

Police terror on Palm Island

The people of Palm Island, off the coast of north Queensland, have been terrorised by Tactical Response paramilitaries, with children as young as nine being forced at gunpoint to lie face down in their homes during raids. The state terror tactics followed a community explosion of rage that had been building over the death in police custody on November 21 of islander Cameron Doomadgee, 36. The people took to the streets in anger after the coroner's report found Mr Doomadgee had suffered broken ribs and a ruptured liver and spleen portal vein.

During protests the police station and court house were burned down. The police were forced to flee to the hospital. The officer who arrested Mr Doomadgee left the island for his own safety. The island's other police officers left and refuse to return to duty.

Palm Island Council chairperson Erykah Kyle said the march on the police station was a spontaneous action and was fuelled by community anger with police.

"The community is very devastated", she said. "Shock has just gone through the community. People have been very angry. After 339 recommendations regarding deaths in custody, and hundreds of thousands of dollars, here we are approaching 2005 and it is still happening.

"Certainly something has got to change for Palm Islanders", said Ms

Carpentaria Land Council representative Brad Foster came to Palm Island at the request of the Council. He described the paramilitaries as storm troopers. "They deliberately closed off the island while they practiced their terrorist drills on unarmed Palm Islanders.

"If they asked the Council and put up a list of people they wanted to speak to, they would have been presented to them without arrests being made at gunpoint and women and children being terrorised in their homes."

Aboriginal Legal Aid members were not allowed onto the island to represent those who have been arrested.

The police smashed down front doors of homes and stormed in with shotguns and riot shields. An alleged leader of the protests, Lex Wotton, was arrested by four car loads of police, who shot him with an immobiliser gun while he was stood with his hands up and the police guns were trained on him.

Shameful history

Of the many Aboriginal reserves set up across Queensland, Palm Island in particular gained a reputation as a "punishment place", a reputation which remains to this day.

Before white invasion in north Queensland, Palm Island belonged to the Manbarra people. Descendants of the Manbarra were still living on the tropical island, 65

regarded the location as an ideal place to confine Aboriginal and Islander people who were regarded by white society as "problem cases" and "uncontrollables".

Over the next two decades around 1630 people from 40 different Aboriginal groups across Queensland were removed by the Department and deposited on the Island.

Removal to Palm Island was the heaviest punishment a Department officer could legally administer. In charge of the new reserve settlement was an ex-army captain, Robert Curry, a man with no previous administrative experience.

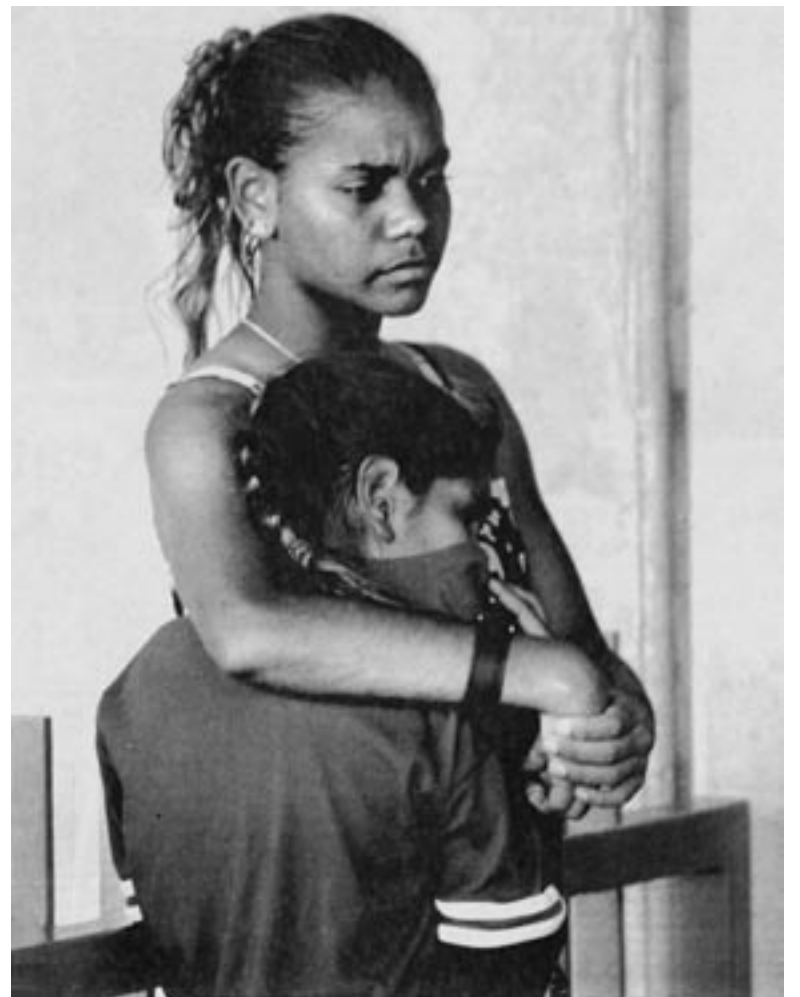
From the start the settlement was underfinanced, with the residents of the island surviving on meagre rations and living in complete poverty. Leprosy and venereal disease spread through the settlement and the doctors appointed to the island were less than competent in their approach to medicine.

No inspections of Palm Island were made by the Department until the Governor of Queensland, Donald Thatcher, visited in 1923 and was critical of the squalid living conditions he observed.

This quickly led to a visit by the Protector Bleakley but no real improvement in conditions occurred. Administrator Curry continued to feud with the other white staff on the Island. Gradually he succumbed to the combined effects of alcoholism and mental illness and in February 1930 he went on a destructive rampage, killing his own children and torching several buildings before he was shot by one of his own Aboriginal staffers.

As was the case on all Queensland reserves, the residents of Palm Island were subject to strict supervision. Conditions were jail-like. No one could leave the Island without the superintendent's permission and he had the power to censor all outgoing mail.

Speaking Aboriginal languages was forbidden. Employment opportunities were limited and the wages earned by Aboriginal workers were "managed" and misappropriated by the Department. Despite this high level of enforced control, poor health conditions continued to pre-



Police state - two children console each other following the arrest of their fathers

vail. In 1957 a series of incidents involving the staff treatment of Aboriginal women and a decision by the Department to cut wages, led to a strike by the residents.

The Department responded by expelling 25 identified ringleaders of the resistance, and their families, from the island. A second strike occurred in 1974 when the Department sacked the local Community Council and threatened to turn control of the Island over to the Townsville City Council.

The Department finally relinquished control of the Island in 1985 when title for the Island was passed to the Community Council in the form of a DOGIT. (Deed of Grant in Trust.)

While this gave the residents a greater say in the administration

of the island, the transfer of title led to the removal of much of the Government infrastructure. Soon after the decision was made, barges arrived and houses, shops, the timber mill and farming equipment were disassembled and shipped back to the mainland.

Like many remote communities, Palm Island today continues to grapple with social problems including high unemployment, alcohol abuse and crime, a direct legacy of 80 years of mismanagement and abuse by Queensland Governments.

As *The Guardian* goes to press there are reports that 18 young people from Palm Island are being held in Townsville and have been refused bail and 80 police on the island are looking for more people to arrest. ❖

Removal to Palm Island was the heaviest punishment a Department officer could legally administer.

Kyle, whose own son died in police custody in 2001.

Describing the level of incarceration of her people as "unacceptable", she warned, "If it keeps going you can expect anything".

The Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission has begun an investigation into the death as well as that of an Aboriginal death in custody at Normanton.

kilometres north east of Townsville, when in 1914 the Queensland Government gazetted the Island as a reserve.

No further action was taken by the Government until 1918 when a cyclone flattened the Hull River Aboriginal Reserve near Tully. The Queensland Protector, JW Bleakley, then decided that Palm Island would become the replacement site. He

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The Guardian

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Class and Indigenous leadership

Noel Pearson is the director of the Cairns-based Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership. He is a lawyer and self-proclaimed spokesperson for Aboriginal Australians. An Aborigine whose education he attributes to the Lutheran Church, he grew up on a church-run mission and was sent to a private Christian boarding school. He advocates sending Aboriginal children to private boarding schools, calling the provision of secondary public schooling in remote Aboriginal communities a "failed experiment". Basing his arguments on his own experience of having "the best of both worlds" he rejects those who say his proposal opens the way for a new stolen generation.

In offering his panacea he casually states that Aboriginal kids have been going to boarding schools since the 1960s. Yes. A lot of things were happening then: Aboriginal people were barred from most public buildings and public swimming pools, hotels and clubs, confined to missions on the outskirts of white towns, refused service at the counter in shops, and in restaurants and cafés. Aboriginal stockmen went on strike against their ruthless exploitation by pastoralists; a Freedom Ride around the country took place by Aboriginal activists to highlight the prejudices, exclusion and racism being practiced against their people.

As far as education is concerned and setting aside for a moment the existence of two different cultures, we immediately run up against practical questions. Does Mr Pearson expect that all Aboriginal children will get this golden opportunity offered up by boarding schools, a whole generation sent away from their families and communities? Or is it to be an elite few who will be feted through the private system?

The answer has been provided by Indigenous Affairs Minister Amanda Vanstone. Supporting Pearson's proposal, Vanstone has announced plans for a \$10 million corporate-backed scholarship program to take Aboriginal children out of their communities and into private city schools. The plan is supported by the likes of Westpac bank and mining giant Comalco.

If Mr Pearson believes that assimilation is off the agenda he is profoundly misinformed.

An issue such as Indigenous education services cannot be dealt with in isolation. Indeed, Noel Pearson does not confine himself to matters of education. He has for some time been blaming welfare for the plight of Indigenous Australians, most recently claiming that Aboriginal communities are "disintegrating socially and culturally because of passive welfare and substance abuse". John Howard couldn't have put it better. In fact "passive welfare" is a government catch-cry for dole bludger or parasite.

Prior to the federal election Mr Pearson called on the incoming government to abolish welfare payments to Aboriginal school leavers. The Government is going one better with a racist scheme to make payment of benefits to Indigenous Australians conditional on their behaviour. This would involve the monitoring of their spending of benefits through a government-issued "smart card". Any spending deemed offend government standards would see individuals cut off benefits and whole communities punished with loss of services. (See *Guardian* 17-11-04)

Not everyone is as enthusiastic as Noel Pearson. Tony McCartney from the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation called the plan "genocide", Mr McCartney pointed out that the crisis was not caused by Aboriginal people, "rather we have been the victims of over 200 years of ill-conceived ideas and policy failure and continue to live with the legacy of that".

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, warned, "I would be deeply concerned if conditions were introduced which place restrictions on access to services for one sector of the Australian community defined by their race".

Where does all this place Noel Pearson in the class structure of society? He believes in the private sector and private enterprise. This accounts for the apparent contradictions in his actions. As such, no matter his claims of community concerns and ties, in practice he puts the individual first and the collective second. He issues edicts and helps formulate policy for governments. Thus he exudes the paternalism usually seen oozing out of Howard Government ministers.

The leadership his institute in Cairns aims to provide is the passage of some individuals toward the creation of an elite Aboriginal middle class, who like himself, would provide "leadership" while being part of the very system responsible for oppressing their people.

PRESS FUND

The UN's 2001 International Year of the Volunteer is fading from memory. Volunteers themselves tend to be self-effacing, even though their contribution to the enrichment of human life is enormous. The true volunteer gives without thought of recognition or reward, and many volunteers go quite unrecognised. As you might expect, those who support the Press Fund with their contributions are our favourite volunteers! They're crucial to the production of *The Guardian*, and we acknowledge all their contributions, large and small, as truly valuable and appreciated. This week our sincere thanks go to the following:

H and E Ewer \$100, R G \$2, W Irving \$5, Bruce Mayberry \$200, Digger Murphy \$10, Michael Power \$10, "Round Figure" \$13, Craig & Lesley \$20.

