

100,000 dead in Iraq

A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY

The British medical journal *The Lancet* has published the first scientific study of the human cost of the war on Iraq. The study has found that at least 100,000 Iraqis have lost their lives since the US, backed by Britain and Australia, launched their invasion in March last year. The revelation of this horrifying body count confirms that the leaders of those countries – George W Bush, Tony Blair and John Howard – have committed a crime against humanity.

More than half the dead are women and children, mostly killed by coalition air strikes. The US is now preparing to perpetrate more death and carnage with major assaults on the cities of Falluja and Ramadi following the US elections, which will add to the growing civilian death toll.

The study was carried out by public health experts from the US and Iraq with a survey of 1000 households in 33 randomly selected neighbourhoods around the country.

The Lancet called the research

“a remarkable piece of work by a courageous team of scientists”.

One member of the survey team was Les Roberts, of the Bloomberg School of Public Health at John Hopkins University in the US state of Maryland.

“Making conservative assumptions, we think about 100,000 excess deaths or more happened since the 2003 invasion of Iraq”, he said. Official estimates have persistently placed the number of dead at around 10,000.

The researchers were savagely critical of the policy of the occupying forces of refusing to count Iraqi casualties (“We don’t do body counts”, said the then head of the US forces, General Tommy Franks). The suspicious purpose behind this policy, that it was to cover up the number of civilian deaths, has now been tragically confirmed.

The scientists also point out that the Geneva Convention requires occupying forces to protect the civilian population and expressed concern that more than half the deaths were of women and children.

In Britain, the figures drew a furious response. Clare Short, the former cabinet minister who resigned over Blair’s decision to go to war, said, “It is really horrifying. How many more lives are to be taken? It is no wonder, given this tragic death toll, that the resistance to the occupation is growing.

“Tony Blair talks simplistically about it getting better in Iraq. These figures prove it is just an illusion.”

Labour Against the War spokesperson Alan Simpson, remarked, “At some point, the slaughter of civilians in the name of peace has to become a crime of war. This is not a matter of indifference but criminality. These figures are horrific ... it is a scandal that the world remains silent.”

Taking the worn out line that the “removal of Saddam Hussein” was a “great benefit to future generations of Iraqi people”, Australian Defence Minister Robert Hill responded to the findings by saying, “Unfortunately there will always be some civilian casualties.” ✪



Developers eye the Block

Janice Hamilton

Sydney developers are licking their lips at the prospect of a huge chunk of valuable inner-city land coming up for grabs – Redfern’s “Block”.

Currently administered by the Aboriginal Housing Company, the Block is home to an Indigenous population who have a long traditional association to the Redfern area. It was also the site of the clashes in February this year between Indigenous people and police following the suspicious death of 17-year-old Thomas Hickey.

NSW Premier Bob Carr has strenuously denied claims that his newly announced Redfern-Waterloo Authority, which will be given planning powers to “revitalise” the area, is aiming to get rid of what is seen

as a hotspot of drugs, crime and violence.

But the warning signs are there – the Carr Government has long been in the pocket of the developer lobby and the land, running between Cleveland St and Redfern Station, is prime inner Sydney real estate.

In his announcement of the plan, Carr pretty much gave the game away: “The Block is a key problem and doing something new with it, maybe focusing on individual home ownership, having them proud of their property, maybe that’s the way forward”.

According to the Premier the Authority will be similar to the former Sydney Cove Authority, which oversaw the redevelopment of the The Rocks area during the ’70s and ’80s, turning it into a developer’s dream and converting it into a tour-

ist and hotel district. The Authority is to be headed by NSW Utilities Minister, and former Sydney Mayor, Frank Sartor.

The current Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore, will also be invited by the Government to be on the authority, but as to whether there will be local Indigenous representation is unclear as no actual detail of the make up of the authority or its strategies has been released.

Moore cautiously welcomed the Government’s proposal but says it must be used as a chance to improve infrastructure and services, not just as a development exercise.

“Any new authority needs to deliver infrastructure and urban and community renewal”, she noted. Ms Moore said that after years of talk the community could be forgiven for suspecting that the authority is

to be a means for the Government to override existing planning processes and bypass the recently elected independent Sydney Council.

“Aboriginal organisations are very angry about the whole thing”, said Naomi Mayers is the chief executive of the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS). “It’s just out of the blue ... There was no consultation.”

The AMS’s Peter Fernando added that the State Government’s failure to communicate with the locals was “nonsensical”.

The head of the Aboriginal Housing Company, Mick Mundine, who administers Indigenous housing projects in the Redfern area, says there needs to be Aboriginal involvement in the plan, and that work done by his organisation toward improving the area must not be ignored.

The Aboriginal Housing Company has been involved in the development of a community social plan for the area which includes strategies for addressing the social and economic problems that have faced the Indigenous population of Redfern for generations.

“We’re willing to work with the Government. But I put it back on the Government to start respecting the Aboriginal people too”, Mr Mundine said.

The local community have made it clear that the only way the authority can make progress is if it addresses the fundamental problems facing the Indigenous community, those being chronic unemployment and poverty, and lack of affordable housing, health care and other essential services. ✪

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The Guardian

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The right-wing push

The policy direction that the ALP is taking in the post-election period is already becoming apparent. The appointment of right-wingers, Stephen Smith as the shadow Minister for Industrial Affairs and Wayne Swan as the shadow Treasurer are definite straws in the wind.

Wayne Swan declared that he intends to snuggle up to the executives of company boardrooms for a "chicken salad offensive". There is no suggestion from him or any other ALP leader that they will seriously set out to win back the many workers who voted for Howard or promote the interests of those millions of workers who continue look to the ALP.

Mark Latham would have us believe that the working class has been subsumed by "contractors, consultants, franchises and small businesses" who are clearly regarded as a more important electorate than the army of blue and white collar workers who remain the driving force of production and the economy.

Ominously, Mark Latham also spoke of "welfare reform" when addressing the ALP Tasmanian conference recently and by that he does not mean that the ALP will maintain or extend the welfare rights of needy recipients.

Another right-winger, Kevin Rudd, remains as shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs. He is signalling a weaker policy line on the Iraq war. Instead of opposing this dirty war and firmly calling for an end to Australia's involvement he has attacked the Howard Government for its alleged failure to take action against "terrorism" in Asia. This is simply a diversion to cover up the ALP's lack of principle regarding the Iraq war.

The ALP leadership seems set to abandon its pre-election policy to protect Tasmania's old growth forests from the chainsaws of the loggers. The *Sydney Morning Herald* anticipates that it will be "jobs over conservation" following acrimony in ALP leadership ranks after last month's election defeat. The *SMH* reports that Tasmania's Premier is to demand that Federal Labor "revise" its election policy and allow the logging of old-growth forests.

None of these ALP leadership back-slides will come as a surprise to those who recognise Mark Latham as a committed right-winger. Nor should it come as a surprise that he would throw election promises and policies overboard to replace them with compromises and accommodation to the interests of the corporations. ALP spokespersons are out to assure company boardrooms that they have nothing to fear from an ALP Government.

On another front, the Federal Coalition Government and State ALP Governments are preparing to do deals on government responsibilities following the appeal by NSW Premier Bob Carr for a Commonwealth-State carve-up of health and education. If this goes ahead, it is certain that the outcomes will be on terms unfavourable to the community – more privatisation, further dismantling of the welfare system, more corporate subsidies and favours to the business sector.

For its part, the Howard Government has signalled that it will give priority to the introduction of even more severe anti-trade union legislation. Legislation will be rushed into parliament to give small businesses the absolute right to sack workers at will without workers having any legal redress.

If the response of the ALP leadership to these events continues on its current course it will turn the ALP into an even more obvious Liberal look-alike.

While many in the labour movement like to think that the class struggle is over, Australia's ruling class has never believed that part of its own propaganda. The intensified attacks that are about to be felt by more and more workers will confirm that. However, it could lead to wider recognition that the class struggle remains a reality for every worker – including those who voted for the Coalition parties.

It is to be hoped that illusions will be shed and replaced by a more militant attitude. But that realisation will not come easily and the reality that the objective of capital is always to increase their profits out of the labour of workers will have to be explained again and again by those who recognise this truth.

Press Fund

On the front page of this issue is the horrific death toll of innocent Iraqis since the Bush/Blair/Howard invasion in March 2003. Around 100,000 Iraqis have so far become victims of the USA's global ambitions on behalf of corporate greed. And it will not stop in Iraq. That is their plan, anyway. The urgent need is to increase the struggle, for peace, against corporate greed. We must recruit people, we must convince and inform them. The Guardian needs your support in this vital task. Thanks to all the contributors this week:

In Memoriam:

John Sgouras, Greek resistance fighter, member KKE and SPA. Died age 67, 11 years ago.

Dimitris Mavrantonis, Greek resistance fighter and always active in peace and working class movements. Died age 93, 4 years ago.

Yiannis Tatakis, Greek resistance fighter and true communist. From Greek island of Lesbos. Died aged 87, 2 weeks ago.

Remembered by Stratus Mavrantonis and Zanthula Sgouras, \$50
MH \$50, Tony Battino \$20, Betty Stewart \$100, Des Donley \$120,
Bert Appleton \$40.

This week's total: \$380. Progressive total: \$10,120.

Cape York land rights win

Celebratory dances in the remote Cape York community of Aurukun heralded Federal Court recognition of native title rights in the Wik people's traditional country.

Justice Richard Cooper had earlier handed down two determinations recognising native title rights of the Wik and Wik Way peoples on more than 1.2 million hectares of land across the central Western Cape.

The determinations stem from the High Court's landmark Wik decision in 1996, which found native title could co-exist with pastoral leases.

They follow years of negotiations between traditional owners, pastoralists, commercial fishing

interests and State and Federal governments.

Justice Cooper told hundreds of people gathered in the Aurukun community's recreational hall that all parties to the agreement should be given credit after mediating the issues in the claim.

"Ten years ago few people would have foreseen that the Wik litigation would end today in a consent determination", he said. "But through goodwill, the parties have achieved a mutually acceptable agreement which accommodates their particular interests."

The native title determinations are the first in Queensland to be made over pastoral leases and prompted a performance of tradi-

tional dancing following Justice Cooper's announcement.

Claimant Gladys Tybingoompa recalled dancing after the 1996 High Court decision, but said her old knees were not up to it today.

"I'm very proud and privileged to be still here to see the end result of this because we are tired of the struggle", Ms Tybingoompa said.

Many of the original claimants had passed away since the claim process began, but the large part of the job was done through recognition of her people's native title rights under white law, she said. "It will be passed on to my grandchildren. We should be proud today. We have made history", she said.

Koori Mail Abridged ☪

BHP, river wrecker

Earlier this month the Nepean Action Group, the Mineral Policy Institute and Greens NSW MP Lee Rhiannon distributed leaflets and dumped a bucket of dead fish outside BHP Billiton's annual general meeting at the Darling Harbour Convention Centre in Sydney. The action was a protest against the transnational's longwall coal mining on the Nepean, Georges and Cataract Rivers.

"BHP Billiton has already wrecked two rivers in the Sydney Catchment Area by mining for coal under the riverbeds", said Nepean Action Group campaigner Carline Graham. "Now they want to destroy the Nepean as well."

Ms Graham said that the Lower Cataract and Upper Georges Rivers

were poisoned and polluted, and lost much of their flow down thousands of huge subsidence cracks in their bedrock. Millions of litres of methane and hydrogen sulphide gases were vented, killing fish and vegetation.

"We're not prepared to let the beautiful Nepean River become another victim of BHP Billiton's destructive practices and the Carr Government's indifference", said Ms Graham.

Lee Rhiannon accused the Carr Government of sitting on its hands and allowing the environmental destruction and huge waste of water to continue unchecked.

"I have put a motion to Parliament condemning longwall coal mining for sucking up to three

megalitres a day from Sydney's water supply. This means ordinary users miss out while BHP gets water at a discount rate to try and mitigate its polluting mining activities."

