated Senate is in place next July before pushing the more confronting parts of their "reform" agenda. Whenever it happens the passing of rejected bills and already drafted new legislation poses a grave threat to the people of Australia.

Potent reactionary mixture

The longest wish list of the Coalition's corporate masters is headed "industrial relations reform". On it are plans for:

- Exempting small business from unfair dismissal legislation and removing the consideration of most unfair dismissal matters from the states.
- Assisting business to get their workers into non-union Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) and extending the contract period from three to five years.
- Reducing the number of allowable matters in awards – from 20 to 17 to start with.
- Establishing a special commission for the construction industry to continue the union-bashing work of the Cole Royal Commission.
- Allowing third parties affected by strikes at other workplaces to apply to the Industrial Relations Commission to outlaw the industrial action.

• Toughening the provisions of the *Trade Practices Act* outlawing secondary boycotts.

• Tightening the restrictions on union representatives needing to enter a workplace.

• Forcing secret ballots of union members before a strike.

• Excluding workers obliged to work as contractors from the protection of awards.

• "Harmonising" state and Federal industrial legislation with the ultimate aim of gutting state structures.

The "War on Terror" ... and beyond

Howard has no intention of being left behind in the rush by reactionary governments worldwide to get laws limiting the civil rights of the people on the books. In every instance it is being done on the pretext of being "tough on terror".



The Government has a long list of anti-union laws

The PM has just appointed Major-General Duncan Lewis of the "elite" Special Operations Command to head the country's most powerful policy advising agency – the national security division of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Major-General will co-ordinate the Government's "anti-terror" efforts and defence policy issues. Among the "terror" measures he will be helping to bed down are:

• The Surveillance Devices Bill, which will set out a more "flexible" national approach to the use of bugging devices by police.

• Legislation to allow easier access to stored information like SMS messages and answering machines.

• The doubling of the staff and funding for the Office of National Assessments.

• \$20 million for ASIO to build up a regional spy training school.

• \$100 million for the establishment of Australian Federal Police flying squads to be deployed in the region in the "war on terror".

• The "protection" of evidence given by security agencies in court proceedings – full blown secret trials.

• The screening of lawyers of terror suspects and their exclusion from court cases deemed to be in the national interest.

• A new business liaison unit within ASIO "to strengthen coordination and information flows between the business world and the intelligence community", as *The Australian* put it.

Shooting the ABC's independent voice

The conflict and controversy that will flow from Howard's fourth term agenda are easy to foresee from the brief survey given above. Another important objective of the Government is that the radical changes and disruption to Australian society should go ahead with as little adverse comment as possible. Malcolm Fraser once described this

as the desire to keep politics off the front page.

The ABC will remain a target of the Government's smothering attention. Last year former Communications Minister Richard Alston hounded the ABC through the Australian Broadcasting Authority over alleged bias in its reporting of the invasion of Iraq. The national broadcaster was bullied into employing Reham – a polling company owned by Murdoch's

ties are such measures as the elimination of proportional representation for the Senate, thereby hoping to eliminate the smaller parties forever. Then there are changes to the present cross-media ownership laws which would allow an even further monopolisation of the media by Packer and Murdoch.

Peter Saunders from the Centre for Independent Studies, one of the "think tanks" advising the Federal Government, wants the Government

Howard has no intention of being left behind in the rush by reactionary governments worldwide to get laws limiting the civil rights of the people

News Corp – to monitor the ABC's programs for anti-government "bias".

The appointment of members to the ABC's board used to be accompanied by a tense political struggle. The Coalition should now be able to appoint trustees to these positions with ease. It is due to make three such appointments shortly. The Government has promised a review of ABC funding and the rewriting of the Corporation's charter is on the cards. Advertising on the ABC and the intrusion of the additional corporate influence are likely outcomes.

Attorney General Philip Ruddock has warned the states that the Commonwealth will introduce federal libel legislation if they do not submit to a uniform national defamation code. Defamation actions are already a refuge from criticism of the rich and powerful in most cases. Ruddock's new code would remove truth as a defence for the media and put the onus on defendants to demonstrate that the "national interest" was served with their comments.

To add to this short list of nas-

to use its historic power to overhaul disability pensions, end compulsory voting and to look at a proposal to end government funding of public schools and instead, issue vouchers to parents to pay the school of their "choice".

Nightmare

If this nightmare should come about the people of Australia will have none other to thank than the ALP leaders in several states who gave preferences to the Family First Party rather than The Greens and, thereby, handed Howard its likely free hand.

The result of the Federal Election is a call to action for the labour movement, the trade unions and all left and progressive community organisations and individuals. There is now an even greater urgency to build unity among opponents of Howard's corporate agenda. The weeks and months ahead must not be wasted. Discussion that leads quickly to organisation and action is required to defeat Howard's savage fourth term agenda. ✪



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