This week's total \$360. Progressive total: \$10,890.

Higher education: the cost increases

When the Hawke Labor Government in the mid-1980s introduced a small "administrative fee" for universities in the mid-1980s, we were reassured that it was not a course fee and that free tertiary education (introduced by the Whitlam Government almost 15 years earlier) would remain free. Bit by bit the so-called administrative fee was increased. This fee was the forerunner to the reintroduction of fees.

Since then the Federal Government, which fully funded student places, has gradually wound back its contribution. Fees have been reintroduced and gradually increased, and students expected to pay a larger proportion of the cost of their studies.

Students were selected on the basis of merit and could pay their fee upfront (with a discount) or through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS). HECS is a form of student loan with repayment deferred until a student has an income of a certain level. Under HECS the government is still making a contribution towards the cost of the course - albeit one that is getting smaller each year.

In more recent years the government has allowed universities to admit a certain proportion of students on a full-fee paying basis (no government subsidy) who make an upfront payment for their studies. These are students who failed to be

selected on the basis of merit for a HECS place. That is, they can buy a place - if they have the money.

In order to encourage students to pay their fees "up front", the federal government is to offer such students a loan of up to \$50,000, repayments of which don't start until the student's annual income reaches \$30,000. Under current guidelines, universities may admit up to 35 percent of their students on this basis.

Having forced them to resort to such measures, the government then uses the phoney argument that the universities are showing increasing "self-reliance" to justify even further funding cuts.

The aim of the \$50,000 loan is to encourage or make it easier for more students (or their parents) to buy a place.

This further disadvantages students from less wealthy backgrounds who are increasingly

"Education is a right, not a privilege"

University courses incur average HECS debts of \$20,000 per student for a degree. However, course fees vary widely. Contrary to the Howard Government's previous reassurances, some 50 Australian university courses now cost \$100,000 or more. Universities are being encouraged to treat their courses as commodities, and to charge whatever fees the market will bear. Medicine at the University of Melbourne now comes with a \$200,000 price tag!

As the number of "up front" fee-paying students rises, the income for universities from fees increases.

forced to earn income to support themselves through university. This reduces their study time, which in turn adversely affects their academic performance. An increasing number of these students will also resort to the loan scheme to buy their way into courses.

Secondly, if you're an "up front" fee student with limited finances, the \$50,000 government loan for degrees will not cover the fees required in later years of the more expensive courses. Banks and other lending institutions are generally unwilling to offer such students a loan to cover the gap. The only recourse in many cases is for the student's parents to make up the difference, if necessary by mortgaging the family home.

Each year more of the cost of education is being shifted on to the shoulders of lower and middle-income earners. The strategy is clearly to have the government ease out of the commitment to its part of the merit-based HECS system (in the same way that free tertiary education was abandoned) and to phase in full fee-paying courses for the wealthy and a few working class children holding corporate-sponsored scholarships.

"Education is a right, not a privilege" was one of the slogans used when free tertiary education was won in the 1970s. It time to bring it back, before all the gains made then are ripped away. ✪



Second Hospital Appeal for Iraq

The CPA is appealing to readers, members, supporters and friends to help raise \$5000 for medical services for the people of Iraq. The money collected will be conveyed to the Iraqi Communist Party which has set up a mobile hospital. We urge you to give what you can!

Many thanks to the following for their generous contributions:

Anonymous \$20, Eddie Clynes \$50, Ron Barrett and Christine & Tom O'Gliasain \$20, Anonymous \$100.

This week's total \$190. Cumulative total \$324.

✂-----

Hospital Appeal for Iraq

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Howard Government rejects peace treaty

The Australian Government's refusal to sign up with other nations of Asia, including Indonesia, to a Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) is a grave and wrong decision that will inevitably lead to the further isolation of Australia in the region.

In an attempt to belittle the issue of the treaty, Howard is reported to have said that he had not been approached personally. However, ASEAN has a publicly declared position that it wants ALL its key partners, including Australia, to commit to the principles contained in the treaty. This has been ASEAN's stance since the TAC first came into force in 1976.

The terms of the treaty of amity and cooperation are clear and simple. They are the principles of "non-interference in the internal affairs of one another", "the renunciation of the threat or use of force" and the "settlement of disputes between nations by peaceful means".

In an attempt to muddy the

waters it is alleged by government spokespersons that these principles have a non-aligned movement flavour.

A senior government official told the media (*Sydney Morning Herald* Nov 27-28) that the treaty was seen as a Cold War relic and carried connotations of being part of the non-aligned movement. This movement of 99 developing countries which emerged from a series of meeting in the 1960s and '70s, and does, indeed, promote its longstanding principles of peaceful coexistence.

But the international adoption of such principles dates back much further, to the UN Charter, which was signed by representatives of 51 countries at a meeting held in San Francisco on June 26, 1945. Australia is a party to the Charter. Presumably the concept of peace is now regarded by the Australian Government as a Cold War relic.

The principles of the UN Charter were torn up by the Australian Government when it adopted the

concepts of "pre-emptive strikes", "failed states" and "rogue states". These justifications for war and interference were again proclaimed by the Australian Government in its rejection of the Asian treaty of amity and cooperation.

The treaty has already been signed by all ten ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, the Philippines and Thailand), and by China, Japan, India and Pakistan. Russia, South

Korea and possibly New Zealand are expected to sign the treaty at the ASEAN meeting in Cambodia this week.

But for the Howard Government the only relationship that matters is its slavish adherence to the war-mongering Bush administration. The Australian Government claims that signing the treaty could undermine its alliance with the US. This speaks volumes about the aggressive nature of our military ties with the US.

The Howard Government is

attempting to push aside the significance of the treaty of amity and cooperation giving emphasis to only trade relations. But Australia's refusal to join the treaty clearly means that it reserves the option to commit aggression and wage war against any of the signatories to the treaty and to interfere in their internal affairs.

This is a policy course that can only lead to the further isolation of Australia in the Asia-Pacific area. ☛



Attack on civil rights resumes

Bob Briton

The Howard Government has wasted no time in putting the civil rights of Australians back on the Parliament's agenda. If passed, three bills currently before the Parliament would be added to the other 19 federal "anti-terrorism" laws it has enacted since September 11, 2001. In common with much of the other legislation, the latest bills pose serious threats to people's privacy and their right to a fair trial.

The first bill contains amendments to the *Telecommunications*

(*Interception*) Act 1979. It purports to "clarify" the situation created by the development of communications like SMS text messages, email and voicemail. This "stored communication" was not dealt with specifically in existing legislation. The Government has seized the opportunity to deny any right to privacy for people using those sorts of communications.

The bill will allow Australia's intelligence and law enforcement agencies to intercept this "stored communication" without a warrant. The threadbare excuse offered by Attorney-General Philip Ruddock

for this invasion of privacy is that the new types of messages are qualitatively different from "live" or "real time" communication like telephone calls. Therefore, according to the AG's logic, it is perfectly all right to spook on them without a warrant.

This is absurd. SMS, email and voicemail are used in everyday exchanges with the same intention as "live" or "real time" conversations. They are still meant to be private communications in the same way a phone call is. A person may send an email to several addressees at once but it still meant

for their eyes only. A person might ring somebody else, discover that they are unavailable and leave a message. Why the message is less deserving of respect than the telephone conversation that might have taken place instead defies logic.

The other bills are renewed attempts to reduce people's rights before the courts. They seek to give the Attorney General the power to issue special certificates that will prevent the defence from gaining access to documents or from calling and questioning witnesses. The stated intention is protect national security, but those words are being given a very broad meaning - they encompass "defence, security, international relations, law enforcement interests or national interests".

Documents and testimony that could help to put a defendant away for long terms in jail will be off bounds to the defence. Of course, this puts severe limits on the ability of the accused to defend themselves.

The terms of the legislation are so broad that it could be invoked in virtually any criminal trial, not just in terrorism proceedings. The government could use the legislation to prevent exposure of adverse information about their handling of a range of issues such as the economy and the treatment of asylum seekers.

The legislation would also give the courts the power to order the defendant, his or her representative or both to leave the court while the Crown gives evidence in secret. The defence would then be invited back to answer allegations raised in the evidence that they were prevented from hearing. The feature of the adversarial system of justice previously regarded as sacrosanct,

in which the defendant or their representative should be in court at all times, is about to go out the window.

The government is trying again to manipulate who can represent a defendant when information that may prejudice "national security" is involved. The Attorney-General could give written notice of this situation and require defence counsel to get a security clearance. The imposition of these secret procedures worries the Law Council of Australia. It does not approve of the government's meddling in the defendant's choice of counsel and the independence of the legal profession from the government of the day.

The bills have all the hallmarks of a police state. They bear a striking resemblance to US denial of justice in Guantanamo, as Australians David Hick and Mamdouh Habib are experiencing. The potential for them to be used against the political enemies of the government without any public scrutiny is obvious.

The Howard Government has shown its hand very early in its new term in office. It clearly intends to take every opportunity to extend its control of the courts and to monitor the communications of whosoever they choose.

Any sense that the government would be satisfied with the swag of this type of legislation it got through the previous Parliament is shattered. And, of course, if the current Senate stands up for the democratic rights of Australians and rejects the legislation, members of the new Coalition-dominated Senate take their seats in July. The opposition to this power grab has to be reinforced and quickly. The stakes are extremely high. ☛

Pete's Corner



"Appalling and insulting"

James Hardie has marked Asbestos Awareness Week with another two-fingered salute to Australians dying from contact with its products, announcing that it would reward disgraced former CEO, Peter Macdonald, with a \$77,000 a month consultancy.

A special commission of inquiry found evidence that Macdonald had broken trade practices and corporations laws during James Hardie's three-year campaign to rid itself of liabilities to asbestos disease sufferers. In the wake of those findings, James Hardie softened Macdonald's resignation with a \$10 million severance package.

Unions NSW secretary, John Robertson, labelled last week's announcement by company chair, Meredith Hellicar, "appalling and insulting".

"Only James Hardie could do this in Asbestos Awareness Week", Mr Robertson said. "Everything they do reflects how far out of touch their directors are with the expectations of the Australian community."

Macdonald and chief financial officer, Peter Shafron, were key architects of a scheme that saw James Hardie relocate to the Netherlands. To facilitate its 2001 corporate restructure, the company told the NSW Supreme Court it would leave partly-paid shares worth more than a billion dol-

lars in Australia for the benefit of creditors.

That arrangement was cancelled at a secret meeting of directors, leaving thousands of asbestos disease sufferers without access to compensation.

As a consultant, Macdonald will make in a month the average amount sufferers are awarded in compensation for their lifetimes.

Whether or not victims of Hardies' products ever see that compensation is now subject to negotiations between the company and the ACTU.

ACTU Secretary Greg Combet said negotiations were "heading for crisis" unless the company removed "unfair and unreasonable conditions" and immediately bailed out MRCF, the foundation it created to compensate victims.

MRCF directors are considering liquidation because James Hardie is playing hardball over promised funding. The foundation needs an immediate injection of \$85 million to meet existing claims but says James Hardie directors are making that conditional on receiving indemnities against legal action.

The Hardie situation was exposed, and brought to a head by a relentless union campaign, spearheaded by the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union NSW branch.

The union's Secretary, Paul Bastian, said no amount of Hellicar spin-doctoring could alter the fact that James Hardie had set out to "rob" victims and their families. He pointed out that at the time of the restructure, Macdonald had given assurances the company would "fully fund" victims but that when MRCF's \$2 billion shortfall had been made public, the California-based CEO had denied "legal or moral" responsibility.