Techa Beaumont, from the Mineral Policy Institute, highlighted BHP's international polluting activities in PNG and Colombia, as well as in Australia. "BHP Billiton is entrenching its reputation as a river wrecker."

"BHP cannot keep ignoring the risks of their activities and dumping the problems it creates onto local communities. It must take responsibility for its actions and agree to stop longwall mining under these precious water resources." ☪

Sydney Water outsources brains

Three engineering experts are being dumped by Sydney Water as part of a process that could compromise the utility's ability to ensure the quality of water supplies, the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers (APESMA) warns. The engineers, in charge of purchasing some of Sydney's most important water assets, are being made forcibly redundant with their jobs expected to go to short-term contractors.

The APESMA took the case to the NSW Industrial Relations Commission over what it saw as a dangerous program of de-engineering within State Government utilities.

Sydney Water agreed not to proceed with the termination of the workers, who have over 50 years experience between them, for at least a week.

APESMA NSW director Martin O'Connell said as Sydney grapples to ensure the quantity and quality of its long-term water supplies the dumping of expert full-time staff in favour of contractors was an irresponsible and short sighted move.

"Sydney Water's assets are meant to last 100 years but it is logical that if contractors with three-year terms are employed they will be more concerned with short term profits."

"While Sydney grapples to find a solution to its ever-dwindling water supplies it is crucial that any technology employed is appropriate for the task and of the highest possible quality."

"These tasks will never be done justice by short-term contractors that lack the experience and technical expertise to ensure the long-term viability of the state's most important assets."

The first of three asset managers was due to be dumped last Friday, with the next due to leave the following Friday.

Sydney Water has downsized its staff by more than two thirds over the past decade. ☪



Sydney

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Safety net is Medicare minus

Anna Pha

When the Howard Government announced details of its so-called "Medicare Plus safety net", it seemed obvious that the health bill would rise. The "safety net" would kick in once patients had paid a certain amount for out-of-hospital medical services. At that point Medicare would reimburse patients for 80 per cent of the gap between the Medicare rebate and the amount charged for the medical service.

For concession cardholders and family tax part B beneficiaries the out-of-pocket threshold is \$300 and for others it is \$700. Once that amount is reached, then 80 percent of the gap is covered by Medicare.

When the government introduced the scheme, no caps or controls were placed on what doctors and other providers of medical services, including specialists, could charge. The government was signing a blank cheque for the medical "industry", and not a single cent of it would assist the public health sector.

In fact the "safety net" would

be an incentive for doctors, pathologists and others to raise their fees. The media have recently carried news items about GPs intending to increase their fees.

The private sector might even appear "affordable" for some families – especially when faced with the choice between paying through the nose for immediate tests or treatment and waiting months for an appointment in the public system.

It would also encourage those who still bulk billed to abandon it.

Initial reports since the introduction of Medicare Plus have confirmed these predictions, with medical practices and pathologists ceasing to bulk bill, hikes in fees and many individuals and families reaching the limit very quickly.

But this did not stop the *Australian Financial Review* (27-10-04) from singing its praises. "Medicare safety net proves to be good medicine" ran the headline of an article by Cherelle Murphy.

"Out-of-hospital medical expenses were held down by the scheme ... "[!] A surprising comment that backed the headline.

"The federal government's



Medicare Plus safety net is keeping downward pressure on consumer prices as the government picks up the medical bills for more Australians and spreads them among taxpayers."

Consumers are paying less. That sounds great. But the other side of the coin is that "the govern-

ment picks up the medical bills for more Australians and spreads them among taxpayers".

Read on a little and this becomes clearer. "The cost of the scheme to the government is rising sharply ... increasing to \$1.2 billion over the next four years – more than double the original [budgeted] cost of the policy."

The Medicare Plus safety net is the second major scheme that the government has introduced that imposes huge and unlimited costs on the health budget. The other is the 30 percent rebate on private health insurance which is costing billions of dollars annually.

As with the uncapped 30 percent rebate and other subsidies for private health insurance and related subsidies (costing almost \$4 billion a year), the safety net is striking another blow at the public health system. It also diverts billions of dollars of taxpayer money from public health care to the costly and less efficient private system and encourages and facilitates the further abandonment of bulk billing.

For the private/corporate health industry they are critical subsidies – without them the private sector would collapse. For the specialists in particular it is a licence to print money. For some patients it may seem to be saving them money – but at an extremely high price – the destruction of the superior public health system and higher taxes.

These uncapped subsidies to the private sector are designed to create budget blowouts – blowouts that will be used to argue that Medicare in its present form is unsustainable. This will be one of the main excuses used to restrict access to bulk billing to concession card holders and to shift the cost of health care for the majority of the population from the state onto the individual.

This is what was proposed in the Liberals' *Fightback!* policy document in 1993, and it is at the top of the agenda today. The longer term aim is to completely privatise the health care and turn it into a commodity bought and sold on deregulated markets where a handful of corporations dominate. ✪

Senate to deliver on greed and corruption

The ramifications of the Liberal/National Coalition's control of the Senate began to emerge last week when the newly elected National Party Queensland Senators laid out some of their reactionary agenda. The National Party took four of the six remaining Queensland Senate seats and from July 1 next year the Coalition will have an absolute majority for the first time since 1981.

The Senate will become a conduit for delivering the Government's policies of greed and corruption for corporate Australia and the imposition of increased hardship for working people.

Although the National Party Senators say they might prevent the full privatisation of Telstra if service levels in the bush "were not up to scratch", their main objective will

be to calm rural community fears of a loss of telecommunication services. Ideologically, the Nationals do not oppose the sell-off of Telstra but they are caught in a contradictory bind, claiming to stand for the interests of country Australia while in reality representing the interests of big business.

By whatever manipulative means – maybe sexing up the service figures, or giving empty guarantees of service delivery by private operators – they will come around to backing the full sale: for the Liberals and Nationals, corporate profits, be they in telecommunications or elsewhere, come first.

This also is why the union-busting agenda of the Howard Government is set to be given a boost from next July. The Nationals in the Senate will ensure that the

Government's anti-union legislation is passed into law.

They backed to the hilt the free trade agreement with the USA which will hit services in every part of Australia. The FTA also threatens the very existence of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and will wipe out local industries and production, including in agriculture.

The hit list is diverse and vicious: from ending Medicare coverage of abortion (women's right to choose has been openly under attack by the Government for some time) to scrapping cross-media ownership laws.

The make up of the Senate from July 1, 2005 will be: Liberals 33; Labor 28; Nationals 5; Greens 4; Democrats 4; Country Liberals 1; Family First 1. ✪

Carr policy jails 76-year-old woman

Magistrate Brian Wilson last week sentenced a 76-year-old woman to one year in jail for drink driving in Newcastle. The startling penalty was compulsory under the guidelines for sentencing imposed by the Carr Government. In common with a number of other Labor state governments, Carr has been meddling with the courts with his "tough on crime" policies for some time.

Pensioner Elaine Daisley is NSW's oldest woman to be jailed for drink driving. She was arrested with a blood alcohol level of 0.302.

The sentencing guidelines for high-range drink driving offences were introduced in September 2004. Similar to mandatory sentencing, the guidelines prescribe sentences for offences that fall within certain categories. The discretion that used to rest with magistrates has been removed. The specifics of Elaine Daisley's case are irrelevant under Carr's tabloid-driven approach.

Kat Armstrong of Justice Action has a strong message for the Premier:

"What happened to common sense Mr. Carr? Try taking away her license or her car – this would remove the risk that Ms Daisley would continue to be a 'menace on the roads'. Try placing her in an

alcoholic rehabilitation clinic. A bed in a rehabilitation unit costs much less than the \$70,000 for full-time imprisonment for a year, and unlike prison, is more likely to keep her away from her alcohol addiction.

"No wonder there's no money for hospitals when Mr. Carr uses the money for jails instead."

Ms Daisley's niece passed on a message to Ms Armstrong after a prison visit last weekend

"My aunt was so embarrassed, she didn't tell her family what happened. She ended up in court with no legal aid arranged. She has high blood pressure and is just sitting in her cell, staring at the walls. She wants to stop drinking, and knows that she needs treatment."

There may be many more victims of the "law and order" drive being imposed in the courts. Inevitably, the outcomes made unavoidable by the misguided policies will lead to a climb-down. One of Clare Martin's first acts when she became the Northern Territory Chief Minister was to ditch the unpopular mandatory sentencing regime.

For further information on Justice Action, contact Kat Armstrong 0428 312 035 or Brett Collins 0438 705 003 or write to: P.O. Box 386, Broadway, NSW 2007, Australia www.justiceaction.org.au ✪

Pete's Corner



Bosses trip on Electrolux

Anti-union employers have failed in a bid to knock more than 10 clauses out of a workplace agreement in the first major test of last month's Electrolux ruling. Australian Industrial Relations Commission senior vice president, Iain Ross, gave the green-light to controls on contract labour, prohibitions on non-union AWA contracts and guarantees on union entry rights in a National Union of Workers (NUW) agreement covering employees at LK Ballantyne's Laverton site in Victoria.

The decision de-bunked the insistence of some industrial law firms that they could roll dozens of negotiated agreements because key clauses failed to "pertain" to the strict interpretation of the employer-employee relationship contained in the *Workplace Relations Act*.

Vice president Ross rejected the employers' contention that anything designed to strengthen the position

of unions, or their members, was illegal.

"The submissions of the Ai Group and ACCI [employer groups] almost seem to proceed on the assumption that clauses which give unions, or their representatives, rights are, almost by definition, not clauses which pertain to the employment relationship and hence cannot be included in a certified agreement.

"This is a false premise. The task to be undertaken is one of characterisation", Mr Ross said.

He did, however, roll a clause providing for union fee deductions, along with another allowing union delegates access to new workers to discuss union matters.

Mr Ross said certified agreements could contain clauses that were "machinery in nature, ancillary or incidental" to a matter that pertained to the employer-employee relationship.

He okayed the following clauses which employers had sought to have ruled illegal:

- An agreement to commence negotiations three months before the current deal expires;
- Indemnities for employees against damages claims;
- Casual employees, including those employed by a third party, to receive no less than terms contained in the agreement;
- Substitution of public holidays;
- Trade union training leave;
- A commitment not to introduce AWAs during the life of the agreement;
- Union notice board obligation on employer;
- Paid time off for union delegates;
- Time off for paid union meetings;
- Right of entry;
- Requirement on employer to keep time and wages records.

NUW Victorian Secretary, Martin Pakula, called the decision a "fantastic result" that meant, with some "minor changes", unions could negotiate as normal.

Attention will now turn to WA where Westfarmers Coal is seeking unspecified damages from Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union state officials and four Collie delegates on the grounds that "protected" action was, in fact, "unprotected" because, under Electrolux principles, some claims did not pertain to the employer-employee relationship (see last week's *Guardian*).



"The union asked management for raises and better benefits, and the corporation gave double what they asked."

This case takes the Electrolux argument one step further, testing the ability of employers to curb strike action and financially cripple unions if claims are subsequently found not to pertain.

Westfarmers, represented by lawyers Clayton Utz, has taken

exception to half a dozen claims, including right of entry, controls on contracting, delegate education and local government representation leave.

Its arguments are now before Justice French, in the Federal Court. ✪

Question over Hardie Laws

Constitutional lawyers are divided over NSW laws which will attempt to force James Hardie to cough up the \$2 billion it owes asbestos sufferers. The Government says the new laws, announced the week before last, will wind back the clock on James Hardie's 2001 corporate restructure and transfer ownership of two asbestos-producing subsidiaries back to the James Hardie group.

NSW Premier, Bob Carr, said he had been assured by legal experts that the legislation would be legally enforceable.

But the head of the government's special commission of

inquiry in the Hardie scandal, David Jackson, QC, said such legislation would be the subject of constitutional challenges in Australia.

Mr Jackson also cast doubt on the law's enforceability in the US or the Netherlands, where James Hardie has relocated its business.

James Hardie signalled during the inquiry its intention to fight any retrospective legislation targeting their 2001 move offshore.

