

Racism inflames anger

Increasing racial tensions inflamed by the Howard Government's racist policies have boiled over into violent responses by Indigenous communities. The death in custody of an Aboriginal man on November 21 sparked riots on Queensland's Palm Island two weeks ago. And in a shocking incident last week an Aboriginal youth accused of attempted theft was dragged with a rope by the neck around a river bank for 40 minutes, near the Queensland town of Goondiwindi.

Sixteen-year-old Allan Boulan was found allegedly attempting to steal a motorbike by the owner of a cattle station. In a reprisal that has been described as "KKK type stuff" he and his friend were then beaten with sticks.

Following this, his friend was bound to a tree and forced to watch while Boulan was stripped, bound and dragged around the river bank. It is enormous good fortune that he was not strangled. As it was, he suffered rope burns, head injuries and severe bruising to his body, and has experienced traumatic nausea and vomiting ever since.

All symptomatic of a disastrous decline in relations between government and the Aboriginal community

The Goondiwindi beating, and the death in custody of Cameron Doomadgee in Palm Island Police Station, followed another death in custody at Normanton Police Station some time ago. The deaths at Palm Island and Normanton are both the subject of an investigation by the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission.

The events at Goondiwindi and Normanton, as well as those on Palm Island, are a clear outcome of government policies of neglect and outright hostility towards Aboriginal people.

The Government has gone out of its way to denigrate and demonise attempts by Indigenous communities to overcome poverty, discrimination and more than 200 years of dispossession.

The Howard Government has historically moved to block all cam-

paigns and legislation favouring the rights of Aboriginal people, because they are seen as standing in the way of vested corporate interests. The Government has also consistently refused to apologise to Aboriginal people over the Stolen Generations, for the same reason.

The deaths in custody at Palm Island and Normanton, the death of Aboriginal boy Thomas ("T J") Hickey who was being pursued by police in Redfern, Sydney, and the shocking assault on Allan Boulan at Goondiwindi, are all symptomatic of a disastrous decline in relations between government and the Aboriginal community.

This manifests itself in a degree of public apathy or ignorance of the problems facing Aboriginal people, as well as blatantly racist criminal behaviour by some individuals and groups. All of this has been given tacit encouragement by the Howard Government's callous attitude and policies towards Aboriginal people.

The introduction of punitive new welfare laws targeting only Indigenous Australians is another demonstration of the arrogance and racism driving Government policy.

Aboriginal Senator Aden Ridgeway recently pointed out that the Howard Government still refused to acknowledge that there was an urgent problem concerning the treatment of Aboriginal people, despite the disproportionately high rate of Aboriginal people in custody, and the appalling incidence of Aboriginal deaths in custody.

He commented: "This country does have major race relations problems that are escalating under the reign of the Howard Government. I believe there is a growing indifference of Australians – the great Australian silence about the increasing rates of imprisonment and deaths in custody of Indigenous people and treatment under the criminal justice system.

"Indigenous people in this country are 15 times more likely to be imprisoned than anyone else ... Last year, 75 percent of deaths in custody of prisoners detained for no more than public order offences were Indigenous Australians."

Robbie Williams, the ATSIC Commissioner for south-east Queensland, remarked grimly: "There's been some militant red-necks who have taken the law into their own hands. There's a few people who are starting to think it's open season on Aboriginal people. It started in Redfern, now it's up on Palm Island: it could be escalating." ✪



Carr's land grab

In a massive property grab the Carr Labor Government in NSW has set up the Redfern-Waterloo Authority which is designed to allow the Government to bypass decision making by local councils and communities. The two inner city suburbs have Aboriginal communities which have long been seen by the Government as a hindrance to plans by developers.

In March 2002, the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project was announced to address serious social problems in the area. That was the stated intention, at any rate. But there was no movement to address the problems, which arise out of poverty and long-term racial discrimination.

There was little information and consultation from those running the Project.