Mr Bastian said there was only one option open to the company: it must deliver on its original promise by putting sufficient money into MRCF, and it must do it now.

"Australians have to ask themselves, how low can a company go?" he asked. "Is it possible to sink any lower than Meredith Hellicar's James Hardie?"

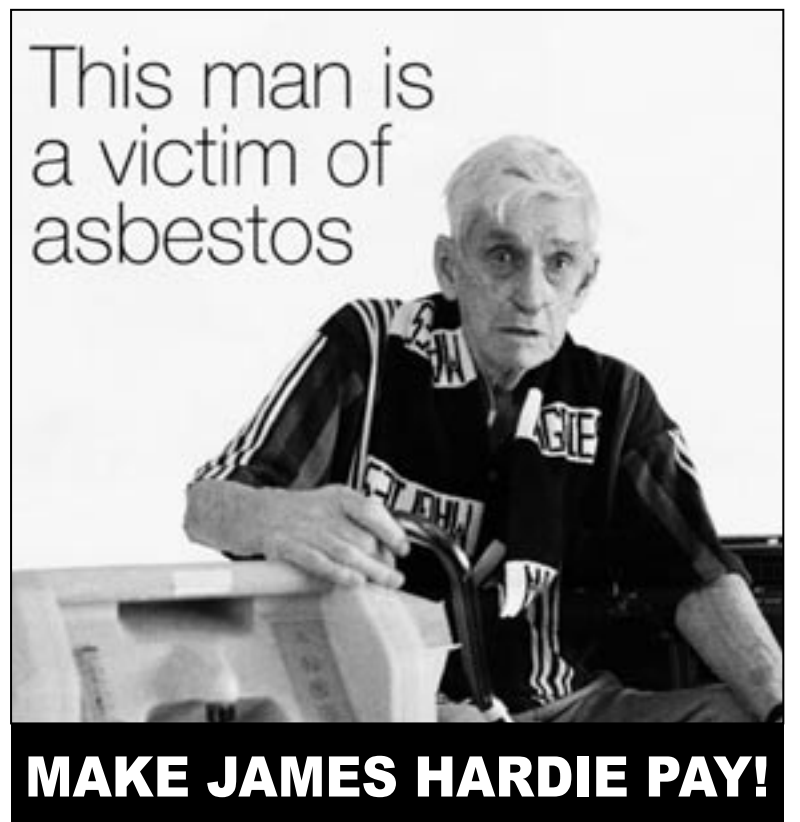
"I don't think so."

Pink slip alert

Meanwhile, NSW is on the brink of becoming the first state to institute a "pink slip" that would alert householders to the presence of asbestos.

Following the lead of councils, including Holdroyd and Ashfield, the state ALP caucus has adopted a policy that means dwellings will have to be subjected to asbestos audits before being sold. It is expected to become law next year.

The plan was devised by the AMWU to try and stop home owners and renovators being added to the thousands of Australians contracting asbestos-related lung diseases every year.



It requires vendors to undertake asbestos audits and have properties containing the killer fibres added to a register that would alert buyers, and future occupiers, to the whereabouts and condition of the product. MP Paul Lynch estimates the audits could be done for as little as \$150 by qualified assessors.

More than half the homes built in Sydney since the 1940s when

asbestos was a standard construction product, are believed to contain asbestos products.

Asbestos is understood to be safe while it remains intact but becomes a health risk when it breaks or starts to crumble. Medical experts say that inhaling one asbestos fibre can lead to asbestosis or incurable mesothelioma in later life. ✪

Visy uses strike-breakers

Australia's second richest man is using helicopters to fly scabs over picket lines in a bid to claw money from sick and injured workers. Billionaire Richard Pratt was flying strike-breakers into Visy factories in Dandenong, Victoria, and bussing them into, Warwick Farm, NSW, as the Federal Court rejected his application to have employee resistance declared illegal.

The Federal Court in Melbourne rejected Visy's move to use a technicality to force employees in Queensland, WA, Victoria and NSW back to work. Six hundred workers at 12 sites went on strike after a national agreement collapsed over company demands to slash the entitlements of workers who fall victim to long-term illness or injury.

The impasse brought negotiations down after Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members cleared a number of obstacles, including getting Visy to drop insistence on single-site, non-union agreements.

The union's Print Division Secretary, Steve Walsh, called the breakdown "very disappointing".

"We thought we had a framework agreement but when we got into the details there were major problems over income protection", he said.

"Under Visy's proposal some people could be seriously disadvantaged."

Negotiators had settled on wage movements totalling 14.75 percent over three years and agreed to establish the first national Visy agreement.

"We got very close", Mr Walsh said, "frustratingly close. This action is an indication of how seriously our members view income protection."

He said the union was ready and willing to negotiate at any time.

The dispute affects Visyboard, Visypaper and Visy Recycling operations.

Last week, AMWU members were near unanimous in their support for a three-year agreement hammered out with leading Visy competitor Amcor. It contained 14.75 percent wage movements and maintained income protection. ✪

Knocking off in November

To bring working hours down to the OECD average Aussies would have had to have knocked off for the year on November 20. Research just published by the Australia Institute shows the average Australian is working longer than their counterparts in any other developed country.

"While Australians consider they live in the land of the long weekend, the reality is that they now work the longest hours in the developed world", the Institute says.

Australian workers spend an average of 1855 hours a year on the job – 212 hours more than the figure across all 23 OECD countries, including Japan!

The research shows that Americans run us second by racking up 1835 working hours a year.

The paper also highlights an International Labour Organisation study showing Australia had the fourth highest level of people working more than 50 hours a week.

The report acknowledges some

people work long hours as a matter of choice, but questions the view that Australians need to work long hours to maintain economic competitiveness. Norwegians, at the other end of the scale on just 1376, work 459 hours per annum less than Australians. The shorter hours have not put Norway out of business!

Workers in the Netherlands and Germany all average less than 1500 hours at work a year.

That is the equivalent to 10-13 weeks less than in Australia.

Following Australia and the US on the workaholic scale are Japan (1821 hours per week), New Zealand (1817) and Canada (1767).

Australian workers are clearly not enjoying the fruits of higher productivity and new technology. It is not surprising to note that at the same time as Australians are working harder and longer, *Business Review Weekly* is featuring articles on why the profits of the top 1000 corporations in Australia are booming.

Long hours, low wages, job slashing and new technology all contributed to the profit boom.

The mining sector, where 12-hour shifts have become all too common, is wallowing in a 94 percent increase in profits in just the last 12 months.

It is time to ask:

- What ever happened to the eight-hour day, first won by Victorian stonemasons almost 150 years ago?

- What ever happened to the 35-hour week campaign that the ACTU was leading in the 1970s?

- What happened to the bans on overtime, in particular the bans on unpaid overtime?

- Where are the demands for a shorter working week without loss pay?

Just imagine how many hundreds of thousands of jobs could be created by cutting working hours back to the level of Norway or Germany! ✪

"CHÁVEZ: VENEZUELA AND THE NEW LATIN AMERICA" Now shipping!

In February 2004 Aleida Guevara conducted an extended, exclusive interview with Hugo Chávez, president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, exploring Venezuela's explosive revolutionary terrain post-April 2002 when Chávez survived a coup attempt instigated by the United States. Featuring a dramatic interview with Jorge García Carneiro, newly appointed head of the Venezuelan Armed Forces, and vox-pops with Venezuelans involved in the country's many social programs, this film affords a rare opportunity to glimpse through the blockade of information imposed by the United States and into a country rich with hope, dreams and... oil.

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Guilty on all counts

A top bank executive pocketing \$4.5 million a year is bleating about workers being compensated for successful health and safety prosecutions. Commonwealth Bank CEO David Murray launched a blistering attack on NSW's OH&S regime, describing proposed jail sentences for killer bosses as "absolutely abominable".

He described the existing system that allows successful prosecutors to recoup costs as "corrupt". Union research reveals over the last 20 years the money paid to all unions

combined in NSW for successful OH&S actions amounted to less than Murray's salary for one year.

Under state law, unions have been able to charge employers with health and safety offences since the 1940s. In recent years, the Finance Sector Union has launched a number of successful actions against banks.

Last year the ANZ pleaded guilty to failing to ensure the safety of workers after an armed robbery at its Brookvale branch. The court heard the company had ignored

repeated warnings about the risks posed to staff and customers.

Murray's Commonwealth Bank recently pleaded guilty to an OH&S offence and faces at least three other counts.

The NSW Government agreed to make employers criminally liable for deaths at their workplaces when it could be proved they were personally culpable. The proposed law change came in response to widespread agitation over the building industry deaths of teenagers Dean McGoldrick and Joel Exner. ✪

Libs to axe disability pensions

Bob Briton

The elections are well and truly over and the Libs' \$66 billion vote-catching spree has come to an abrupt end. The distribution of all those taxpayers' dollars stacked up through "careful economic management" of a "thriving economy" has stopped and we are back to talking all those intolerable drains on the economy that simply have to be plugged.

High on the list are old people with a recent Productivity Commission report on our ageing population. Workforce participation rates are reportedly set to fall by eight percent by 2040 and (wouldn't you know it) the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme will not be viable into the future in its current form. Increased productivity is clearly not going to be spent on the elderly – that will be taken in private profits.

Indigenous Australians are being talked about again for special treatment in the area of social security. Whole communities may be punished in future for non-compliance with a range of Government directives. According to leaked documents, individuals may have deductions made from their "smart card" accounts for transgressions including failure to have a shower!

The hit list does not stop there. The more than 670,000 Australians struggling on the Disability Support Pension (DSP) are also, as far as this government is concerned, an intolerable drain on the economy.

and that a disability pension is available simply for the asking! Nothing could be further from the truth.

Members of the trial group, who were given the maximum assistance available through the largely private Jobs Network, had varying degrees of success in gaining employment. Of the roughly one in five of the participants who found work, 39 percent got casual jobs, 31 percent got part-time positions while only 22 percent scored a full-time job. Another eight percent had started studies.

The government is working hard to rectify the "misconception" among disabled pensioners that taking up some of the McJobs on offer in today's labour market might make them worse off. "An immediate priority is to ensure that more people on DSP are informed about their option to give work a try and not be worse off, and of the assistance available under the Jobs Network", as Mr Dutton puts it.

It is unlikely that Mr Dutton has ever received a DSP or any other Commonwealth "benefit". If he had, he would know that the complex thresholds for payments and the similarly complicated reporting system imposed on recipients would try the patience of a saint.

ACOSS President Andrew McCallum summed it up the results of the experiment this way:

"This pilot study underlines how hard it is for people with disabilities to find work and the importance of employment assis-

The more than 670,000 Australians struggling on the Disability Support Pension are, as far as this government is concerned, an intolerable drain on the economy.

Their affairs have already been transferred from the Department of Family and Community Services to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. A new Minister for Workforce Participation, Peter Dutton, is now on their cases and pushing the new "work first – welfare second" line in the media.

The government has just released a final report on an \$800,000, six-month pilot scheme involving 1100 DSP recipients. The report contained conclusions that were news to absolutely nobody. For example, over 90 percent of the participants "really want to work". The response of the government, however, is to promote the idea that DSP recipients do not have any real obstacles to rejoining the workforce

tance. Of the 1100 voluntary participants who started this pilot only 57 percent completed it and less than 10 percent of them obtained a substantial paid job."

And it is noteworthy that only 57 percent of this small group of "winners" in the Government's pilot scheme considered themselves to be better off financially.

The Minister maintains that people "choose" to remain on a DSP out of ignorance of the "option" to work. It seems that pensioners believe the government would seek to deny them their benefits if they did manage to get some of the scraps of work on offer around the place. And they are absolutely right! Mr Dutton must think DSP recipients all suffer from short-term memory loss!