The laws are expected to increase pressure on James Hardie during ongoing negotiations with the unions to make up the cash shortfall voluntarily. ✪

Qantas directors' donkey vote

Donkeys in India scored a 33 percent pay rise in the same week that Qantas directors voted themselves 66 percent hikes. The Indian animals, used to collect rubbish in the narrow lanes of Lucknow, have been paid the same grass and fodder allowance for many years despite inflation.

The donkeys' rise will take them from the equivalent of 300 Rupees (\$15.00) to 400 Rupees a month, effective from the Diwali festival on November 14.

Many companies use the festival to give bonuses to employees. The Hindu goddess of money is worshipped on the day.

While no Indian asses were available for comment, Qantas chief executive Geoff Dixon was braying about fee hikes for his board members.

The move has prompted Qantas technicians to adopt a "six for sixty-six" approach to EBA negotiations. The maintenance workers want six percent pay increase, pointing to the 66 percent pay rise directors voted themselves and the airline's record \$660 million profit – up 90 percent.

The Australian Licenced Aircraft Engineers' Association Federal Secretary David Kemp believes the enormous expertise of tech staff is impossible to replace, as opposed to the directors who voted themselves an extra "cool million" a head.

"Tech staff do the invaluable work of aircraft maintenance logistics, and integration", noted Mr Kemp, "as well as saving millions in expert cost analysis, planning and scheduling.

"They deserve the full six percent boost and no less." ✪

Roofers fight sweatshop rates

A two-week strike by roof tilers in Western Australia has helped the construction union knock off a cartel demanding contractors use the Howard Government's individual contracts, AWAs, to keep employees on "sweatshop" rates.

In the unprecedented action, contractors and workers joined forces to wring improvements out of four companies benefiting from the state's home building boom.

Monier, Bristle, Prime and virulent anti-unionist Len Buckeridge's Harmony Group had operated a restrictive system in the traditionally un-unionised sector by selling tiles and labour as a bundled product.

Tiling contractors said they would eventually need 50 percent increases to bring their workers onto parity with eastern states counterparts.

During their stoppage the union, the Construction Division of the CFMEU, received public support

from unexpected quarters. Local broadcaster and former editor of the *West Australian* newspaper, Paul Murray, said the WA tiling industry had "all the hallmarks of a modern day sweatshop".

CFMEU State Secretary, Kevin Reynolds, said the four companies had suppressed rates to the point that, in the midst of a housing boom, contractors couldn't afford to pay award minimums.

"Even though the award pay for a first year junior is just \$6 an hour, most didn't even get that", Mr Reynolds said. "Other kids got more working at McDonalds and KFC.

"The only future for young tilers in this state was to be robbed blind and then thrown on the scrap heap when they burned out at an early age."

Back in 1992, the state's WA Industrial Relations Commission chief commissioner, Bill Coleman, reported that few tilers remained in the industry until their 50s.

"Their fate appears to be either to obtain a position as a supervisor or be forced out on the invalid pension", he reported.

A recent Housing Industry Association report found that the average pay of WA tradesmen had risen 12.5 percent in the past year, except in the roofing industry where rates had moved 1.5 percent.

When the CFMEU launched its campaign, the tiling cartel threatened Australian Competition and Consumer Commission action against contractors who supported increased rates for their employees, on the grounds that it was a breach of the Trades Practices Act.

About 800 tilers were involved in the strike. They returned to work this week after the companies agreed to fund 15 percent increases, over three years; and increase casual loadings, redundancy, sick leave and annual leave entitlements.

Tilers also won site and height allowance payments. ✪

Commonwealth banks on sackings

Commonwealth Bank workers will now put the issues of job security and services to shareholders after management slammed the door on negotiations. Finance Sector Union Assistant National Secretary, Sharron Caddie, will move a Commonwealth Bank AGM resolution calling for future restructures to go before shareholders in a bid to stop slash and burn policies that have cost 20,000 jobs and shut more than 600 branches.

Workers are annoyed at last year's "Which new bank?" restructure which proposed axing

another 3700 jobs, while claiming to promote excellent service and staff morale.

During a national strike in July over staffing levels, relief structures, work targets and pay rates, staff voted for shareholder activism.

The David Murray-led bank responded by increasing wage rates by four percent without consultation and refusing to negotiate on any claims put forward by staff.

Sharron Caddie says the bank has treated employees and EBA negotiations with contempt.

"During negotiations management thanked us for our presenta-

tions and said no to every single aspect of our claim", Ms Caddie said. "Federal industrial relations rules don't require good faith bargaining so the Commonwealth doesn't negotiate in good faith.

"Eighty seven percent of employees believe lack of staff is the most important issue confronting them.

"David Murray has lied to the extent he said he would listen and he's failed to provide them with the very things they have said are fundamental to providing good service and having a good day at work", Ms Caddie said. ✪

Sydney

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Centenary prompts curious "support" for arbitration

Bob Briton

Comments by Justice Michael Kirby about the "industrial ayatollahs" plotting the destruction of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) certainly stirred a hornet's nest. The High Court judge and former deputy president of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (predecessor to AIRC) used the occasion of a convention to mark the centenary of the AIRC to make a thinly veiled criticism of the Federal Government's reactionary industrial relations agenda.

Kirby attacked those who want to see the Commission "closed down lock stock, and barrel" or "converted into a mediatory body with no legal powers of arbitration or intervention".

"Persons of such views tend to live in a remote world of fantasy, inflaming themselves in their rhetoric into more and more unreal passions, usually engaging in serious dialogue only with comfortable persons of the same persuasion. For the rest of us, who live in the real world and know our country and its institutions better, time will not be wasted over such fairy tales."

Unfortunately for Justice Kirby (and "the rest of us" who have to eek out a living in the "real world"), the inflamed, comfortable persons in charge of industrial relations policy in Australia have just been granted control of the Senate. Twenty-eight union-bashing bills previously blocked by the Senate look to receive a smooth passage through the new Senate when it

He described Kirby as a "colourful judge" and set out to give him a refresher course in the law:

"Judges, I think, need to be careful in the way in which they speak because it often invokes comment, and it is important that the separation of powers which we have, where the legislature makes the laws and the courts adjudicate, be protected."

Clearly, as far as Ruddock was concerned, the sort of discussion sparked by Justice Kirby's critique was unhelpful. Howard was displeased, too. In response to a question from the media quoting the judge's "ayatollah" remarks, the PM replied, "Oh did he? I haven't seen the text of the comments, but I note that." Later on he also gave him a lesson on the law and the need for judges to be "temperate" in their use of words. Of course, none of these outbursts should be seen as interference from the legislature in the affairs of the judiciary!

Naturally, Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews was not moved by Justice Kirby's arguments. He spoke after the judge and proceeded to confirm the worst fears of the supporters of the AIRC present at the commemorative gathering. He reminded the audience that industrial arbitration was only one of the methods a society like Australia could have chosen to deal with the phenomenon of industrial dispute – meaning class struggle by workers in defence of their own interests. Other, unmentioned countries had chosen different methods.

He pointed out that the proposal for a commission 100 years ago



The working class must organise or starve

close the doors – was appropriate then but not now. Today, workers have "intellectual capital" of their own and take their place on an even playing field with employers, at least according to the Workplace Relations Minister.

Minimum wage under attack

While Andrews was singing the praises of the generosity of the deregulated, non-union workplace he simultaneously argued that the concept of a minimum wage must go. It stands in the way of job creation. He said that the AIRC must keep the interests of the unemployed in mind when deliberating on wages and conditions. The clear message was that low wages and poorer conditions equal more jobs. The idea that workers need sufficient purchasing power to sustain production (not to mention themselves!) is foreign to the Minister.

Andrews speech supported the AIRC the way a rope supports a hanged man. His claim to have defended the Commission was that he wants to "reform" it, to help it evolve in order to survive. In reality he wants to empty it of any, albeit limited, progressive role in defending workers' rights in less well organised industries while he sets about purging workplaces of unions.

The ALP remained silent during the ensuing controversy. ACTU President Sharan Burrow called the Minister's contribution extreme and implored Bob Hawke to try to talk some sense into his fellow IR reformer. Victorian Trades Hall Council Secretary Leigh Hubbard also "defended" the Commission with an example of the type of attitude that has helped disarm the trade union movement: "We hope that it [the AIRC] is allowed to continue to balance the competing interests of workers and employers in the best interests of all Australians for many years to come".

While Andrews was singing the praises of the generosity of the deregulated, non-union workplace he simultaneously argued that the concept of a minimum wage must go.

comes into action in mid-2005. The bills may even get through earlier – the government is not waiting, it is trying again this week with the old bills and some new, even more vicious ones, this week.

As Kirby warns, the AIRC will be "converted into a mediatory body with no legal powers of arbitration or intervention". It will lose its relevance to trade unions and workers, considering fewer and fewer matters, forcing unions to rely more and more on their own organisation and actions.

Initially many more workers will be forced into Australian Workplace Agreements (employer-dictated individual employment contracts – AWAs) with access to only the Minister's own Office of the Employment Advocate for their grievances or possibly common law or corporations law.

Regrettably, the scenario described and rightly criticised by Kirby is no fairytale. It has been happening and its complete fulfilment is Howard's top priority in his fourth term in office.

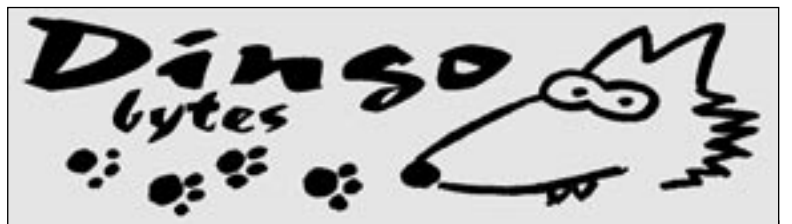
Still, the Judge's statements were not going to pass without comment. His stand for a more independent IR system was condemned by Attorney General Philip Ruddock.

had been approved by a narrow margin by the "founding fathers" and that it was agreed to in response to a specific set of circumstances. According to Andrews the disputes that took place on the wharves and in pastoral industries of the 1890s had caused the "economic and social distress" of that decade. Virtually every other commentator has concluded that the calamitous depression of the 1890s – a periodic crisis of capitalist overproduction – had forced the working class into a desperate struggle based on the need to organise or starve.

Andrews just kept on rewriting history. The 1907 Harvester Judgement – that concluded that employers should pay wages that are adequate to sustain "the normal needs of the average employee" or

Harvester Case, Arbitration Court 1907 Justice Higgins:

"If A let B have the use of his horse on the terms that B give the horse fair and reasonable treatment, B would have to give the horse proper food and water, shelter and rest. I decided, therefore, to adopt a standard based on 'the normal needs of the average employee, regarded as a human being living in a civilised community'. This was to be the primary test in ascertaining the minimum wage that would be treated as 'fair and reasonable' in the case of unskilled labourers."



The developer of the Lake Cowal gold mine in western NSW, Barrack Gold, is under fire over a gold mine it half-owns in Western Australia. Cyanide contamination has polluted groundwater and boosted salinity. The NSW Greens have warned that the Kalgoorlie Super Pit mine in WA sets an alarming precedent for Lake Cowal. NSW Greens MLC Lee Rhiannon has called on the ALP and Coalition to support a Green's bill which is currently before the NSW Parliament to outlaw cyanide-based mining.

A new opinion poll has found that more than a quarter of Australians believe the bible provides a more likely explanation of the origins of life than evolution. The survey, by the British-based firm Hawker Britton, found that older people, Liberal voters and Queenslanders were less likely to accept evolution. People living in NSW and those earning over \$80,000 a year preferred evolution as an explanation as to how we are here. Asked where they thought they would go when they died, 46 percent answered heaven, 16 percent "somewhere else", 11 percent ticked nowhere, while only three percent said hell and two percent purgatory. We have a way to go compared to the USA, though. In the poll's result in the US 50 percent of people said they believed the bible's claim of creationism and only 15 percent accepted evolution.