Now the Redfern-Waterloo Authority, under Minister for Energy and Utilities, Frank Sartor, is to control key sites, administer a Redfern-Waterloo Fund and develop a ten year plan.

Sartor, a former Sydney mayor,

will have unprecedented powers to override normal planning controls, take control of areas at will, choose developers for areas adjacent to such sites, and override the Heritage Act.

Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore is also an MP whose electorate takes in Redfern and Waterloo. She described the plan as "nothing but a grab for development-related cash" by the Government.

In Parliament Ms Moore moved amendments to the proposed Redfern-Waterloo Authority Bill, warning that it sets up a new super-authority with extraordinary powers that will be above the law.

"The Minister will be accountable to no one and will have the capacity to annex other suburban areas at will, to cherry pick the most valuable development sites, and to act as the consent authority for his developments without being hindered by inconvenient planning laws, such as the Heritage Act."

For starters, heritage laws will no longer apply to four sites in Redfern: the Australian Technology Park, Eveleigh Railway Workshops,

the 23 hectares of public housing estates, and the Block and its surroundings, where the area's Aboriginal community lives.

Sartor claims it is "not about dispossessing Aboriginal people and sending them off somewhere else". But there will be no place for them in Redfern and Waterloo as it will be changed into a high-income-only residential and retail area.

There are already plans for the construction of three shopping, residential and office towers over Redfern station and for residential development of Eveleigh.

It has also been revealed that another, separate, body along the lines of the Redfern-Waterloo Authority is being formed to take over what the Government describes as "run-down corridors" throughout Sydney. Although details of this body are as yet only sketchy the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, Craig Knowles, has already earmarked Parramatta Road from City Road to Granville, and set up a Parramatta Road Task Force. ✪

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People before profits

For decades governments have taken responsibility for the provision of infrastructure and essential services such as education, water, sewerage, electricity, gas, roads, public transport, post and telephones. In taking responsibility, they have provided public services, totally or partially funding them, and have been publicly accountable through parliament. The majority of the population (apart from some rural and Aboriginal communities) have taken it for granted that water would flow out of taps in their homes, that electricity would provide light and heat, or that our cars or buses would freely use the roads.

We paid our taxes to government and government provides the necessary services to meet the needs of society – both individual, personal needs and those of businesses and the community at large. In some instances we might pay for the service or use of infrastructure such as electricity, telephones and rail, and in other instances it would be provided free of charge (eg roads, education).

The prime purpose of a service was its provision to meet a need. Thus, public transport was to serve the needs of people to commute to work, to school and so on. This may sound obvious and logical. After all, why else would they be provided?

That was the case before the economic rationalists took over. They set about corporatising government utilities and services to put them on a commercial footing. This was then extended to making “reforms” to enable government “businesses” to recover the full cost of a service through “user pays” and other means.

Competition policy followed, with the abolition of cross-subsidisation and the introduction of private sector providers. The next step was to make a profit. When the service became profitable, it was sold or public ownership and provision was replaced by “public private partnerships” (PPPs) where the government takes financial responsibility (ensures profits flow) and the private sector provide or manage the service and pocket huge profits.

There are endless government reports on public services and how to put them on a profitable footing – or in other words fattening the turkey for the corporate table.

Cross subsidisation works through the most profitable sector of a service subsidising the sectors which do not make a profit. Thus, Telstra has an obligation to fund telecommunications in regional and remote areas so the people in those areas pay the same for their services as those in the densely populated cities.

The abolition of cross-subsidisation means that services are cut or users pay more where it cost more to provide that service. This applies to many services, such as Australia Post and rail services. The concept of universal access and uniform rates is being eroded and replaced by a new regime of making everything turn a profit – focusing on every individual situation rather than the totality of the service and community needs.

It is approaching the point where, every train trip, every letter delivery to every address, every phone call to every destination, every drop of water to every property – all will have to make a profit.

This process is evident in the NSW public transport system where the government has proposed emasculating rail services – focusing on peak periods and cutting services with smaller patronage (see page 3).