Coercion

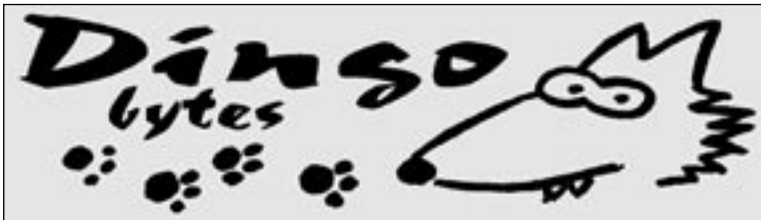
During the Howard Government's last term in office, it moved to reduce the number of hours a disabled person can work before losing any benefit at all from 30 hours to just 15! Persons deemed able to work 15 hours or more would have been forced onto the unemployed NewStart allowance and lose \$52 off their base rate straight away. They were set to lose their \$5.80 pharmaceutical allowance and concessions on a number of utilities and for transport.

Only a hostile Senate prevented the Government from carrying out these plans. Of course, Howard no longer has this particular obstacle to overcome. Mr Dutton was not able to specify to the media how many DSP recipients were currently rorting the system when asked about the situation last week. It seems, though, that he is happy for the press to bandy around the figure of 150,000 individuals who might be forced to look for work. He also encourages the idea that his plans to apply the pilot's methods will save in the order of \$1 billion. Dutton speaks openly about the need to use "coercion" on those resisting the government's assistance.

For the record, prior to the attempt to enact the "work for the pension" model in the 2002/3 Federal Budget, Howard's own Department of Family and Community Services was obliged to make the following, very revealing, points:

- Nine percent of those receiving the pension are already working – "a figure that is growing";
- Although the number of people on the pension is growing, "the actual rate of increase is slowing";
- The majority of new pension recipients in 2002, 55 percent, were "transferred onto Disability by the Department";
- Many women (58 percent) with disabilities have, in the past, been disguised through receipt of other types of payments e.g. Widow B and Wife Pension, which, through previous "welfare reform" measures, were discontinued.

Still, it is an ill wind that blows nobody no good, as they say. The publicly funded but mostly privately operated Jobs Network is about to have a large batch of new "clients" forced onto their books. ☘



Remember when PM Howard promised there would "never, ever" be a GST? Then when he brought it in, that it would "never" rise above 10 percent? Well, now an increase in the GST is being promoted with the excuse it's needed to pay for the cost of the "aging population". They're spending \$55 million a day on the military, corporations pay next to no tax or pay none at all while being given "incentives" (read government hand outs and tax breaks), but we've got to pay more GST so that the elderly will be taken care of. Makes no sense, does it?

When the PM was in Chile last month at the APEC meeting, he did a doorstep interview during which he was asked an unexpected question. His answer was, "I can promise there will be no move to abolish compulsory voting in this term". Never underestimate them: they're capable of anything.


Pork barrelling in bush seats has come back to bite the Federal Government. Funding promised for six projects in marginal seats under a Regional Partnerships set-up hasn't appeared. The Department of Treasury and Finance has yet to approve the funding and may not do so. National Party leader John Anderson, who promised the \$27.5 million during the campaign, now says the funds will be "subject to due diligence" and will not go ahead if "the business case did not stack up". It's called lying.

The announcement last week that air marshals will be able to use stun guns on suspected terrorists on aircraft after a six-month trial by a specialist federal police unit raises the immediate question: who is this unit going to trial them on?

I bet you thought escalating police corruption was a product of a corrupt society, run by corrupt governments on behalf of criminal corporations. Well, it turns out that's not it at all. Police corruption, according to a police whistleblower, is a result of "mateship gone mad", a "warped sense of loyalty". No doubt there's an element of it there. But its driving forces are the kickbacks, the bribes, the drug money etc, and they've got less to do with mateship than with gangsterism.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is entrepreneur Rob Foster. The golden rule of business is, never pass up an opportunity to make a buck, no matter how despicable. So it was that Australian businessman Foster operating in that profit opportunity called East Timor, has been found guilty by – of all things – the World Bank, of corruption in the procurement of school equipment. Foster colluded with other business interests in a tender for school furniture. What parasites!

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Reminiscences of Eureka Stockade

Monty Miller was an extraordinary historic figure, at the forefront of many struggles over a long time span. He fought and was wounded in the Eureka Stockade in 1854. At the age of 85 he was sentenced to six months hard labour for his leadership in the anti-conscription struggles in 1917. In that same year he welcomed and supported the October Russian Revolution. The following are extracts from his own story, written 60 years after the event.*

Among the shoal of adventurers who swarmed to the Australian eldorados, Ballarat had its full share. One of these – Bentley, the most notorious scoundrel that ever landed on Australian soil – became the factor that precipitated the fatal 3rd of December, which so sadly marked the close of 1854.

Bentley was from the Californian goldfields, and had a most evil notoriety among the men who hailed from there. He had been a grog and gambling saloon keeper in that country, and started in the same line on the Eureka Lead. He had the evil repute of causing the death of various men in gambling quarrels in California, with revolver or bowie-knife. His den was known as the Eureka Hotel.

One night a party of diggers was returning late from White Flat to their tents, past Bentley's, and tried to get a drink. Being late, the place was closed. They gave up the idea of obtaining the desired drink, and proceeded homeward. Amongst the party were two Scotchmen, brothers, George and Hughie Scobie. The younger brother insisted on knocking Bentley up, and stoutly resisted every attempt of his mates to get him away.

Tired of futile attempts, his brother urged that they leave him 'til he tired of his endeavours to get the place opened. He was left to follow at his leisure. Alone, he increased his clamour, and Bentley, rushing out with a spade, clove the skull of the unfortunate young Scot from crown to eye-brows, then, dragging the body of his victim some hundred yards or so from the hotel, he returned to his bed with no more compunction than if he had kicked a howling dog into silence.

At early morning, a digger, passing to his work, discovered the body of the murdered man, and gave the alarm. Bentley was arrested and brought to trial, with his paramour, who gave conclusive evidence of Bentley's guilt. Yet they

were acquitted by the influence of the Resident R.M. at Ballarat, one Downes, who was a great crony of Bentley's and was believed to be a partner in the drink and gambling business.

Despite the evidence

Bentley's acquittal raised a furore of indignation and a mass meeting was held, and speeches expressing fierce resentment against the miscarriage of justice were made. Among the speakers was George Scobie, who declared that the spirit of his murdered brother was hovering over the meeting, imploring vengeance on his foul murderer.

This so excited the meeting that cries of "Let us lynch him!" were raised, and the whole crowd rushed off to Bentley's, but he, seeing their

approach, rushed to the stable and escaped on a fine horse he kept, and gave himself up to the police at the Camp. The enraged crowd broke every window, and uttered cries of "Set the place afire!" No sooner said than done, and in less time than it can be recorded Bentley's infamous den was a thing among the iniquities of the past.

The Government arrested three diggers who were suspected of being ringleaders in the hotel burning. One of these was at Creswick Creek, 12 miles from Ballarat, at the time of the fire; one at Mopoke Gully, a mile from the fire; and the other admitted being present but denied any complicity in burning the place.

Despite all evidence the men were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

Another mass meeting was held, from which delegates went to Melbourne to secure the release of the men imprisoned. Governor Hotham, who had been at the helm of affairs since the withdrawal of Latrobe, did not like the manner of the delegates, who were not subservient enough to suit his naval martinet views and the delegates returned.

This incident added fuel to the already inflamed emotions of the miners, and the report of this deputation resulted in a mass meeting on November 28 held at Bakery Hill, at which it was resolved that all further allegiance to the Government was useless as a means of getting justice.

Licences burnt

The Australian Flag, simply a light blue, with the five symbol stars of the Southern Cross – no corner Union Jack on it – was floated; and Peter Lalor beneath, it called on the meeting to refuse to show licenses and requested those who held them to destroy them. At once, licenses were cremated wholesale; and it was resolved that if any digger were arrested on account of not having a licence all would unite for his

the severity and amount of our taxation; and the drastic and brutal mode of collecting the tax. Nothing more can be done. There is only one course open to us. That is to fight, and defend our rights and liberties as men."

This was approved of; and he called upon everybody who was willing to join a rebel band of that nature to kneel down, and a great many who never took any part in what happened afterwards just for the sake of appearance and conformity kneeled down.

Lalor said: "Hold up your right hand and repeat after me the oath I shall put to you: 'We swear by all we hold true and sacred to fight in defence of our life and liberty to the point of death, if need be; and we further swear to be true to each other, whatever consequences may ensue.'"

Right! I swore that. Others swore it, and stuck to it.

Barricade built

Amongst the diggers on that November day when our resolution was taken was a very tall man with a straw-coloured beard and moustache and reddish hair, named Vem, Fred Vem. He was known as Long Fred and was looked upon as leader of the continental section of the miners

barricade about eight feet in height as the front wall of the stockade.

As nearly as memory serves me, the barricade was about one hundred feet in length; and down each side of the stockade there was a continuity of that stout rampart for about fifty feet, then the smaller timbers the scantlings which were left, were put into the trench and battens nailed inside it to unite them together. Out of the edge of one of these piles a notch was cut, and on the corresponding joining side of the next post. These formed the loopholes, about four feet apart, from which the entrenched miners were to fire on any attacks made upon them.

Next day saw that rude stockade well under construction. On the 30th, that is the last day of November, it was what was called finished, but the back was the weak point of defence. The back part of the stockade consisted of carts, which had been used to bring in timber of construction thrown down, on their side; one wheel down, and the other up. The shafts were lashed together, and nailed on to the shafts were shorter slabs, like a barricade fence.

There were two parties within the stockade – the Scottish party and the Irish party, and, I am sorry to say, there was a treasonable party. Men of that treasonable party, in spite of our watchword, would go out, and carry news up to the camp of the police of our forces, how many men were in the stockade, how they were armed, and that sort of thing. Constant bulletins were going from the seat of the diggers war front to the military and police forces up at the camp.

For Right and Liberty

The formula of the oath was as follows: "We swear by the Southern Cross to stand true to each other, and fight to defend our rights and liberties. Amen."

The construction of the Stockade was proceeded with, and pushed on with such vigour that, on Saturday morning, it was completed; and 800 armed men occupied it.

Paddy Gettins, the pike-smith, with another son of Vulcan, were all the time busy making pikes, after the Irish models of Ireland's '08 and '48 formidable weapons, with a hook flattened and sharpened to a keen edge, to cut the bridles of the mounted police.

It is obvious that a structure

Every digger disabled from flight was mutilated and done to death by the police with enough wounds to kill 20 men.

rescue.

The answer of the authorities was a digger hunt the next day. The diggers resisted the police and stoned them. The military were called out, and Colonel Robert Rede read the Riot Act. The diggers were dispersed for the time and the police took a few unlicensed diggers.

In the afternoon, a last meeting was held, at the same old Bakery Hill. Again the diggers' flag flew over the greatest meeting ever held; and Lalor, gun in hand, swore in all who agreed to fight.

He said: "We have tried all that is known as constitutional means, we have sent deputation and deputation to the Government; and all that they have done is to increase

who were in revolt; and he had been in the Prussian army and claimed to have a good knowledge of military tactics, and also of fortifications.