ASIO Chief Dennis Richardson has finally conceded that it is possible that Australia's involvement in the invasion of Iraq has made Australia a terrorist target. This admission comes nine months after Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty got hammered by the Howard Government for linking the Madrid bombings in Spain with that country's involvement in the Iraq war and warning that our involvement also increased the possibility of an attack on Australia.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is the weapons industry. Talk about weapons of mass destruction! The arms manufacturers are massive transnational corporations with mountains of money. They are one of the driving forces that take the world into wars and are constantly designing new means of destruction to fatten their profits. A warning last week from the British Medical Association that it is possible to design biological weapons that target ethnic groups will have the arms makers cheering. The idea is that organisms could be engineered to attack genetic variations common to a particular race of people. Of course, the spin doctors pushing the war on terrorism claim it is terrorists who will create such a threat. Yet it is not terrorists who have the technology to make them, but the rich, developed western nations, headed by the USA. America already has more weapons of mass destruction, including chemical and biological, than the rest of the world combined.

UN votes overwhelmingly for end to US blockade of Cuba

On October 28, the UN General Assembly voted resoundingly in favour of ending the vicious and punitive US blockade against the people of Cuba. The annual resolution to end Washington's economic, trade and financial blockade against the island's people and their democratic system of governance was won with 179 nations in favour (including Australia), four against (US, Israel, Marshall Islands, Palau) and one abstention (Micronesia). Last year's vote was 179 nations in favour of Cuba, three against (US, Israel, Marshall Islands) and two abstentions (Micronesia and Morocco). Noteworthy was Afghanistan's vote to end the US blockade of Cuba – clearly a blow to Washington.

In the plenary session prior to the vote, Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque addressed the General Assembly. His presentation (reproduced below) was followed by massive applause.

Cuban statement to UN

Statement by his Excellency Mr Felipe Pérez Roque, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba before the United Nations General Assembly in New York on October 28. The agenda item was listed as the "Necessity of Ending the Economic, Commercial and Financial Embargo Imposed by the United States of America against Cuba".

Excellencies:

Millions of Cubans are now closely following what happens in this hall.

Some 70 per cent of them have had to endure all their lives the longest blockade in history, imposed by the Government of the United States on our homeland right from the triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

However, in voting today on draft resolution "Necessity of Ending the Economic, Commercial and Financial Embargo Imposed by the United States of America against Cuba", the 191 UN Member States will not only be making a decision on an issue of interest to Cuba. They will also be voting in favour of the respect for the Charter of the United Nations, in favour of the respect for International Law, in favour of the sovereign equality of States and the self-determination of the peoples, so that no government, mighty as it may be, can punish not only Cuba but also any other country for trading with and investing in ours.

Today, we will cast a vote against the extraterritorial enforcement of laws; a vote against haughtiness and the disdain for the rights of others.

I have an odd document here, distributed by the United States to all delegations – except Cuba, of course.

Genocidal economic war

It lies so much, and so many times, that it deserves to be commented on.

Let us see:

"The United States maintains

that the embargo is a bilateral issue that should not come before the General Assembly. It is clearly not a blockade, as we do not interfere with the trade between Cuba and other nations."

But this General Assembly knows that there is a different truth to it. Well does it know that it is not just an embargo; it knows that the US Government has unleashed a worldwide genocidal economic war against Cuba. Cuba is prevented from exporting to the United States; Cuba is prevented from receiving American tourism; we are prevented from gaining access to the technologies produced in this country; Cuba is prevented from importing any US product, equipment or raw material.

The Assembly knows that the Torricelli Act, which prevents the subsidiaries of US companies in third countries from trading with Cuba, has been in force since 1992 and is meticulously enforced. I will just mention a few examples:

- The Canadian subsidiary of US Picker International could not sell spare parts for X-ray equipment to Cuba because it is a branch of an American company.

- France's Bull could not complete the sale of ATMs to Cuba because it was bought by America's Diebold.

- Refractorios Mexicanos, a company from Mexico, was purchased by US Harbison Walker Refractory – and thereafter it could not continue selling to Cuba heat-resistant bricks used in furnaces for cement production.

- The US representative is well aware, even with expressions to the

contrary, that nobody in the world can sell a product or piece of equipment to Cuba if containing more than 10 per cent of US components.

- The import of a quadruple veterinary vaccine, which should have been supplied to our country by the Netherlands' Intervet, was curtailed when the US Government informed the aforementioned company that it could not sell the product to Cuba because it contained 10 per cent of an antigen made in the United States.

On the other hand, the US Government prevents any company in the world from exporting a product or piece of equipment to the United States if containing Cuban raw materials. A Japanese car manufacturer has to certify to the US Government that the metals used to make the automobile do not contain any Cuban nickel. A European confectioner has to prove that no Cuban sugar was used.

Worldwide penalties

The US document also says the following:

"The embargo regulations apply only to persons or entities subject to US jurisdiction."

If so, then why, after seven years of investigations, was Canadian citizen James Sabzali sentenced last February by a Philadelphia Federal Court to a year's probation and a US\$10,000 fine for having sold to Cuba some resins that purify the drinking water supplied to the Cuban population?

Why does the Torricelli Act prevent vessels of the rest of the world from calling at Cuban ports under the threat of being "blacklisted" and denying their access to American ports for a period of six months?

Why does the Helms-Burton Act, in force since 1996, penalise the businesspeople from the rest of the world who attempt to engage in business deals with Cuba?

The General Assembly has been informed that last May 4 the US State Department sent a letter to the Chairman of Jamaica's SuperClubs, warning him that if his business with Cuba did not terminate within 45 days he would be penalised under the Helms-Burton Act – which involved the denial of visas for him and his family to travel to the United States and the threat of facing a lawsuit in the future in US courts.

The Government of the United States prevents Cuba from using the dollar as currency for trading operations with the rest of the world. Our charges or payments in that currency are confiscated.

Is it true or not, Mr US representative, that your Government imposed a US\$100 million fine on Switzerland's banking entity UBS for the latter's reception of dollar transfers from Cuba following the



Seventy percent of Cubans have endured the blockade all their lives

accrual of absolutely legal earnings in our tourism and trade?

As of last June, the media controlled by the Miami-based terrorist groups of Cuban origin unleashed a gross campaign aimed at frightening the banks that may have financial relations with Cuba.

US fines banks

At the same time, we have been receiving continuous reports that US authorities are exerting pressure on an ever-increasing number of banks from other countries in order to thwart the transfers originating in Cuba.

Finally, last October 9, Daniel Fisk, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, in addition to recognising the efforts of the US Government to boycott tourism to Cuba from Europe, Canada and other countries, announced that the United States has set up a Group for the Persecution of Cuban Assets with a view to freezing the movements of hard currency towards and from Cuba.

As a result of the foregoing, we concluded that all necessary actions had to be promptly implemented in order to defend our country from the new aggressions that attempt to prevent the use of the dollars that we earn to pay for our imports. Therefore, 72 hours ago our President, Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro, informed the public opinion of the decision to replace the circulation of the dollar with that of the convertible Cuban peso all across the national territory. On this new episode of the US blockade and about our sovereign measures to defend ourselves, the Permanent Mission of Cuba is conveying additional information to each delegation.

Would the US delegation explain why Cuba does not receive and has never received a credit from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank? Because the US Government prevents them from doing so. In 2003, these two international banks, which are not American-owned or legally under its control, loaned US\$14 billion to Latin America. Why was not a single dollar lent to Cuba to build houses, roads, hospitals or schools? Is it not Cuba in the centre of the map of the Americas?

It is true that over the last

three years we have been able to purchase food from the United States. However, we can still see the draconian obstacles imposed on those sales, such as the need for bureaucratic licences, the obligation to pay in advance and in cash without the possibility of receiving not even private credits and the prohibition for Cuban vessels to carry the goods.

The US delegation also maintains that its Government has introduced measures "facilitating greatly the export of ... medicines and medical supplies" to Cuba.

However, the General Assembly knows, once again, that there is a different truth to it.

The truth is that this year the US Government prevented Abbott from selling to Cuba two essential drugs in the treatment of AIDS patients: Ritonavir and Lopinavir+Ritonavir. Therefore, Cuba had to purchase them in another country, with a six-fold increase in price.

The truth is that the US Government imposed a fine of US\$168,500 on Chiron Corporation because a European subsidiary of such company had sold – reportedly by mistake – two children's vaccines to Cuba.

The American text distributed to those present here goes on to add that "Cuba is using this resolution to justify its own political and economic woes". If the US Government is so sure that Cuba uses the issue of the blockade as a pretext, why does it not lift the blockade and leave us without a pretext?

I am going to answer that to you: because the US Government is afraid. It is afraid of our example. It knows that if the blockade on us is lifted, Cuba's socio-economic development will spiral up. It knows that we will further prove the possibilities of the Cuban socialism; the as-yet-untapped potential of a country without any discrimination whatsoever, with social justice and human rights for all citizens and not only for a few. It is the Government of a large and mighty empire, but it is afraid of the example of the small rebellious island.

Excellencies:

We are gathered here only five days away from the elections in this country, awaited by all with secret hopes. It is true that these four years have been terrible for the world.

A Japanese car manufacturer has to certify to the US Government that the metals used to make the automobile do not contain any Cuban nickel. A European confectioner has to prove that no Cuban sugar was used.

Letter to Monsanto Seeking justice for Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange



Mr Hugh Grant
Chairman, President & CEO
Monsanto Company
St Louis, USA

Dear Mr Grant,
You were born just three years before the American forces, in 1961, began the spraying of chemicals in areas of South Vietnam, and 14 years of age when the spraying ended in 1972.

In those 11 years, while you were a growing lad and going to school, the chemicals that Monsanto, Dow and other companies manufactured, were being used to destroy the forests, contaminate the land, lakes, streams and rivers of South Vietnam.

But, Mr Grant, a bigger crime than the above were the agonising deaths the chemicals caused to the many thousands of innocent Vietnamese, including youngsters like yourself who would have liked to have reached the age of 14.

You would not have known as a lad of 14 years, that the company you were to join in 1981, nine years after the spraying ended, had caused the deaths of so many Vietnamese and left so many more suffering from various illnesses and disabilities. But Mr Grant, you surely would and should have known in 1981. Certainly, in 1984 you knew for in that year, American Vietnam Veterans took your company and others to court in New York for the terrible damage Agent Orange had done to them and their families.

The Judge in his ruling said that Monsanto would pay a greater percentage of the settlement of \$180 million, than the other chemical companies. And today Mr Grant, you hold the top three positions in Monsanto.

In January of this year, another lawsuit against your company and others began, brought by Vietnamese, seriously ill through Agent Orange. Behind them, are the three million Vietnamese also seriously affected by the chemicals your company manufactured.

In my visits to Vietnam I have seen and met with many victims of Agent Orange. I have also seen the effects on their family.

This year 2004, 32 years after the spraying stopped, I met children from 10 months, to adults of 25 years, ill and with disabilities that are painful to witness, let alone suffer from. And caused, Mr Grant, by the chemicals manufactured by your company.

At 14 years of age you may not have been aware of the Vietnam War, let alone the damage caused by chemical weapons. But today in Vietnam the legacy left by your chemicals and others can still be seen in the people and the land.

Let me make a suggestion to you. In Ho Chi Minh City, there is the Tu Du Hospital. I have been there a few times and seen some of the young children with disabilities from Agent Orange.

Also in Ho Chi Minh City, on the 14th floor of Sun Wah Tower, is an office of Monsanto. I suggest that you ask the director/manager of your office to request a visit to Tu Du Hospital, ask to see the special room and to see the wards where the children affected by your chemicals can be seen.

I would be interested to receive the comments of your office director/manager. I am also very interested to hear what defence your company and the others will make in court.

At the date of this letter, in an online petition 610,000 people in many countries have signed a petition calling for Justice for Victims of Agent Orange, and for compensation to be paid.

The text of the petition and their signatures can be seen at: <http://petitiononline.com/AOVN/>

Let me end by making an appeal to you. Monsanto as the leading company in the lawsuit can take a lead that hopefully the other companies involved in the lawsuit would follow.