Vem recommended that the diggers should at once build a stronghold; what he called a stockade. He was determined to do it; and, on that very afternoon, of the 27th November, carts were commandeered, and all the horses and drays, carting in timber on the diggings. They were utilised for going out into the bush and carting in what we called small piles, posts twelve feet [4 metres] long. These were split down, made into two, the round sides put inwards, and the flat, rough sides, outwards in a trench dug about four feet deep. That left a



THE EUREKA STOCKADE 1854-1954 by R.D. Walshe

This important booklet by R.D. Walshe was originally produced for the 100th anniversary of the Eureka Stockade. With an incisive political analysis, Bob Walshe traces the development of the diggers' struggle and the political implications of the Stockade for the movement for independence and democracy in Australia then and today. Walshe writes: "Eureka Stockade was the heroic forerunner of independent working-class activity in Australia." and "There is much 'unfinished business' of the Eureka Stockade, and it would be heresy against good Australianism to take for granted the freedoms which come to us from past fighters in the Eureka tradition."

The Communist Party of Australia has republished the booklet as a contribution to the 150th anniversary of the Eureka Stockade.

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EUREKA - 150TH ANNIVERSARY 1854-2004 - A PORTFOLIO OF PRINTS

This portfolio includes 13 lino-cuts of the events of the Eureka Stockade and historical commentary on this momentous occasion. The artists who contributed were Noel Counihan, Peter Miller, Pat O'Connor, Ailsa O'Connor, Mary Zuvella (Hammond), Len Gale, Ray Wenban, Naomi Shipp and Maurice Carter.

Originally produced by the Melbourne Popular Art Group in 1954 for the 100th anniversary, the Communist Party of Australia has republished the portfolio as a contribution to the 150th anniversary of the Eureka Stockade.

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thrown together in less than four days was not in any sense a stronghold. The front facing to the west, where were the police and military camps, had a semblance of strength, and the sides were weaker, while the back was in part made of carts turned on one side, the shafts lashed together and slabs nailed on. This was the weakest point of the line of defence.

On Saturday afternoon there were fewer than 200 men in the Stockade, the majority went off to see their claims; and to have a stroll on the main roads, while most of the younger men went to the dance rooms. Treachery was at work. So much for the weak state of the diggers' garrison.

Military attack

The military encampment consisted of part regiments – the Fortieth under the command of Captain Wise, and the Twelfth under Captain Thomas. They were quick to take advantage of the situation, and moved to the attack at between 2 and 3 am. Sunday morning, December 3, 1854. It was in the darkness before dawn that Harry de Longville, one of the sentries on duty, heard the tramp of the storming party, and fired the shot that alarmed the diggers in their death trap. Volleys were quickly fired from both sides; and Lalor, who was in a conspicuous place cheering on his men, received a musket ball which shattered his left shoulder and put him out of the fight.

The attacking force were getting the worst of the volley firing, and Captain Wise fell mortally wounded, dying the next day. The palisades of the Stockade deadened the shots of the invading foe, while they were fully exposed to the first of the defenders – and a bugle call rang out, signifying a bayonet charge.

This was made at the weakest part of the enclosure.

A breach was soon made, and military and police poured into the diggers' citadel. Then came the deadly hand-to-hand fighting in which the 8 foot pike was superior to the five-foot, musket and bayonet. But the carbines and revolvers of the police did fatal work; whilst the ammunition of the rebels was running low at this stage of the fight.

The fight in the stockade was silent and deadly, broken only by the heavy fall of a fatally wounded digger or soldier.

During the struggle I became engaged in a hand-to-hand contest with a big muscular soldier of the 40th Regiment. It was evident to me that he would win in the end. He was a perfect master of his weapon, the bayonet in thrust and parry, and it was only the superior advantage of the length of my pike that prevented me from being speedily wounded to death.

I felt I was the weaker in the encounter and on the impulse of instinct rather than reason did perhaps the most foolish thing in the circumstances. I planted the hook of my pike against the muzzle of the soldier's musket, and running it down the barrel dropped my pike and caught hold of the stock and the barrel below and above the grasp of my adversary.

Wounded

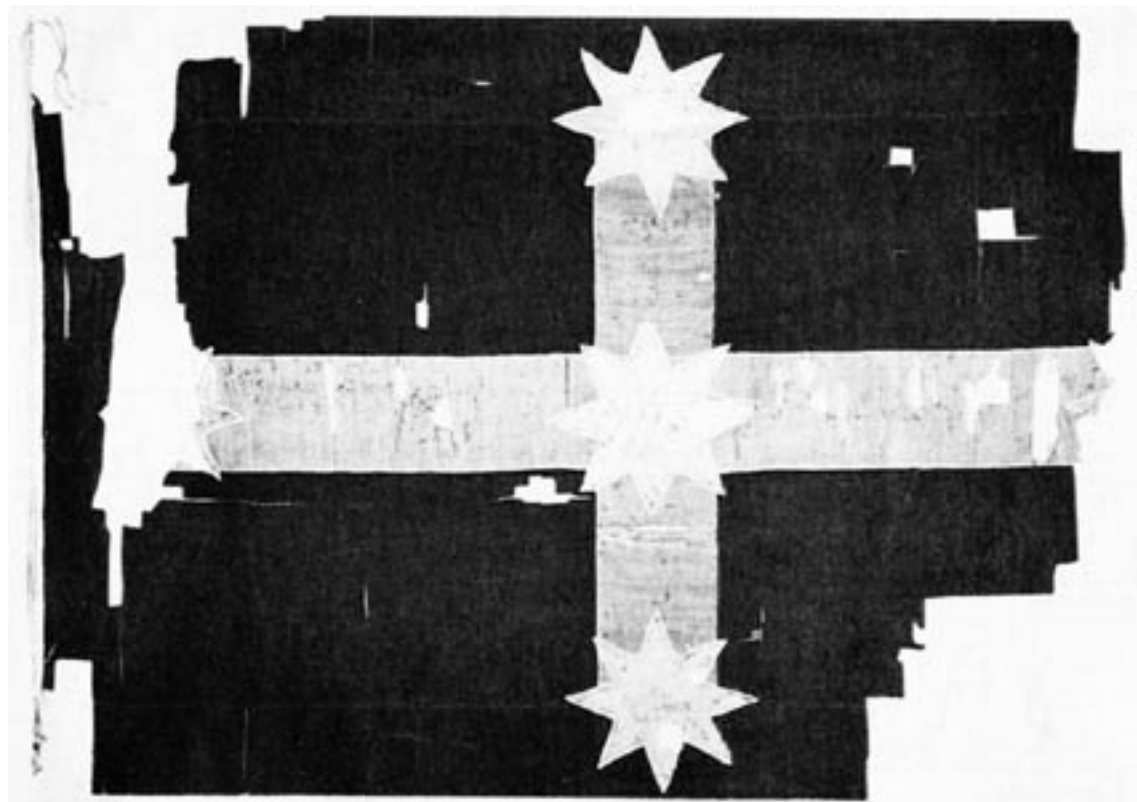
His superior strength soon told, and presently he brought the brass bound stock of the musket crashing down on my temple, rendering me unconscious for a minute or two. As soon as I regained consciousness I found myself on my hands and knees with my head against the palisading of the stockade to which I must have crawled unknowingly.

On looking round I saw that everybody was trying to escape from the stockade. I had no sooner started for the rear of the enclosure than I felt a blow on my left leg, which brought me sprawling to the ground. I had been hit by a one-ounce [28-gram] musket ball, and was now unable to rise from the ground.

At this juncture M'Iver, a mounted constable, rode up to me, and leaning over the neck of his horse made a lunge at me with his sabre. I caught the weapon with my left hand, which was pierced right through leaving scars which remain to the present day.

At this juncture M'Iver pulled back his sabre, severing my thumb and nearly cutting off the forefinger. He then started to charge at me a second time, when an escaping digger rushing past with a pike made a swoop at him, struck him on the back of the neck and toppled him out of the saddle.

I managed to struggle to my feet and make my way through the breach which the soldiers had made in the barricade at the rear. But our retreat was cut off by a line of sentries outside the enclosure, and I was taken prisoner by one of them,



implored him not to give me up to the police, who were killing all the diggers they could find in the stockade.

My captor told me that he would not give me up to anyone but one of his military superiors. Meanwhile, the diggers from the neighbouring camps, attracted by the noise of firearms and the struggle within the stockade, had crowded up to see what was happening.

Several times the soldiers were ordered to keep back the crowd, but the constant stream of new arrivals kept pushing the diggers in front further forward. I seized my opportunity and pushed into the crowd, and, as soon as it was seen that I

extracted and the wounds dressed. Today, after a lapse of 60 years, I am able to show these marks of the circumstance.

No quarter was given to diggers by the police. The mutual ill-will, even hate, of each other amounted to a vendetta of vengeance on both sides; whereas the soldiers had no old-time enmity, and took prisoners of all who surrendered.

Slaughter

The Stockade became a shamble of slaughter. Every digger disabled from flight was mutilated and done to death by the police with enough wounds to kill 20 men. Whilst held prisoner by a Fortieth Regiment

(Lalor) was taken away at night to Father Smythe's.

His arm was taken out at the shoulder, and he was soon spirited away to Geelong, where he was kept secure by true friends, despite every attempt to betray him for the dirty £500 blood money offered for him, Vem, Black, Kennedy, Lynch, and the bravest of the brave.

Amid the crowding rush from all parts of the diggings, consequent on the assault and storming of Eureka, many prisoners made their escape, the writer of these annals being fortunate enough to get away, though handicapped with an ounce of lead and considerable loss of blood.

Moral victory

In the Eureka Stockade there was a victory for both sides. The Queen's troops achieved a small conquest over less than half their own force of men. The miners fought for a triumph of principle, and their victory was a moral and a constitutional one.

The first fruits of the miners' moral victory were that, in a year, the Miners' Right to mine or dig for gold was issued on stout parchment, to be current for one year; price £1. Responsible Government was instituted, with Peter Lalor as member for Ballarat; and, in the second year from Eureka came the Eight Hours labour day.

*Taken from *Eureka and Beyond* (edited by Vic Williams, published 1988 by Lone Hand Press, Willagee, WA).

"There is only one course open to us. That is to fight, and defend our rights and liberties as men."

was an escaping and wounded prisoner, I was helped into the middle of the crowd, and so escaped.

I then made my way back to my camp, three miles [4.8km] distant, where my two mates got medical assistance. My wounds consisted of a fractured temple, a musket ball in my left leg, a bayonet wound above the knee, and a badly cut and lacerated hand. The musket ball was

soldier, I counted 38 dead diggers from where I stood under guard. Men were pursued, and many who hid themselves in shallow workings were shot there, finding their death and grave in one grim act.

Lalor was concealed in one of the rifle-pits, and his Irish brigade kept their oath "to be true to each other" by saving him at the peril of their own lives. From there he

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Venezuela

Terror networks strike at the Bolivarian Revolution

Bob Briton

Opponents of the thoroughgoing changes taking place in Venezuela have struck a well-directed blow against the Bolivarian Revolution with the recent assassination of an investigating magistrate in charge of several prominent cases. Danilo Anderson died when two packets of C4 plastic explosive attached to his car were detonated remotely. The courageous magistrate had been involved in one of the central tasks of the latest stage of the revolution – to intensify the struggle against corruption and to end the gross inequalities before the law and impunity of the wealthy elites.

Anderson had been pursuing the highly placed individuals involved in the coup attempt of April 2002, including those who led an assault on the Cuban Embassy, the owners of the pro-coup mass media and the heads of the supposedly impartial CIA-linked NGO called Sumate. This last mentioned body played a major role in the campaign for a referendum to recall President Hugo Chávez. The vote was eventually held in August and was an overwhelming vote of confidence in the radical government and its President.

However, frustration that the legal system has remained unchanged has been growing. The poor in Venezuela still get little consideration before the courts while the rich are rarely brought to justice. The first cases against the leaders of the sabotage of the PDVSA – the country's state-owned oil industry – have been thrown out because of the incompetent or deliberately inadequate preparation of the cases. It is this "go slow" in the workings of the justice system that Danilo Anderson had dedicated himself to rectify.