- Accept the responsibilities caused by the chemicals your company manufactured, and the US Government used in their war on Vietnam.

- Make a commitment to pay compensation to the present and future victims of Agent Orange etc, and their families.

- Agree to establish research facilities in Vietnam to study and to seek a solution to the long-term effects of Agent Orange and the other chemicals used.

- Agree to fund the establishment of clinics in agreed areas of Vietnam.

- Agree to help towards the clean-up of the contaminated areas (hotspots) in South Vietnam.

Yours sincerely,

Len Aldis
Secretary of Britain-Vietnam
Friendship Society

Optimism and confidence

Cuba, however, awaits and works with optimism and confidence. It knows that it is right. It knows that time is in its favour. It sees the ever-increasing rejection of the blockade right within the United States. It does not forget that the blockade has cost us over US\$79 billion. Cuba knows that if the blockade is lifted, within a few years there will be a tremendous improvement in the living standards of its citizens. It knows, for example, that in 10 years our country would build one million new houses, into which some four or five million Cubans would move.

Cuba also knows, that if the blockade is not lifted and there is no end to the hostility that has been in place for over four decades now, everything will continue to be difficult but not impossible. Our people are sure that there is no human or moral constraint capable of hindering their course towards a more prosperous and just country.

It is true that for the last 12 years the US Government has disregarded the resolutions adopted by this Assembly with ever-increasing support, which demand the end of the blockade against Cuba. But that does not diminish the importance and momentousness of the act to be discharged today by each delegate on behalf of their people.

Therefore, on behalf of the Cuban people, whose sons and daughters have gone to heal, teach, build and fight side by side with every country that ever needed the Cubans; on behalf of the memory of the 2000 Cubans who laid down their lives fighting colonialism and apartheid in Africa; on behalf of the 22,474 Cuban health co-operators currently rendering services in 67 countries of the Third World; on behalf of the Cuban professors who are now teaching over 17,000 youths from 110 countries in our schools free of charge; on behalf of five young Cuban heroes who are enduring cruel and unjust prison terms for fighting terrorism; in sum, on behalf of a small country that is harassed for wanting to be free, I would like to ask you, once again, to vote in favour of the draft resolution submitted by Cuba.

Thank you very much. ☺



The US airforce dumping pesticide during the war on Vietnam

Dictators and would-be dictators

Why is this man in the White House? The majority of Americans did not vote for him. Why is he there? And I tell you this morning that he's in the White House because God put him there for a time such as this.

Lt Gen William Boykin, speaking of G W Bush,
New York Times, October 17, 2003.

God gave the saviour to the German people. We have faith, deep and unshakeable faith, that he was sent to us by God to save Germany.

Hermann Goering,
speaking of Hitler.

If this were a dictatorship, it would be a heck of a lot easier – just so long as I'm the dictator.

George W Bush,
December 18, 2000.

International law? I better call my lawyer; he didn't bring that up to me.

George W Bush,
December 12, 2003.

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INCLUDED IN THE PRICE:

* All fares * All transfers, accommodation, meals, excursions and transport in Cuba

BOOKING CONDITIONS

Group departs Australia together to final destination.
Two return route stop-overs permitted free of charge.
Children 2-11 years pay 75%. Infants 0-2 pay 10%.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Adelaide: Paul Noack 0418 831 873 ebart@adam.com.au
Brisbane: Sue Monk (07) 3848 5208.
Melbourne: Flora (03) 9470 5300
Sydney: Nick Rawson 0414 691 732
Perth: Ian Butcher (08) 9535 9945 or 0429 359 945

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

OR WRITE TO:

Australia-Cuba Friendship Society,
PO Box 1051, Collingwood Vic, 3006

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Vinnie on 0419 812 872 or vinniemolin@hotmail.com

Funds raised to support projects in Cuba – Aust Cuba Friendship Society Perth

This is a political trial

In violation of international law and its own rulings on procedural matters, the NATO-run International Court trying Slobadan Milosevic in The Hague has decided to impose a counsel chosen by the Court. Its aim is to silence Milosevic speaking in his own defence. In justification of its ruling the Court claimed that it was motivated by Milosevic's health. He is suffering from hypertension.

In contesting the decision before the Court, President Milosevic said it was his deep conviction that the decision to take away his right to represent himself was not prompted by health reasons nor legal reasons but by political reasons.

Milosevic quoted an August 29 article in the *Washington Post*, "At the start of the trial in February 2002, the original presiding judge, Britain's Richard May, ruled that 'under international law, the defendant has a right to counsel but he also has a right not to have counsel.'"

"Virtually everything that has gone wrong with the Milosevic trial can be traced back to that erroneous ruling", the *Washington Post* article alleges.

"By acting as his own counsel, Milosevic was able to begin the trial with an 18-hour long opening argument, which included Hollywood-quality video and slide-show presentations showing the destruction wrought by the 1999 NATO bombing campaign."

The *Washington Post* article, said Milosevic, shows that "we're not talking about law here but politics".

The *Washington Post* article went on: "In creating the Yugoslavia tribunal statute, the UN Security Council set three objectives: First, to educate the Serbian people, who were long misled by Milosevic propaganda, about the acts of aggression, war crimes and

crimes against humanity committed by his regime ..."

Milosevic responded: "As you can see, the *Washington Post* is citing a political reason which only a twisted mind can use in view of the fact that there was no war in Serbia and that Serbia was the only one that maintained the structure of population as it was before and that there was no discrimination at all. This is part of the propaganda which is being affirmed here."

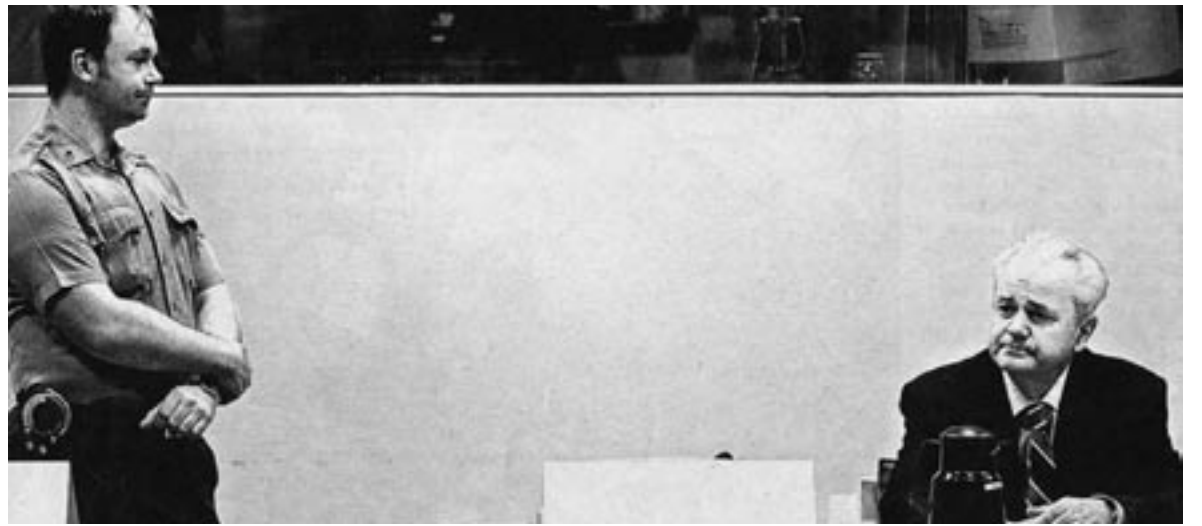
Court-imposed counsel

About the question of assigning counsel Milosevic said: "I would like to also draw your attention to this question of assigning counsel that about 100 prominent legal scholars, professors, experts in international and criminal law from Serbia, Russia, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Germany, the United States, Canada, India, Belgium, Denmark, Bulgaria, Hungary, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Great Britain and France, submitted a petition to the General Secretary [of the UN] and to the United Nations Security Council.

"You probably did not pay attention to this, but many arguments were stated there against this decision which was adopted by the Trial Chamber."

The petition said: "This apparently punitive measure is contrary to international law, incompatible with the adversarial system of criminal justice adopted by the Security Council in Resolution 808, and ignores the Court's obligation to provide adequate medical care and provisional release to the defendant ..."

The petition goes on: "The envisaged imposition of counsel constitutes an egregious violation of internationally recognised judicial rights, and will serve to only aggravate Mr Milosevic's life-threatening



Milosevic: "The right to defend oneself in person is at the heart of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights."

illness and will further discredit these proceedings.

"The fundamental, minimum rights provided to a defendant under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as well as under the Statutes of the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and Yugoslavia include the right to defend oneself in person."

Speaking to the Tribunal Milosevic said: "In the long history of British criminal jurisprudence, there was only one tribunal that ever adopted a practice of forcing counsel upon an unwilling defendant in criminal proceedings. The Tribunal was the Star Chamber. That curious institution, which flourished in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, was of mixed executive and judicial character and characteristically departed from common law traditions. For those reasons, and because it specialised in trying "political" offences, the Star Chamber has for centuries symbolised disregard of basic individual rights.

"The right to defend oneself

in person is at the heart of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights. The United Nations should not tolerate these continuing violations of international law in the name of expediency. Using a detained person's inappropriately treated illness as an excuse to infringe upon his rights and silence him and embark on a 'radical reform' of the proceedings – as the Chamber is now considering, by changing the rules in the mid-trial, and to the defendant's detriment – is a perversion of both the letter and the spirit of international law.

"So, I would like to be very brief. I would like my right to be restored to me.

"I therefore demand my right to represent myself back. I believe that my legal position cannot be changed in the middle of the trial, or my capacity to defend myself, and I demand my right back. Thank you", concluded Milosevic.

The International Committee to Defend Slobodan Milosevic (ICDSM) has made an urgent appeal for financial assistance.

It says, "We need professional, legal work now more than ever. President Milosevic has the truth and law on his side. In order to use that advantage to achieve his freedom, we must fight this totally discredited tribunal and its patrons through professionally conducted actions which would involve the Bar Associations, the European Court, the UN organs in charge and the media.

"Our practice has shown that ad hoc voluntary work is not enough to deal properly with these tasks. Please organise fundraising activity urgently and send donations to the following ICDSM accounts:

Peter Betscher
Stadt- und Kreissparkasse
Darmstadt, Germany
IBAN:
DE 21 5085 0150 0102 1441 63
SWIFT-BIC: HELADEF1DAS
or
Vereinigung für Internationale
Solidarität (VIS)
4000 Basel, Switzerland
PC 40-493646-5 ☎

China moves to reduce rural poverty

Marilyn Bechtel

At the first-ever China Poverty Eradication Award ceremony on October 17 – the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty – China announced with great pride that the poor population in the country's rural areas had decreased to 29 million from 250 million in 1978. Now, the government said, only about three percent of rural people are impoverished, compared to 30.7 percent in 1978. China's total population is 1.3 billion.

However, as the newspaper *People's Daily* points out in its account of a quarter century of anti-poverty achievements, much remains to be done. If the current standard for extreme poverty – an annual income of less than 625 yuan (US\$75) – is raised by just US\$24, the number of impoverished Chinese would rise to 90 million.

In the mid-1980s, a government-sponsored, large-scale poverty relief project was organised throughout the country. A "National Program for Poverty Relief" initiated in

1994 was followed in 2001 by the "Development Outline for Village Poverty Relief 2001-2010".

The national government's allocation of special poverty relief funds has grown to about US\$1.5 billion a year from US\$121 million in 1980, for a total allocation of nearly US\$13.9 billion. Last year, local governments also put up some US\$363 million for the campaign.

In recent years the drive to end rural poverty has received renewed impetus as emphasis by the Communist Party and the government has shifted from the earlier all-out effort to develop eastern China to building up the western and north-eastern regions.

The stated goal of the effort is "to build a well-off society in an all-round way" by 2020. In recent years 15 east coast cities have aided 11 western provinces and regions with financial support and co-operative projects. Non-governmental organisations are increasingly being encouraged to join in the effort.

At the October 17 ceremony, Vice Premier Hui Liangyu urged all citizens to participate in the nationwide government-led poverty relief programs, and pledged that the government will continue to guide, encourage and support both individuals and organisations that join the campaign.

Among the 18 institutions and

individuals recognised at the ceremony were activities like Project Hope to help poor children attend primary school, Project Happiness to help poor mothers, Project Spring Bud to help girls who have dropped out of school, and The Glorious Cause, to help private businesses in underdeveloped areas.

Also recognised were 90-year-old Bai Fangli, who used his pension and the money he earned riding a pedicab to provide financial aid to poor university students, and a Zhejiang Province businessman who donated US\$600,000 to the project.

Among the anti-poverty programs' achievements:

- Between 1986 and 2003, almost 4.5 million acres of farmland was added, and almost 75 million people gained access to clean drinking water. By 2003, almost 83 percent of villages in poor areas had access to roads, electricity, telephone, and radio and television broadcasts.

- School conditions in poor rural areas are much better, and the dropout rate among school-age children has been cut to 7.8 percent.

- Agricultural training classes have helped poor farmers learn to grow traditional crops more productively, and to switch to new, more economically productive crops. Poorly educated farmers are helped through innovative methods,

such as incorporating crop growing techniques into local folk songs and illustrating such techniques through cartoons.

Among regions receiving special attention have been the southwestern province of Yunnan, where the provincial government invested close to US\$363 million in anti-poverty projects last year, helping 400,000 poor people obtain food and housing.

However, despite the efforts of the central and provincial governments, Yunnan is still home to the largest poor population in China, because of unfavourable geographical conditions as well as slow economic development. Last year the province set a goal to invest another US\$544 million to help resettle half a million people living in below-subsistence conditions within five years.

Central and local governments have also prioritised Tibet, allocating over US\$36 million to energy, water conservation, road construction and drinking water projects that benefited tens of thousands of Tibetans. Going beyond basic food and clothing, programs are now focusing on social and economic development in agricultural and pastoral areas as well as overall improvements in living standards.

Peoples Weekly World, Communist Party USA ☎

Sri Lanka

The BIG PICTURE

Independence from Britain presented a hopeful future for the Sri Lankan people in 1948, but since then they have gone through very difficult times. Plagued by violence and foreign intervention, they have nevertheless fought to make their country free.

The recent elections provided a great chance for the progressive people of Sri Lanka to highlight the endless possibilities for the country's future. The Sri Lankan/Australian Progressive Alliance brings together those interested in working to bring about positive changes in both societies.

To hear the latest update on events in Sri Lanka you're welcome to join us at:

13 November, 7.00pm

The Blue Elephant Restaurant

38 Willoughby Road, Crows Nest

Please RSVP Jagath Bandara on 0419 404 997
Admission \$50 (includes dinner, drinks and soft drinks)

Signing up to vote

"We have the numbers"

Susan Webb
and other PWW staff reporters

"We have the numbers, we have the momentum", said New Mexico labour leader Danny Rivera. "It's going to be about performance" – about who gets the voters to the polls.

Reports from around the nation bear out Rivera's enthusiasm – massive new voter registrations, heavy early voting, and an unprecedented groundswell of volunteers. These new factors could put this election on the map as a milestone in the birth of a powerful national progressive movement.

In Michigan, labour is pouring in staff and volunteers "in the thousands", said Metro Detroit AFL-CIO President Donald Boggs.

Panicked by the surge of new voters, the Ohio Republican Party challenged the registrations of 35,000 state-wide, 17,000 in Cleveland alone, based solely on claims that postcards sent to them confirming their registration were returned as "undeliverable". However, a 1993 federal voting rights law stipulates that a person's right to vote cannot be denied because they moved to a new address.

The Republicans have recruited 3500 operatives, each paid \$100, who will be assigned to Ohio's polling places November 2 in a drive to slow down, harass and intimidate voters.

"History tells us that, as we move closer to Election Day, the potential for more such dirty tricks and widespread voter intimidation

and suppression will increase exponentially. The right of thousands of Ohio citizens to cast their ballots is at stake", said Jocelyn Travis, state director of the Ohio Election Protection Coalition

"After the fiasco in Florida in the 2000 elections, the eyes of the world are trained on the election process in the United States ... [and] we want to make sure our state shows the world that Ohio is a place where voters can make their voices heard at the ballot box in free and fair elections."

In Columbus, Ohio, more than 1,000 union members marched on the offices of Ohio Secretary of State J Kenneth Blackwell on October 25, to demand that he protect the rights of the 700,000 newly registered Ohio voters threatened by Republican vote suppression tactics in this crucial battleground state.

Georgia Congressman and civil rights hero John Lewis electrified a rally following the march. He recounted the story of "Bloody Sunday" when police brutally attacked voting rights marchers in Selma, Alabama.

"Thirty-nine years ago, during the Selma to Montgomery march for the right to vote as we crossed the Pettis Bridge, if someone had told me that I'd be here, in Columbus, Ohio, in 2004, on the same issue, I would have told them they're crazy!" Lewis thundered. "But all across America, the handwriting is on the wall – the people are coming on November 2 ... and there's going to be a change!"

Ohio Rep Stephanie Tubbs

Jones told a large rally: "Florida ain't happening in Ohio", and promised an all-out fight to protect the right to vote.

In West Virginia, 500 volunteers turned out to door-knock last weekend. Some 115,000 new voters signed up this year in the state, an 11 percent increase. State AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Larry Matheny said labour was responsible for a "tremendous segment" of those new registrations. Now it is working to ensure that members and their families vote. Key issues in West Virginia, as elsewhere, are jobs, health care and trade that benefits working families, he said.

Matheny, was confident that his state would go for Kerry. "Following the John Kerry victory", he said, labour will build on its new grassroots strength, with its eye on electing a more worker-friendly state Legislature in 2006.

In Arkansas, where polls showed the presidential race tied, state AFL-CIO President Alan Hughes said unions are pulling out all stops to mobilise the vote. The mood is, "We can't afford four more years of Bush", and "the guy is incapable", he said. Most of all, "We want to know we got a job when we wake up the next morning".

Arkansas has 162,000 new voters registered this year, a 7.7 percent increase over 2000. Over 29 percent of these are young voters ages 18 to 25, a group that is seen as favouring Kerry nationwide.

Nationally, the union movement will have 5000 paid staff working full-time by Election Day, more than triple its 2000 effort, along with over 200,000 Labour 2004 volunteers, the AFL-CIO says. They have worked 257 phone banks with 2,322 lines in 16 states, and passed out more than 32 million workplace leaflets.

This year's massive voter mobilisation drive included major efforts to register minority, youth and women voters.

American Indians

Native Vote 2004, sponsored by the National Congress of American Indians, and the Moving America Forward Foundation have registered thousands of new voters, ranging from 20,000 in Arizona and New Mexico to 450 new voters in the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Oregon.

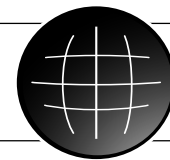
In hot-spot Wisconsin, state AFL-CIO Executive Vice-President Sara Rogers noted that people were waiting in long lines every day to vote early in Milwaukee and Madison. The state's same-day registration is expected to pull in many new voters whose impact is not reflected in the polls. Along with allied organisations, labour is waging "the largest, most massive ground effort I've ever seen", she said. Over a thousand union volunteers were set to work during the final campaign days.

Thousands more volunteers are working the battleground states, mobilised by America Coming Together, MoveOn, the League of Conservation Voters (LCV) and other issue-based progressive groups. Car and bus caravans have poured in from around the country. Last weekend alone, over 500 people from the Chicago area travelled to Wisconsin.

People's Weekly World (PWW) ☘



Sign of the times – outside an early voting centre in Florida



Global briefs

GLOBAL: The International Labor Organisation (ILO) says that half the world's unemployed are between 15 and 24 years of age. An ILO report, "Global Unemployment Trends for Youth, 2004", said the worldwide youth unemployment rate last year was 14.4 percent – representing a 26.8 percent increase in the total number of unemployed young people over the past decade. Although young people represent about a quarter of the working age population, the ILO said, they made up as much as 47 percent of the 186 million people out of work in 2003.

NIGERIA: The four-day general strike called by the Labor Civil Society Coalition to protest against petrol price hikes was officially suspended on October 14. But the Nigerian Labor Congress – a key component of the coalition – warned that an indefinite stoppage could begin in two weeks if the government fails to lower petrol prices. The strike – which had the participation of broad sectors of Nigeria's working people – closed banks, businesses, shops and public services. The action was the third general strike in 18 months over fuel prices, which have soared following government deregulation of the domestic fuel market – a move made at the behest of the International Monetary Fund.

CANADA: Global low-wage retailer Wal-Mart said last week it was "concerned about the economic viability" of its store in Jonquiere, Quebec, which in August became the only unionised Wal-Mart in North America. Wal-Mart claims the Jonquiere store "is not meeting its business plan". The company said it had not yet heard from the United Food and Commercial Workers Union about starting talks on a contract, and alleged that "the unresolved labour situation ... is proving detrimental to improving the performance of the store". Wal-Mart is increasingly besieged by criticism from the labour movement, social activists and academics, and faces as many as 8000 lawsuits – including a number of class action suits – at any given time.

BOLIVIA: Thousands of peasants marched on Bolivia's capital, La Paz, for an October 18 rally demanding that former President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada be tried for the deaths of 80 people during last year's protests against the export of natural gas. Lozada, who was forced out by the protests, is now in exile in the US. Bolivia's Congress backed the peasants' demand. The current President, Carlos Mesa, had been Lozada's deputy. But Mesa has been forced to listen to demands of peasants and indigenous Bolivians that their gas resources be used to industrialise and develop the country instead of merely enriching giant energy transnationals. Bolivia's Congress is currently debating a new law to govern gas exploitation, which would increase the royalties transnationals pay for the gas and direct the income to health, education, roads and jobs. The current demonstrations, like those a year ago, are being led by indigenous leader Evo Morales.

Indymedia asks: "Who took our servers?"

Two weeks after the hard drives of two Indymedia servers were seized from the London office of a US-owned web hosting company called Rackspace, Caroline Flint, UK Home Office Under-Secretary, answered parliamentary questions by stating that "no UK law enforcement agencies were involved".

The seizure shut down around 20 Indymedia websites, an internet radio station, and other projects. The servers were returned a week later because "the court order had been complied with", but still no information is available to Indymedia as to who seized them and who now might have copies of all the public and personal information they contained.

An FBI spokesperson originally suggested to Agence France-Presse that the FBI issued a subpoena to Rackspace, but that it was "on behalf of a third country". Later he denied that the FBI had any involvement whatsoever.

A few days after the seizure, a senior federal prosecutor for Geneva, Switzerland, also confirmed that she had opened a criminal investigation of Indymedia – but that she had not asked for the servers to be seized.

An Italian judge from Bologna confirmed that she issued a request to US authorities for the server's IP logs concerning certain posts published on Italy Indymedia – but

she says that she did not request the seizure of the server hardware, either.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), who is representing the interests of Indymedia, has contacted all the likely suspects in the US – including the FBI, the State Department, and the Federal District Court in Texas – that could have issued the subpoena referenced in Rackspace's public October 8 statement concerning the Indymedia server. But none of them claimed responsibility for the seizure.

"Were our servers abducted by aliens?", asks Clara, an Indymedia volunteer from the Netherlands. "Two weeks have passed and we are no step closer to knowing who took our servers, why, or even on which continent they were."

The only thing that is known is what Rackspace volunteered in their statement: that they received a court order in the US. Efforts are now underway by the Electronic Frontier Foundation to unseal that court order.

Meanwhile, the international outcry continues. Five thousand individuals have signed on to Indymedia's solidarity declaration (solidarity.indymedia.org.uk), and numerous others continue to contact Indymedia offering their support to help ensure that secret court orders and mysterious government agencies don't shut down Indymedia's websites ever again. ☘

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

email: guardian@cpa.org.au



People's concerns

The Guardian editorial (13/10/2004) rightly claims that a major reason for the Coalition victory on October 9 was the widely held fear about jobs and higher interest rates.