Early investigations of the murder led police to opposition lawyer

Antonio Lopez. The suspect died in a gun battle that was sparked when he fired on the police sent to arrest him. Officer Alberto Pavon died later in Caracas Hospital. Police found guns, grenades and other explosives in the Lopez' car and another cache of weapons at his residence.

death. Details of the case were not made public so as not to cloud the referendum debate taking place at the time.

While many of the coup plotters – including some of those who signed coup-leader Carmona's treasonous decree of April 12, 2002

against Venezuelans training with Cubans at their camps in Florida.

There have been a number of incursions into Venezuela by terror squads from Colombian territory already. This situation is set to worsen following meetings between US President George W Bush and

Bolivarian revolution will be passed up.

In other developments, US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld visited Nicaragua recently on his way to Ecuador. His message to the region is for governments to batten down the hatches to resist the gains being made by popular movements all over Latin America. He wants the military to take up civilian policing roles.

And of course, on November 16 Bush appointed Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State – surely the only such office holder to have a Chevron oil tanker named after them for services to the oil industry. She has been a long-term critic of President Chávez, his economic "failures" and his denial of the democratic rights of the Venezuelan people – at least according to her. State control of the country's oil industry would not meet with her approval, either.

The job of rooting out corruption and reforming Venezuela's judicial system has been made harder by the callous killing of Danilo Anderson. It has exposed the extent of the plans for a campaign of terror against the Bolivarian Revolution. However, the government has pledged to keep pressing ahead with the work Anderson had started. Writer and academic Heinz Dietrich summed up this contribution:

"The menace of Danilo for Washington's terrorist project was two-fold ... he threatened one of its main instruments of power, Venezuela's corrupt class justice system and too was becoming a symbol of the honest patriot and servant of the majority of the new Bolivarian nation."

So far, US authorities have ignored a call from Venezuela's Interior and Justice Minister Jesse Chacon to work together to overcome the growing terrorist threat. ☛



Overwhelming support – President Hugo Chavez

Evidence of the operation of well-organised and resourced terror networks is mounting. It has now been revealed that an attempt on the life of Defence Minister Jorge Garcia Carneiro in August was thwarted when security discovered C4 explosive attached to a headstone adjacent to the grave of the minister's mother. The minister was due to visit the grave on the anniversary of his mother's

– continue to live unperturbed in Venezuela, others have relocated in neighbouring Colombia and in Miami, Florida. In Miami, the Venezuelan exiles have been flaunting their links with Cuban terrorist organisations by appearing with their spokesmen on TV. Actor Orlando Urdaneta has publicly called for the assassinations of leading figures in the Venezuelan government. No action has been taken

his Colombian counterpart Álvaro Uribe in a brief visit to Colombia by the US head of state last week. There has been talk for some time of extending the reach of Plan Colombia beyond that country's borders. The "Plan" was originally promoted as a joint offensive against Colombia's drug trade but is, in fact, a war against leftist guerrillas active in Colombia. It is not likely that the chance to create difficulties for the

Regime change, torture and murder

Jacob G Hornberger

President Bush's recent trip to South America provides a valuable foreign-policy lesson for Americans. The President was greeted in Santiago, Chile, by some 30,000 angry demonstrators. But it was not only Bush's invasion and war of aggression against Iraq that Chileans were angry about.

Unlike so many Americans, the Chilean people have not fallen for the "We invaded Iraq to spread democracy" line that US officials moved up to rationale number one after failing to find those infamous weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

The reason? Chileans have not forgotten – and are still angry about – the US Government's role in bringing about "regime change" in Chile in 1973 (just as the Iranian people have not forgotten the US Government's "regime change" in Iran in 1953).

Chileans still remember that in the 1973 "regime change" in

their country, the US Government played an active role in ousting their democratically elected President, Salvador Allende, because he was a left-wing socialist, and replacing him with a brutal military dictator, Augusto Pinochet, who ended up ruling Chile for almost two decades until 1990. Yes, you read that correctly – the US Government, the paragon of democracy around the world, helped to oust a man who had been democratically elected by the people of Chile and helped replace him with an unelected, military brute.

What mattered to US officials was not democracy in Chile but rather the same thing that matters to them today in Iraq – the installation of a ruler, brutal or benevolent, democratically elected or not, who was friendly to the US Government. If that meant supporting a cruel and brutal military dictator whose forces killed, tortured, or disappeared his own people, so be it.

It is even likely that Chileans

are much angrier than Americans over the US Government's role in the murder of an American journalist, Charles Horman, during that Chilean "regime change".

In fact, despite the fact that a movie, entitled *Missing* was produced about Horman's execution, I'll bet most Americans are not even aware of that execution or that the CIA played a role in it. (Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the CIA refuses to open all its files on US government involvement in the Pinochet coup, the Horman murder, and the succeeding years of torture, executions, disappearances, and other human rights abuses under the Pinochet military regime. In the name of "national security", of course.)

Chileans remember the decades of military rule in their country, characterised by middle-of-the-night arrests, obliterations of civil liberties, torture, executions, disappearances, and other human-rights abuses that eerily bring to mind the US military's "war on terrorism"

policies in Iraq, Cuba, Afghanistan, and in the United States itself.

As their counterparts in the US military are doing today, Chilean military officials long avoided responsibility for the wrong doing by claiming that the human-rights abuses were committed by a few lowly soldiers. However, today's Chilean army officials are finally taking responsibility for the institutional framework that permitted and encouraged the abuses to take place.

Obviously, we're still a long way from that in the United States. After all, don't forget that the next US Attorney General is likely to be the very man who provided the President with the "Geneva Convention is quaint and obsolete" memo that not only opened the door to Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and the Pentagon's suspension of *habeas corpus* and due process but also conveniently provided the President and other US high officials with "legal cover" when the US Army's human-rights abuses came to light. Let's also not forget the ongoing

deception and cover-up in the Abu Ghraib scandal.

Just as bad, if not worse, has been the supine position that has been adopted by Congress in the face of the US military's torture, sex abuse, rape, murder, denial of *habeas corpus* and due process, and massive violations of civil liberties of prisoners.

For all practical purposes, Congress's silence has been no different from the silence adopted by the Chilean parliament under the Pinochet regime. Come to think of it, the "We're here to support you and not ask questions" attitude of Congress toward the President and the Pentagon in the US Government's "war on terrorism" is no different than it was when the US Government was "regime changing" and participating in the murder of an American journalist during the dark days of Chile's "war on terrorism".

Mr. Hornberger is founder and president of *The Future of Freedom Foundation*. ☛

Lines of the new Cold War

The conflict in the Ukraine is a further grab for complete economic, political and military power by the United States, supported by the European Union.

Outgoing President Leonid Kuchma – who has maintained a semi-state controlled economy and favours relations with Russia over the NATO alliance – backed Viktor Yanukovich in the recent Presidential elections.

A pro-big business, pro-NATO banker – Viktor Yushenko – was the main opposition candidate.

The tactics used by the United States and European Union to interfere in elections are familiar. They have been tried and tested in Yugoslavia, Georgia, and earlier in the socialist states of Eastern Europe. They were tried in Venezuela recently where they failed and in Belarus and Zimbabwe where they also failed.

These tactics are:

1. Huge quantities of money are provided by the capitalist states;

2. Opposition parties and groups are brought together behind one candidate who is acceptable to the West – preferably some big business figure or as in the case of the Ukraine a former banker;

3. Money is provided to the youth together with the technical know-how to set up webpages and make use of the internet;

4. A colour is selected together with some simple logo and catchy slogans which are drummed into the minds of the population by constant repetition;

5. Street demonstrations are organised – a bit of action for the young – who are being told of the wonderful life in the West and the attractions of getting an education in a private school, preferably in the United States.

6. When elections are to be held the campaign is stepped up to fever pitch and the population is told that the existing regime, the “old” government has to be replaced by the “new”.

7. Agents and organisers from the West are sent in in large numbers to help organise the campaign

with election material, tactics, slogans, the necessary printing equipment and unlimited money to buy key individuals;

8. Election observers are part of the game both to station themselves in the vicinity of polling booths and to organise exit polls, which are the first to get to the airwaves and the TV with results. They will come up with the necessary accusations that the poll was rigged if the chosen candidate fails to get a majority vote as was the case in the Ukraine;

9. It's all under the slogan of democracy, regardless of what electoral processes previously existed in the state concerned or not;

10. If ethnic or language differences exist they are played up, eg the west of the Ukraine that speaks Ukrainian and the east that speaks Russian.

From NATO to anti-NATO

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union and the victory of counter-revolution on the territory of the Soviet Union, the present Ukrainian President, Leonid Kuchma, initially followed a pro-West line but later warmed relations with the Russian Federation. He had initially proposed bringing the Ukraine into NATO but then rejected the idea.

Yanukovich also campaigned on an anti-NATO policy in the recent elections.

This development was not acceptable to the US and EU and the wheels of counter-revolution started to turn again. They wanted their own man at the top as in the case of Georgia.

Henry Kissinger, John McCain, Richard Holbrooke and other US leaders all visited the Ukraine in recent times.

Some background

The western part of the Ukraine was formerly a part of Poland and provided the Nazi armies with hundreds of thousands of traitors during WW2. These never accepted the



Viktor Yushenko has won support by raising wages and pensions

defeat of Nazism or being part of the Soviet Union. They remained a political cancer in the body of the Soviet Union and today, provide the chosen candidate of the US with their strong support even to the point of plunging the country into civil war.

When a part of the Soviet Union, the Ukraine was, however, one of the Soviet Union's most prosperous republics.

But independence and capitalism did not bring prosperity but widespread poverty. Many Ukrainians emigrated and looked for work in Europe and in the Russian Federation – at cheap wages, of course.

The furious response to the electoral failure of pro-West candidate Yushenko in the Ukraine is indicated by the threatening and inflammatory comments of US Secretary of State Colin Powell. (The very same Colin Powell who has been exposed for his litany of lies regarding Iraq's alleged WMD, that he delivered to the UN Security Council to justify the invasion of Iraq.)

He now threatens Ukraine, demanding that the Ukrainian Government listen to the voice of the people and that it reconsiders the election result.

The simple meaning of these allegations and threats is that the Ukraine should install the candidate favoured by the US.

Behind the colourful rallies

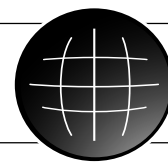
Behind the colourful mass rallies, the threats of a general strike and civil war, the raucous condemnations coming from the US, the European Union and the corporate media is the steady march of the US and NATO to push its frontier to the heart of the territory of the former Soviet Union and to further surround the Russian Federation.

The eastern part of the Ukraine was solidly against the candidate of the West.

The industrial heartland of the Ukraine, the Donbas region, where only two percent voted for Yushenko (the West's candidate), are threatening to hold a referendum and secede to the Russian Federation.

They point out that they provide the manufactured goods and feed the other regions. The Ukraine also receives its necessary oil and gas supplies from the Russian Federation.

At the time of *The Guardian* going to press the outcome of the conflict is not clear. ❖



Global briefs

SOUTH KOREA: The Korean Government Employees' Union (KGEU) launched a general strike this month despite government efforts to squelch its demand for full labour rights, including the right to strike. Last week the government forcibly disrupted a strike vote by the unrecognised union of 140,000 members. It also issued arrest warrants for 33 KGEU leaders, including Chairman Kim Young-gil. The existing Civil Service Law bars most government workers from joining a union or participating in collective actions. The government said it would severely punish or dismiss strikers.