One may speculate that a sizeable proportion of working people arrived at their decision on how to cast their vote, not on the basis of the handouts of both major parties, but on their judgement that the Coalition can do much better than the ALP in managing the economy in a way that will protect jobs and keep interest rates low.

This surely shows that they are concerned about the economy, that they have an intuitive (at least) understanding of the link between the economy as a whole and the outcomes that affect their wellbeing.

If this judgement is correct, it follows that there are implications for the tactics that need to be adopted by the radical left in order to get the support of the working people for radical change. We cannot hope to succeed only by appealing for support to get a better deal within the system.

Karl Marx tells us the way in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. He says "it was altogether a mistake to make a fuss about the so-called

distribution and to put on this the chief emphasis".

We must not make the mistake of the Utopian Socialists, who, Marx said followed the capitalist economists in regarding and treating distribution as independent of production, and hence represented Socialism as turning chiefly around the question of distribution. This he regarded as a "backward step".

Bob Saltis
Adelaide, SA

Black Saturday lesson

The lesson of the Black Saturday election is clear, to work harder to rid this government – before its term of office is over, and it does more harm.

The many rabbits Howard pulled from the hat were based on a strong economy, independence and the family.

Howard's double talk has become a humbug.

Our economy is far from strong, indeed our economy is weak and sick. Our independence has been sold to America, and too many families are in deep debt.

Over production has got us hamstrung.

Car yards are chock-a-block and overflowing. Electrical goods and other commodities are being hawked by the media or letter-dropped advertising leaflets to buy, buy and then get one free.

All sorts of gimmicks are used to get us to enter the supermarket chains with little or no cash left to fill the larder.

More attacks by Howard are not far off to hamper radical and people's struggle to keep a system

of government to take turns at robbing the public purse.

Phyllis Johnson
Animus Populi
Friend of the people
Padstow, NSW

Students raise the red flag

I have attached some images of mine and a few dedicated comrades' efforts at a socialist revolution at our ultra-conservative suburban Sydney high school. On our school "muck up" day we managed to hoist the hammer and sickle up the flagpole alongside the archaic Australian flag.

We also managed to erect images of the great man himself Vladimir Lenin all around the school inciting mixed reactions from students and staff. One of the many reactions we received from supposedly learned students was "why are there NAZI symbols around the school?" along with "Huh, communists; don't they start wars?" along with other solidly ignorant remarks.

I believe this highlights a distinct flaw in our contemporary education syllabus. Students are still being instilled with the attitudes predominant in the Menzies era. Communism has been automatically associated with "evil" in many young minds. This ignorance then as we have seen in the recent election transfers into adulthood and the ballot box. Society has become so caught up in our own selfish individual needs and desires that we have forgotten the harsh realities of "the other side of the fence".

Prosperity clearly breeds ignorance.

Perhaps a more open and informative high school syllabus will help open the future's mind to the world and of how dire problems and issues can be solved. This would be a welcome relief to the current glorification of "our federation" and "the honourable" Sir Robert Menzies.

NB: May 'god' help us all if George Bush is re-elected next week.

Justin Morris
Westleigh, NSW

Is this what lies ahead?

On October 14, four days after the election the DIMIA (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs) forcibly deported a young Iranian man. He fled his country – an offence – but is also a self-proclaimed Christian, which is a serious crime under Sharia Law in Iran.

Sister of Mercy, Anne Foale writes, "It is with a heavy heart that I inform you that in the lull following the Election this Government has deported our friend and Christian Iranian directly from the church service yesterday afternoon.

"While we were praying together DIMIA packed up his room. He wasn't seen again by his friends. M was taken to Perth, and then to Iran where he is most likely to face arrest, imprisonment with a death sentence for apostasy. His friends and other detainees are in shock, wailing and bewildered. I am reminded of Rachel crying for

her children. We are crying too. We are in mourning. Please feel free to act."

Is this going to be the pattern for the new government? I am very frightened that as voters we have given permission for hard line, inhuman and anti-Christian policies. It is happening covertly without any access by the media to inform the Australian public.

Elaine Smith
West Haven, NSW

No allies, only interests

Three real winners in the federal election were the three untrumped but fully exploited policies – fear, prejudice and greed. Rejoice Australia.

Australia cannot continue its past decade of slipping down in its international standing. Of course our macho belligerents will say, "Stuff the international opinion. We will do what we want to do – with big brother behind us we will get away with anything."

Oh yeah? Big brother is not making too good a job of it in Iraq. And there's one little point they are either ignorant of or have forgotten – the unwritten but well understood principle tenet in foreign policy: "You have no allies, only interests – your own".

If the US thinks it is not in its interests to support us, then it will be "tough luck Australia, we can go it alone".

See how good we will be then.

B Appleton
Woy Woy, NSW

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Forbidden research

Remember Iraq's supposed "weapons of mass destruction"? According to Bush, Blair and Howard at the time of the Iraq war, Iraq's cellars (not to mention its streets and alleyways) were apparently littered with stockpiled WMDs.

As we all know, none were in fact found despite 18 months of frantic searching. The quest to find them has in fact been officially called off.

So why are the US occupation forces still holding a number of Iraqi scientists in prison for allegedly working on those same fictitious weapons of mass destruction? If the weapons don't exist (indeed, never existed), surely the people accused of making them should be released.

Britain's *New Worker* suggests there may be another reason for holding them in custody. Some, at least, of the scientists were researching the adverse effects of Anglo-US use of depleted uranium (DU) weapons in the Gulf War and the Iraq War.

In both wars in the Gulf, the US and Britain treated the territory (and people) of Iraq like a giant weapons-testing range, using an unimaginable number of armour-piercing shells and tank-smashing (and bunker-busting) bombs and rockets, all of them tipped with or encased in the extra-hard depleted uranium.

On impact, DU atomises, producing a fine powder of radioactive

dust particles. Ever since the first Gulf War Iraq has suffered a catastrophic rise in the number of cancer patients, especially among children.

Apparently the leaders of the "free world" however, would rather the environmental and public health impact of these weapons remained under wraps. Hence the continued incarceration of the Iraqi scientists accused of working on non-existent WMDs.

And we all know who really researches – and not only researches but builds and uses – all sorts of weapons of mass destruction, don't we?

Drawn from life – still

In one episode of the brilliant British TV cop show *Foyle's War*, set on the south coast of England during the early days of WW2, Foyle had to deal with a clever, sophisticated home-grown fascist. This well-bred smoothy contended that Germany was the wrong enemy: "our enemy – and Germany's – is the Bolshevik and the Jew", he told a public meeting.

Lest you think that that sort of thinking went out with the Second World War, or even that it was a bit of dramatic licence to put such sentiments into the mouths of the English, consider the following recent incident.

British Labour MP Gerald Kaufman was a delegate to the just-concluded Labour Party Conference in Blackpool. The Conference always includes a number of "fringe meetings", and Kaufman was due to speak at one of them organised by the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign.

To get to the Palestinian meeting, Kaufman had to walk along the seaford past a noisy demonstration by the horsey set protesting against the ban on fox-hunting. I quote *The New Worker* once again: "One of the demonstrators – a stout middle-aged

man in checked tweeds – recognised Kaufman and yelled out: "You Jewish bigot".

"The MP was then attacked by a mob of toffs, screaming anti-Semitic abuse, tearing at his clothing and ripping open his brief case."

Not that it would have made any difference to these terribly pukka fascists had they known – I am sure they would not have cared a jot – but, far from being a "Jewish bigot", Kaufman was on his way to the Palestinian meeting to speak against the Israeli wall.

Japanese capitalism

Capitalism is such a rotten system that the corruption within it is fast becoming an everyday part of life, or if not life, then certainly popular entertainment. Where would television "drama" be without the scheming, conniving, back-stabbing corruption and murderous money-grubbing of capitalism to give it plots, motives and characterisation?

I picked up at a second hand shop the other day one of Guy Stanley's thriller's, *A Death in Tokyo*, containing a succinct description of at least one aspect of the reality of capitalism.

Stanley's thrillers are set in Japan, where he presumably still lives with his Japanese wife Kayoko. Certainly his knowledge of contemporary Japanese custom and practice smacks of the long time resident.

His hero, Araki, is a somewhat disreputable journalist, whose probing around the case of a small-time thug found washed up on the bank of the Tama River leads to an opportunity to expose the widespread practice of using organised crime gangs to "maintain order" at corporation shareholder meetings.

I was struck by Stanley's description of the underside of Japanese business: "The world Araki and his colleagues observed



was outside the fortified and sterilised environs in which the protected populace lived:

"Where the housewife saw a pinball parlour, a massage house or an all-night gay bar, Araki saw an underworld struggle for territorial supremacy with police payoffs and protectionism;

"When the childish pranks of the drunken salarymen had ended and the hostess clubs were closed Araki found the pimps and their stables of women, the blackmail and the drugs;

"When the politician appeared on television displaying an impassive façade of immense propriety, Araki already had a file on his corrupt manipulations of Japan's fragile

democratic processes, his pay-offs and his mistresses;

"And when the president of Mitsu-this or Sumi-that pontificated with unbearable sincerity on the policy of social responsibility being pursued by his company, Araki saw the cartels, the rebates and the unprincipled, opportunistic strategies of a market dominated by greed."

But like almost all journalists on capitalist newspapers, he finds it almost impossible to write about these things, because the owners of the media want scandal, not analysis, they want sensation, because that sells.

Who knows where serious reporting might lead? ☘



Sun November 7 ~
~ Sat November 13

In the movie *Jurassic Park*, Richard Attenborough uses dinosaur DNA from the blood of a mosquito entombed in a piece of fossilised amber to recreate dinosaurs in his theme park.

In *The Amber Time Machine* (ABC 7.30pm Sunday), his real-life brother David examines the reality of DNA and other things preserved in amber for 150 million years.

His starting point is a piece of amber he was given as a child and which he was fascinated to discover had insects buried within it. Amber, he explains, is pine resin, and the insects become trapped when the sticky resin seeps over them from a wound in the tree.

While the program shows that recreating dinosaurs from amber is just a fantasy, there are nevertheless plenty of discoveries still to be made using amber as the vehicle, a translucent little time machine allowing a glimpse of plant and animal life in the distant past.

A few years ago, a portable jukebox was discovered which belonged to John Lennon in the 1960s. This jukebox contains a fascinating tracklist of 40 records – Soul, Rhythm & Blues and Rock 'n Roll – written in Lennon's own handwriting. These are the songs that shaped Lennon's musical education, and they reveal many of his original sources of inspiration.

In *John Lennon's Jukebox* (ABC 9.30pm Monday), presenter Melvyn Bragg and director Christopher Walker took Lennon's jukebox back on the road to meet the artists featured on it who influenced Lennon and The Beatles.

I found the program a surprisingly interesting and informative way to walk down memory lane, and the portable jukebox itself is a remarkable little marvel.

Young, Muslim And French, screening in the *Cutting Edge* timeslot (SBS 8.30pm Tuesday), looks at the lives of young Muslims in France and the introduction of a law banning the wearing of headscarves in schools.

France now has five million Muslims, the largest community of Muslims in Western Europe. Islam is now the second largest religion in France, Catholicism being the largest.

Hate crimes against Muslims are increasing while, in turn, at least five imams have been expelled from France in the past year for inciting hatred. The law on headscarves, which came into effect in February this year, has polarised the country.

The law bans the wearing of headscarves in schools. It also bans the wearing of Jewish skull caps or prominent Christian crosses but debate has centred on the issue of headscarves.

The government has defended the law as upholding the secularism of the French state.

Young, Muslim And French interviews members of the community of Dammarie Les Lys where the majority of the residents are Muslim.

Up to 30 per cent of young people living in this neighbourhood are unemployed. Many of them claim they are discriminated against because of their background and religion.