PERU: Over 200 Peruvian children have sent messages of solidarity and encouragement to Ivette Gonzalez, daughter of René Gonzalez, one of the Cuban Five. “The world is with you”, the children told young Ivette. “We want to greet you and wish you the best”, wrote the children from the working-class district of San Juan de Miraflores in Lima. “We are sure you will soon see your father and will be happy.” *Prensa Latina* said the names, signatures and identity cards of 205 children were presented at a ceremony at the National Telephone Union headquarters. The event was part of a coordinated series of solidarity activities with the Five put on by Peruvian-Cuban Friendship Houses, trade unions and political organisations.

BURMA: The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) has released new details of forced labour across the country. For the fourth time since June 2004, the ICFTU has provided specific examples of forced labour of various types, including road construction, building and maintenance of military camps, carrying of army supplies and ammunition, and agricultural work. The ICFTU's examples are based on data collected by the Federation of Trade Unions – Burma (FTUB), an underground workers' organisation active inside Burma and maintaining offices and training facilities in neighbouring countries. Three FTUB leaders were sentenced to death last year after the Burmese dictatorship found they were giving the International Labour Organisation information about forced labour. Though their sentences have since been reduced to prison terms, they remain in detention, and their cases are to be featured in discussions on the situation in Burma by the ILO's governing body this week.

SOUTH AFRICA: TSW mag-wheels (Tigers wheels) manufacturing company in South Pretoria has announced it will rationalise its workforce and sack 700 workers. COSATU strongly condemned the company, which said it would retrench 200 members of the National Union Of Metalworkers Of South Africa (NUMSA) this month and a further 500 workers before 2007. “The whole process of retrenchments is substantively unfair and unjustifiable because the union has provided concrete alternatives to the retrenchment process”, the trade union body said. “... retrenchment can be seen as death penalty because it has a deleterious impact on the life of workers and their families. It also impacts heavily on the economy by increasing the levels of unemployment and poverty. It further undermines the Growth and Development Summit agreement to create sustainable jobs”, COSATU said in a media statement. A Labour Research Services study exposed that while workers' wages increased by 0.008% between 1997 and 2002, the increase for executive directors for the same years was 85% and for non-executive directors was 164%.

Philippines:

International support overwhelming following massacre

In response to a world-wide call for solidarity last week, thousands of messages have been sent to government officials, non-governmental organisations and unions in the Philippines. Fourteen people were killed, including two children aged two and five, when police fired on striking workers on November 16.

The call for solidarity was made through the LabourStart website (www.labourstart.org) and according to a letter from an activist in one of those striking unions they have been “flooded” with messages”.

The weekend before last some 10,000 people participated in the funeral of a couple of the victims. A tribute to the workers who died was held on the Saturday night at the location of the massacre.

According to a report received

by LabourStart from the Philippines, union officials “informed the people about the strong international support to the striking workers and the protest against state terrorism.

“We mentioned the campaign being generated by and read some of the letters and announced the partial numbers of protests generated. The workers of Hacienda Luisita, the victims and their families would like to express their utmost gratitude to the huge support on their struggle”, the report said.

The protest messages included demands for an investigation of the massacre, the dropping of all criminal charges against the strikers and the re-hiring of those for further information on the massacre (see *Guardian* 24-11-04) or visit www.labourstart.org for updates and to send a message. ❖

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



email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Greenhouse pariahs

Australia, along with the USA, is a greenhouse pariah. Although Australia produces only about 1.4 percent of the total world greenhouse emissions, on a per capita basis it is among the highest emitters, along with the US, which is the biggest greenhouse polluter at 25 percent of the world's emissions.

Yet, in a disgraceful display of environmental vandalism, the Government refuses to sign the 1997 Kyoto agreement that was meant to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, it and the US being the only developed industrial nations not to have signed.

Between 2008 and 2012 the protocol has the very modest aim of reducing annual emissions to 5.2 percent below 1990 levels.

It must be ratified by at least 55 countries accounting for at least 55 percent of the world's emissions. When last month Russia, which produces 17 percent of global emissions, came on board the figure went past 55 percent and the Kyoto protocol is now set to come into force in 2008.

One of the Howard Government's ludicrous reasons for not signing on is that it claims the protocol is not viable while ever the US doesn't sign it.

The Government also prattles on about protecting Australia's "strong economy" as another reason not to sign while the US points the finger at developing nations saying they're polluting also but not signing up.

And all the while the Howard Government has been part of a separate treaty along with the US that allows Australia to *increase* its greenhouse emissions by eight percent above the 1990 level.

But the real reason is corporate profits. The Bush administration and the Howard Government are totally committed to doing everything possible to increase those profits. The implementation of the protocol would cut into the bottom line of polluting companies, and that is unacceptable to them. Best let the whole world go to hell instead.

The Government adds that such measures would also cost jobs. Even if that were true – and there is no evidence that it is – things can be organised to help those workers effected *if there is the political will to do so*. Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that Howard has overseen the closure and collapse of businesses around the nation, in most cases the workers losing not only their jobs but also their entitlements.

In many instances these closures and collapses were the result of criminal behaviour on the part of company directors, most of whom get a slap on the wrist, if they don't get off scot free.

Anyway, international law experts are warning that businesses

here will suffer because Australia has not signed up. This is because they will be shut out from the trade benefits that come with ratifying the treaty.

These include access to a global emission market worth billions of dollars, incentives to invest in renewable energy in developing countries and financial credits for projects such as plantation forests. Existing trade agreements with countries that have signed the protocol could also be affected.

As I said, the Kyoto protocol has modest objectives. It was watered down by the US with Australia's support at the time it was concluded in Japan. But it is a small step in the right direction. The world moves forward, we stay back, tied to Uncle Sam's coattails.

Marcus Browning
Sydney, NSW

Long-term perspective is up

The excellent editorial of "The Guardian" on the 10/11/04 commemorating the Russian Revolution and its list of the achievements of Practical Socialism has stirred me into action time. This letter has been stewing for some time. I can only hope that it is not "over-cooked".

I am not an auditor or an accountant, not even a "creative" one who can produce any desired results – a profit into a loss or vice versa. But as an ordinary run of the mill working man I have felt the urge to try my hand at a simple stock take of the present state of socialism.

Biased! Of course it will be biased. I am working class. But I prefer to call it a "balancing bias" – it is a counter to the anti-socialist bias that pours out non stop from the capitalist media.

But before I start on the stock take – a little note for my own convenience I have divided time into two zones – seasonal, which refers as you might guess, to the human life span – and peaks at 100 years – and then there is history time which is counted in millions of years.

Naturally most of our act takes in seasonal time – where as the change of society systems takes place in history time – not necessarily in millions of years but considerably longer than our seasonal time which is why it is so frustrating.

To start the stock take we must begin with Russia – that was the birthplace of practical socialism. According to our capitalist "friend" Russia and socialism have been written off.

I disagree. Russia may no longer be truly socialist, but neither is it a capitalist state. It is in limbo with a great struggle still going. The Cold War was supposed to put the Kybosh on Russia after the devastating effects of the conflict with Germany. It did not quite succeed in my honourable opinion. Russia and socialism did not collapse as was anticipated.

A spoke was put into the wheel and it has been temporarily put on hold, but will eventually start moving forward again. In the meantime the jewel in the crown of socialism (Cuba) continues to shine brighter than ever – Venezuela, Brazil, Uruguay are pluses with Argentina poised to join them. Vietnam and China are working away quietly to produce their own brand of socialism.

In fact we are winning – not spectacular gains but slowly and consistently edging forward. After all practical socialism is not yet a hundred years old. Our stock is on the up.

Bert Appleton
Woy Woy NSW

Sydney

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Photo: Ana Pha

Culture & Life

by
Rob Gowland

Not dumb, just ignorant

In the '90s, journalist/author Bill Bryson returned to the United States after living in Britain for 20 years. A savvy editor at the *English Mail on Sunday* newspaper promptly tapped him to do a weekly column for the paper's *Night & Day* magazine on aspects of life in the US of interest to people in the British Isles.

These highly varied and often amusing pieces were collected in book form as *Notes From A Big Country*. At least a third of them also appeared in his book *I'm A Stranger Here Myself*, the result I assume of that strange dichotomy that affects to completely separate US and British publishing (you have all seen those notations on paperback books "For copyright reasons this edition not for sale in the USA").

Anyway, all this is just so I can refer to one of his short articles for *Night & Day*, published in November 1996, entitled *Dumb and Dumber*. This piece dealt with "the phenomenon now widely known as the Dumbing Down of America".

Bryson began his article with

the results of a survey conducted a few years earlier by the National Endowment for the Humanities, which tested 8000 senior students at US high schools and found, as Bryson puts it, "that a very large number of them didn't know, well, anything".

"Two thirds had no idea when the US Civil War took place or which president penned the Gettysburg Address. Roughly the same proportion could not identify Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill or Charles de Gaulle.

"A third thought that Franklin Roosevelt was president during the Vietnam War and that Columbus sailed to America after 1750. Forty-two percent [this is my favourite] notes Bryson] couldn't name a single country in Asia."

Bryson, who avers that he "does not for a moment think that Americans are inherently more stupid or brain-dead than anyone else", blames this appalling test result on the fact that Americans "are routinely provided with conditions that spare them the need to think, and so they have got out of the habit".

There is certainly something in that, but I have no doubt this situation is also not as accidental or benign as Bill Bryson seems to think. With the sophisticated mass media that we have now, it would be perfectly possible to raise the cultural and educational level of the community – substantially – within the space of a single decade.

Unfortunately, of course, the relatively small number of capitalists who control the mass media – directly through ownership or indirectly through domination of government – have a vested inter-

est in *not* improving the cultural and educational level of the populace.

Obviously, the kind of message espoused by Bush and Howard, or the line that is pushed by the Murdoch press on almost anything, has more chance of success with people whose grasp of current events is rudimentary at best, whose critical faculties have been dulled through disuse.

The stories of weapons of mass destruction being developed in Iraq or of imminent interest rate rises in the event of a Labor victory would not have been nearly so effective if placed before a well-informed electorate.

As we have said before in these pages, capitalism prefers to function in a world of ignorance and works hard to see that, in fact, it does. The erosion of democratic rights – or even their outright destruction – is a lot easier when people are kept in ignorance and fear.

However, although the dumbing down of the population has become more obvious in recent decades, especially on television, it is not all that recent really. And it is certainly not confined to the United States.

In the 1950s, I was a pupil at Sydney High. At the time the US was trying to provoke China into a war over the occupation of islands and the passage of ships in the straits between Taiwan and the mainland.

The newspapers were full of daily reports of shelling and other indicators of imminent war over what they still persisted in calling "Formosa" (as named by the Portuguese in the 16th century).

I vividly recall how stunned I was when Mr Allsop, our History



'Always late, lacks motivation, last in every subject . . . well done, son.'

teacher (who, with his colleague Hunt, had written the textbook we were using), asked the members of the History Honours class where Formosa was and *I was the only one who knew!* I mean, there were little maps showing its location in almost every day's newspaper.

It was the height of the Cold War but none of the other members of that same Honours Class could say what the letters USSR stood for

(although one lad who confidently asserted it meant "United States of Soviet Russia" deserved an A for ingenuity, I thought).

American – and Australian – high school students are not inherently stupid (still less "brain-dead"). They are however, the victims of a ruling class strategy to keep them ignorant.

And *that* needs to be vigorously opposed. ☺



Rob Gowland
previews
ABC & SBS
Public Television

Sun December 5 ~
~ Sat December 11

The dumbing down of the ABC continues. Even programs about books are not immune.

In a quest for popularity – and ratings – the ABC invited viewers to vote for their “favourite book”. A favourite book is presumably one that you read and re-read with pleasure.

It is probably not the same as “the best book written in the last century” (or “the best book ever written”), or “the most influential book ever written” or “the most exciting/romantic/comic/imaginative book of all time” or any of a host of categories concerned with differentiating quality.

But as the ABC’s publicity says, “The votes are in”, and on *My Favourite Book* (ABC 7.30pm Sunday) “journalist, former publisher and a woman who loves a good read, Jennifer Byrne, will reveal all”.

Gosh, doesn’t that sound exciting. And the ABC promises additional delights: “ABC TV will celebrate [our] love affair with reading in a playful and provocative evening of entertainment, stories and discussion as we countdown Australia’s favourite books, from ten to one.”

It doesn’t sound like a very cultural evening, does it, even though the ABC’s publicist did promise that “There’ll be cameos from famous Australians who will bravely reveal dark secrets about their reading habits.”

“Which books do actors Sophie Lee and Claudia Karvan recom-

mend to pick up the opposite sex? Which actor has admitted to being a book thief – Sam Neill, Naomi Watts or Sam Worthington?”

“How do David Koch, Glenn Robbins and Amanda Keller feel about reading on the loo?”

Striving for excellence appears to have been abandoned in favour of the relentless pursuit of superficiality. No doubt Prime Minister Howard will heartily approve.

Viewers of *Victoria And Albert*, which is being repeated this week (ABC 9.00pm Sunday), could be excused for thinking Britain was an autocracy and not a bourgeois democracy in which Parliament makes the laws and the monarch simply reads them out at the opening of Parliament.

The program takes the line that “Together, Victoria and Albert ruled with distinction”. Ruled? They were expensive figure heads, that’s all, their pomp and splendour a useful device for impressing both locals and foreigners with the apparent wealth and power of the British Empire.

The antics of the ruling class have taken a bit of a battering over the last century or so and all these programs about Royals – very top people who are seemingly unsullied by sordid commerce – seem to be intended to repair the image.

Basically, they are just ruling class propaganda, and an insult to the downtrodden masses who toiled to create the wealth these Royals squandered so profligately.

It’s sometimes hard, given that the US is now the world’s only superpower, to realise that there are still struggles within the US leadership over how their military might should be used. *Rumsfeld’s War*, screening on the *Cutting Edge* timeslot (SBS 8.30pm Tuesday), is a report by the PBS *Frontline* team and the *Washington Post* to investigate US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld’s contentious relations with the Pentagon.

When George W Bush came to office, the Pentagon still sought to dominate the globe and prevent any rival world power from developing. The extreme right Republicans in



Insights about ordinary English people’s attitude to the garden. (*Creature Comforts*)

the Bush White House, however, saw the need to fight numerous wars, to protect “America’s interests” and Christian civilisation.

Some current and former officers from the US Army now say the army is on the verge of being broken and that Rumsfeld is responsible.

The program maintains that in the early months of the Bush administration, Rumsfeld saw his biggest enemy as “the outdated Cold War-mindset of the troops he commanded” (2.5 million enlisted men and women).

Professor John Arquilla of the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, says: “Donald Rumsfeld wanted to build a smaller, nimbler and more networked military that could respond swiftly to threats anywhere in the world.”

Rumsfeld’s push for a reduction in the number of troops in the army found him clashing with General Eric Shinseki, the US army’s Chief

of Staff. By September 2001, there was open speculation that the unpopular Rumsfeld might lose his position.

Then came the September 11 attacks and Rumsfeld’s position was secure. He moved to invade Afghanistan using the Pentagon’s Special Operations forces.

Now, Rumsfeld’s critics allege that his methods – effectively marginalising advice about troop strength, post-war planning, and the treatment of prisoners – has left the US with mounting casualties in Iraq and without a clear exit strategy in either Iraq or Afghanistan.

Former Centcom Commander-in-Chief General Joseph Hoar (Ret.) says, “Today we find over fifty percent of the United States Army – the regular army, ten divisions – committed overseas. It’s not sustainable.”

This week on *Creature Comforts* (ABC 8.30pm Thursdays) Aardman’s Nick Park and director Richard Golezowski seek out insights about ordinary English people’s attitude to the sea, gardening and eating habits. For each ten-minute segment, interviewees’ comments are put into

the mouths of appropriate Plasticine animals, to clever and whimsical effect.

Mind you, I still think they should have been used as ten-minute fillers once a week rather than cobbled together to make a “half-hour program” as here. I think the joke is more sustainable in short bursts.

Another repeat beginning this week is the BBC series about the history of popular music, *Walk On By: The Story Of Popular Song* (ABC 9.30pm Thursdays).

Not nearly as compelling as the US series *Jazz*, which it clearly seeks to emulate, *Walk On By* is nevertheless eminently watchable. I found it to be most interesting when dealing with the early development of the pop-music “industry”.

Starting with black and Jewish-influenced traditional music, the staple of Tin Pan Alley at the turn of the century, the series examines the growth of musical theatre on Broadway and Hollywood; the emergence of singers like Bing Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra who toured with the dance bands of the ’30s and ’40s; and the blues and country roots which produced Elvis-style rock’n’roll. ♣

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SA Museum

December – January

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Film Review by Richard Titelus

The Motorcycle Diaries

Directed by Walter Salles

In January 1952, two Argentine students embarked on a journey to see Latin America, a continent that they had largely known only through books.

The students – one a medical student specialising in leprosy, the other a biochemist – were profoundly affected by the landscape, friendships and experiences which they would encounter along the way. Both would go on to make a significant and enduring contribution to the political, economic and medical landscape of the 20th Century.

The two young men were Ernesto “Che” Guevara, the co-leader of the successful Cuban Revolution and Alberto Granado, one of the early initiators of Cuba’s world-renowned biotechnology program. The film is based on the two books written by the men of their journey through four countries in South America – Argentina, Chile, Peru and finishing in Caracas, Venezuela.

More than 37 years have passed since Che’s execution at aged 39 by the Bolivian Army (at the behest of the CIA), and while this has served to enhance his mythical stature

the man to see what made him do what he did and why?

He is seen as either a liberator and fighter for justice or an unyielding and uncompromising guerrilla (or, as some in the bourgeois media today would say – a terrorist) which belies the subtleties and complexities that drove the impassioned Che.

This movie is an attempt to reveal the man as he took a long and difficult journey of discovery – both physically and spiritually.

The cinematic portrayal of Ernesto Guevara and the journey he undertook is assisted by following as closely as possible the original route taken by Guevara and by the use of actors from the countries through which he passed. The language used by the pair as well as the scenery is also quite colourful.

Guevara and Granado start their journey in Buenos Aires, Argentina with an emotional farewell to their families before heading out on the open road on an old 500cc Norton motorbike, optimistically nicknamed La Poderosa – “The Mighty One”.

(In real life it was called La Poderosa II, the first being the moto-

The going is rough and tough as dirt roads, frequent spills and mechanical failures slowed their speed and patience.

They head towards Chile through the beautiful alpine region of Bariloche in southern Argentina with its deep, clear lakes, expansive forests and snow-capped peaks.

They enter Chile with little means of support and appeal to people along the way to help them gain food, shelter and mechanical repairs – often in imaginative and ingenious ways.

However it is the honesty and sincerity of Ernesto which mostly allows them to enter into people’s homes and hearts.

In the great dry expanse of the Atacama Desert they meet a former farming couple who have been forced off their land by large commercial farm interests and are now looking for work at the US-owned Chuquicamata Mine (the world’s largest open cut copper mine).

The couple reveal to Ernesto that they had been hounded by authorities in Chile for being Communists. This is one of the first experiences Ernesto has that convinces him of



Ernesto and Alberto’s work at the leper colony not only transforms their own lives but also the lives of the people around them – both the lepers whom they touch without gloves and the doctors and nuns who work there.

it has also served to simplify and dichotomise the legacy he left to the world.

A cinematic portrayal of the life of one of the iconic revolutionaries of the 20th Century was always going to be a hard task – does one attempt a portrait of the political achievements of Che or does one attempt to look behind the aura of

risied bicycle used by Che on his earlier journey around Argentina.)

After a farewell visit with Ernesto’s aristocratic girlfriend Chichina Ferreira (Ernesto himself came from an upper-middle class family) in Miramar – where the two travellers are made to sleep in a tent on the grounds of her father’s estate – they start their journey in earnest.

the integrity, earnestness and hunger for justice which drives those who call themselves Communists, and thus begins his inexorable pull in that direction.

On arrival in the Peruvian capital Lima they meet Dr Pesce, one of the most important leper researchers in Latin America. The doctor makes arrangements for them to

work in the largest leper colony in South America, in the jungle on the Amazon River.

Ernesto and Alberto’s work there not only transforms their own lives but also the lives of the people around them – both the lepers whom they will touch without the regulatory gloves (leprosy is not contagious) and the doctors and nuns who work there.

The two finally arrive in Venezuela at the end of the South American journey – but at the cusp of far bigger journeys that each will soon face.

Real life in Latin America

The movie is about the triumph of the human spirit in the face of extreme poverty and adversity faced by many people in South America.

Our current world leaders could benefit from undertaking a similar

journey to the one undertaken by Ernesto so that they would more readily be able to comprehend and empathise with the suffering and desperation of the poor and marginalised peoples of the world.

As it is, the closest they get to a motorbike and the world’s poor is the motorcade in front of their limo as they arrive at yet another globalisation talk-fest in some developing country – where they will announce yet more ways to screw the workers and other oppressed classes.

The Motorcycle Diaries opens nationally on December 16 at selected cinemas. ☪

Perth: The Australia Cuba Friendship Society is holding a special preview screening on Friday 10 December at the Luna Cinema, 6pm, \$15.

Howard Government threatens Vanuatu again

Australia’s small independent island neighbour of Vanuatu is again under severe pressure, threats and interference by the Howard Government.

Vanuatu was sufficiently independent-minded earlier this year to expel two Australian Federal police officers who were alleged to be spying on Vanuatu’s political leaders. It is hard to imagine why any foreign police officers are needed in the generally peaceful society of Vanuatu.

The Australian Government wishes to reconstruct the economic, legal and political structures of all South Pacific Island states in line with those adopted in Australia and

in the interests of the Australian ruling class. This makes it easier for Australian corporations, with the active assistance of the Australian Government, to penetrate and control their economies and their political life.

Similar policies are being pursued and imposed by the Howard Government in its relations with all the states of the region from East Timor, through Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands to Fiji and Tonga.

Howard’s arrogant hatchetman Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, has decided to penalise Vanuatu by threatening to cut a \$10 million aid package that had

been earmarked for agricultural development.

In taking “tough action”, the Australian Government sent a delegation to Vanuatu last week led by a senior Foreign Affairs Department official conveying a list of alleged transgressions by the Vanuatu Government.

In addition to demanding that the Vanuatu Government continue to accept the presence of Australian Federal Police, the delegation is said to be calling on the Vanuatu Government to stop interfering with the Vanuatu Financial Intelligence Unit and implement existing legislation controlling financial transactions. These demands are

an obvious interference by the Australian Government in what are clearly the internal affairs of the Vanuatu Government.

Trotting out the usual justifications, the apologists for the actions of the Australian Government mention the possibility of money laundering and drug smuggling unless Vanuatu does what it is told by the Australian Government.

In a new display of defiance the Prime Minister of Vanuatu Serge Vohar is said to have refused to meet the Australian delegation leader.

This latest pressuring of Vanuatu will confirm in the minds of the governments and people of the South Pacific states that Australia

is acting as a South Pacific “big brother” and policeman interested in forcing all regional governments to comply with its policies or face retribution.

While such tactics may succeed for a time they will, in the long run, lead to Australia joining the small club of the “most hated nations” in the world. Furthermore, in browbeating the South Pacific states the Australian Government is taking on much more than the country’s resources will be able to handle.

Australia’s relations with all countries should be based on the principles of peace, friendship, equality, non-interference and mutual benefit. ☪



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