Several express their frustration that despite the fact they were

born and grew up in France, speak French, vote in France – and in many cases are third generation French – they are still being asked to “integrate” into French society.

I have always liked Michael Palin. He was excellent in his various *Monty Python* incarnations – who can forget his poverty-stricken but oddly self satisfied Edwardian parent in a grimy North Country tenement telling his rather large brood that because the mill had closed “there's nowt for't but to sell you all for scientific experimentation”?

He was equally splendid sending up British literary clichés, whether displaying absurd stiff upper lip heroism in *Across The Andes By Frog* or with equal absurdity supporting the local football team from one disaster to the next.

These latter programs were in a tradition of poker-faced deadly serious leg pulling exemplified in print by the classic *Ascent of Rum Doodle* (if you ever come across it in a second-hand bookshop, grab it – its delicious verbal and pictorial farce).

But then he went off at a tangent into a new career as the modern world's best known eccentric traveller. Although the various travel series he has done tend to teeter on the verge of being less about the places visited than about *Michael Palin* visiting those places, they usually manage to do no more than teeter.

As a presenter, he shares with David Attenborough the ability to seemingly invite the viewer to share the experience with him, unlike the bronzed, coiffed and ever-smiling professional TV presenters on most travel shows.

His new six-part series, *Himalaya With Michael Palin* (ABC 7.30pm Saturdays), sees the intrepid ex-Python on a 2000-mile expedition through the Himalaya.

As usual, it includes things the tourists get to see and – since tour-



Translucent glimpse of the past (*The Amber Time Machine*)

ists rarely have a camera crew in attendance to impress the local dignitaries – things and people tourists rarely if ever get to see.

The three-part series from Wales, *The Power of Gold* (SBS 7.30pm Saturdays), should be interesting to *Guardian* readers. It purports to tell the history of one of mankind's most intoxicating obsessions: gold.

The first episode deals with gold in the ancient world; the second looks at gold in the age of the Arab and Spanish traders and conquerors and the third episode deals with gold in the modern era, from the industrial revolution onwards.

According to the ABC, *A Spooks* (ABC 10.20pm Saturdays) is “the hit drama that takes us into the thrilling world of MI5, Britain's clandestine security service”. There are, however, other ways to describe MI5 – and programs about it.

It has always been an anti-people organisation – whether trying to hunt down “Soviet agents” within government or “Communist

agitators” in trade unions and community movements – its role has been one of bolstering *by whatever means were necessary* a reactionary state apparatus.

More recently, its ostensible target has become “terrorists”, but it is just as indifferent to such niceties as onus of proof and assumption of innocence as it ever was. It is apparently as willing to frame a suspect (or a “target”) as its US counterpart the FBI.

TV programs that glorify MI5 and gloss over or excuse its illegal activities are in effect a form of government propaganda aimed at making the loss of civil liberties and democratic rights acceptable and “justified”.

A badly made program on the subject would have a negative effect, so the best people are hired and money spent to make this kind of series a success. *Spooks* for example won the award for Best Drama Series at the 2002 Broadcast Awards and the Best Drama Series award in the 2003 Bafta TV Awards. ☼

Sydney

MANUFACTURING FEAR

Public Forum: The politics of anti-terror

As terror laws and military strikes escalate, who gains, who loses? Who is manufacturing fear and why? Who lives in fear in the “war on terror”? What can be done to challenge this? How can people take up the issues, and act for justice?

Saturday 13 November
9.30-4.30

Broadway Tower,
University of Technology Sydney

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Speakers: Vicki Sentas, Community Law Centre, UTS; David Bernie, NSW Council for Civil Liberties; Agnes Chong, Australian Muslim Civil Rights Advocacy Network; Joo Cheong Tham, Civil Rights Network Victoria; Micheal Head, UWS; Michael Humphrey, UNSW; Jude McCulloch, Monash University; Stephen Hopper, solicitor; Ratna Dewi, Legal Aid Institute, Indonesia; Rafendi Djamin, Human Rights Working Group, Indonesia; Nori Colmenares, Karapatan, Philippines;

Tanja Dreher, UTS Shopfront; Scott Poynting, UWS; representative from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission; Warren Duncan, Community Relations Commission; Ken Davis, APHEDA, Trade Union Aid Abroad; Dr Jamal Rifi; Keysar Trad, Lebanese Muslim Association; Kieran Longridge, Greenpeace; with participants from the NSW Labor Council, Amnesty, NSW Council of Social Service, and others.

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Pedlars of influence – Family First and the Federal Elections

Bob Briton

The sudden appearance of the Family First Party (FFP) during the recent Federal Elections certainly grabbed the media's attention. Its slick campaign and shrewd preference deals ensured that it went on to grab enough votes to put Victorian businessman Steve Fielding into the Senate. Other FFP senate candidates came close. Certain things about the new party were widely reported in the mass media before the election. It has clear links with the fundamentalist Assemblies of God (AOG) church. It is politically conservative to put it mildly. It is now obvious that its modest success at its first national outing will cement the Coalition's dominance of the new Senate.

Secretive and pragmatic

However, it has been fairly hard for outsiders to get a clear idea of what exactly Family First is or even advocates. Pastor Andrew Evans (formerly of Adelaide's Paradise Christian Church) gave Kerry O'Brien of the ABC's *7.30 Report* the party's one line response to just about any query about policy: "Well, in a short way, we could say that anything that helps families, we'll support. Anything that hurts families, we will oppose."

Unfortunately for those who are still interested, even the policies posted on the party's website give little extra detail. They are generally supportive of the status quo with a little of the "good for families" stardust sprinkled on them. When the media tried to contact candidates like Mr Fielding or the party's national leader Andrea Mason after the election to find out what their attitude might be to the sale of Telstra or media cross-ownership laws, they found that the phone had simply been taken off the hook.

Ms Mason had previously suggested that the Telstra sale might not be "good for families" but now, it seems, a more pragmatic approach has been adopted. Before going into seclusion, Mr Fielding made a hurried comment that the sale could be considered if it was in the interests of families. It is pretty safe to predict that the new Senator – a marketing manager for industry super fund Vision Super – will see the benefit to all those "mum and dad investors" likely to buy into a fully private Telstra.

Before the elections, some campaign workers strayed off the set message by giving vent to their bigoted views on gay marriage. Victorian FFP Senate Candidate Danny Nalliah of the Catch the Fire Ministries made a widely reported gaff in one of his leaflets:

"Spot Satan's strongholds in the areas you are living (brothels, gambling places, bottleshops, mosques,

temples – Freemasons/Buddhist/Hindu etc, witchcraft... If you are ready to pray against it do so. If not, bring it to your church and ask your intercessors, through the pastor, to pull these strongholds down."

Those responsible for the blunders were reprimanded. Nothing was going to be allowed to spoil a campaign costing an estimated \$1.1 million.

In Queensland, Berowra FFP candidate Reverend Lance Clark was taking the preferred approach. Asked whether the detention of asylum-seekers and FFP's decision to give its preferences to Philip Ruddock might be anti-family, the Reverend said, "I'm not saying anything. You'll have to ask headquarters."

When a reporter from Adelaide's daily *Advertiser* snuck into the hall at Paradise Community Church to observe the FFP's origins at first hand, he was stunned to be singled out by Pastor Ashley Evans (son of Family First MLC Andrew Evans). He had been asking the congregation to pray for the elections. "From whatever political party they are from, we pray that they have Christian beliefs, Christian values, Christian ethics." Then, out of the blue, he blurted out "A journalist from *The Advertiser* I believe is sitting in the back row ... welcome. Could you please stand up and wave so we can all welcome you."

The journalist in question was very impressed by the efficiency of the church's "eyes and ears", if slightly less so by the firm talking to he got after the service. Nevertheless, it was obvious from this brief contact that the church was the centre of a lot of political



Family first – looking for Sanan's strongholds

Assemblies of God churches have a neatly packaged approach that looks for all the world like a franchise.

"In an uncertain age many people are confused and seeking certainty and they find that in the Pentecostal churches", according to Canberra Uniting Church secretary and historian Ian Wills. Cash-strapped families struggling to make mortgage repayments would like the "wealth is good" message, too. Pastor Bobbie Houston of Hillsong Church has authored a book called *You Need More Money: Discovering God's Amazing Financial Plan for Your Life*. Those that have spare cash might like to place it with AOG's own investment services at competitive rates of interest.

property developer Peter Harris set up Business Generation Ministry International (BGMI) with a vision to "facilitate and participate in the generation of billions of dollars through businesses to extend God's Kingdom." BGMI's "Movers and Shakers" program wants to build an "army of wealth builders and influencers".

The Assemblies of God also talk a lot about "covenanting". It means, in part, extending the fundamentalist influence throughout a specific area (like Sydney's west or Adelaide's northeast) and eventually to be able to steer political developments and declare the district for "God". The plan for penetrating the business community is clear. The other priority is the schools of the area. AOG seeks to have its members become school chaplains or, at the very least, to bring other chaplains under their influence. Students of schools – public or otherwise – will then be accessible to the AOG's all-singing, all-dancing approach inside school walls and in school hours with the inevitable invitation to a religious event promoted as a "concert".

Allies Howard can count on

Though the Coalition's control of the Senate in its own right makes the question of likely FFP voting habits a bit academic, it is clear that Senator Fielding will not be causing Howard any heartburn. Former Paradise Community Church Pastor Andrew Evans has not stood out since being elected to SA's upper house. The "law and order" Rann Labor Government would not be very deserving of his criticism in any case. Evans has taken the opportunity to deliver some lectures about abortion but his record is not noteworthy.

The attendance of Howard and Costello at AOG services and

the agreement to institute "Family Impact Statements" for government policy and a mentoring program for trouble youth has delivered a classic "win/win" for these right-wing forces. FFP's meagre 1.9 per cent of the vote went to the Libs by and large in the form of preferences and Labor and the Democrats shot themselves in the foot by putting the fundamentalist party ahead of the Greens on their tickets. The result, an Assemblies of God "Mover and Shaker" gets a big helping of influence by taking a Senate seat.

Another indication of AOG political behaviour can be drawn from the US. Federal Attorney General John Ashcroft is a member of the church. Conditions in the US are slightly different in that the Pentecostals have decided to attach themselves to the Republican Party rather than establish their own. However, in common with FFP, Ashcroft downplays his religious connections, too. He stopped talking in tongues the minute he was sworn in as Attorney General.

From his senior post, Ashcroft has been able to push projects to outlaw abortion and flag burning and to reintroduce prayer to US classrooms. Like conservatives the world over, the former "states' rightist" now favours centralising the functions that matter in the Federal Government. He has pressed a number of states to impose the death penalty. He has also championed every piece of post 9/11 legislation restricting the civil rights of US citizens. He has backed racial "profiling" to detect terrorists entering the country. His name is synonymous with the so-called *Patriot Act* with its roving wiretaps and secret access to individual citizens' financial and other records.

It all sounds terribly familiar. Steve Fielding should fit right in with his Coalition colleagues in the Australian Senate. ☺

Assemblies of God churches have a neatly packaged approach that looks for all the world like a franchise

activity. In common with a number of other Assemblies of God centres, Paradise's foyer had been used to sign up FFP campaign volunteers.

Franchised religion

While the Assemblies of God have impressive facilities in a number of Australian capitals and have been able to attract weekly gatherings numbering in the thousands at its larger churches, its "end times" message has a limited appeal to the wider public. Its heartlands are the dispirited, alienated far-flung suburbs of the bigger cities. The focus is on younger people and Christian pop music is a major lure.

"Influence" is a much-used word in church circles. According to Pastor Ashley Evans, they want "... influence that gives us real access to the realms of politics, media and the entertainment world... to create leaders and people with influence that is so pervasive it cannot be stopped, so attractive it cannot be ignored, so contemporary it cannot be ridiculed and so authentic it can't be rejected." The people to do this work are trained (some say brainwashed) at Influencers Conferences or at the 10-week "Alpha" courses developed originally by the London branch.

FFP chairman and wealthy

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