The overriding reason for private provision of services is profit. The service itself is no longer the *raison d'être*: the service becomes the vehicle for generating revenue for the coffers of big business. Public need comes a distant last, if it enters the picture at all.

Every public asset and service is now in the firing line for privatisation, from education through health to welfare. Those parts that can't be made profitable – many public services were never going to make a profit and were never meant to – will either become a second rate, under-funded service provider or will be scrapped altogether.

It's time to challenge the assumption that essential services should make a profit and return to the collective, efficient public provision of services for the public good.

PRESS FUND

As another *Guardian* goes to press, many people are doubtless wondering what awaits them in 2005. The year 2004 has seen a number of setbacks, but also a number of important gains. Whatever happens, one thing is certain: the future will be determined by the mass action of the people of the world. In Australia, *The Guardian* has an important contribution to make. This week's response to the Press Fund is very encouraging. There is only one more issue of the paper this year. It is still possible to make our target of \$14,000. We know it can be done. Our sincere thanks go to all those who contributed this week, as follows:

B Appleton \$40, R and J Brown \$200, M H \$290.40, “Round Figure” \$9.60, Stan Thornton \$50, SA State Committee \$223.50, BJ Hawke \$25, R Junkerstorff \$50.

This week's total: \$888.50. Progressive total: \$11,778.50.

Exposure: The Bhopal disaster

Peter Mac

Just after midnight on December 3, 1984 there was a gas leakage at Union Carbide's pesticide plant at Bhopal in India. The accident, which is said to have been triggered in part by a refrigeration plant being turned off as an economy measure, released 40 tonnes of toxic methyl isocyanate gas into the atmosphere, forming a cloud that covered an area of 40 square kilometres around the plant.

It was the world's worst industrial accident. Three thousand people died that night from the effects of the gas. There were 8000 casualties in the three days after the accident, and another 20,000 have died since. One hundred and twenty thousand people have survived, but with terrible injuries to the eyes, skin, lungs and other parts of the body. Since the disaster, the rates of cancer, infant mortality and deformities in and around Bhopal area have soared.

More than 572,000 survivors have now been officially classified as victims of the accident, either because of their injuries or because of loss of earning power or other ill effects.

Union Carbide declined to reveal the composition of the chemicals involved on the basis that this knowledge was their intellectual property. (This made it extremely difficult for medical authorities to treat the victims in the immediate aftermath of the blast.) Although only five years old, the plant had been losing money. After the accident the company simply abandoned it. The manager, Warren Anderson, was arrested but skipped bail and lives in great comfort in the US despite an Interpol warrant for his arrest.

The company later made a small compensation payment to the



From Raghu Rai's exhibit

victims, but it was not until 1989, after a court case mounted by the Indian Government, that a legal settlement was reached.

The company had chosen to contest the case in India, rather than in the US, where the damages were likely to be much larger. The Indian Government demanded US\$15 billion in damages, but in the event only \$US470 million was forthcoming.

Moreover, the victims did not receive anything until November this year, just under 20 years after the tragedy. The entitlement for each victim was some 25,000 rupees. At the current rate of exchange that is

about A\$757, or approximately \$38 for each year the victims have had to wait.

Not surprisingly, many of the victims felt that this did not represent a just outcome. The environmental organisation Greenpeace and a coalition of survivor groups is now campaigning for adequate compensation, as well as for the company (which has been taken over by Dow Chemicals) to carry out remediation to the site, whose soil and water are still shockingly polluted.

An exhibition on the disaster is currently on display in Sydney. Shortly after the disaster, Indian photographer Raghu Rai visited the site to record its aftermath. Last year he again visited Bhopal to document the long-term impacts on the local residents. His haunting images, reminiscent of the post-Hiroshima photographs, form the basis of the exhibition.

The exhibition will be on display in Sydney, with half the photographs at the Tap Gallery at 278 Palmer St, Darlinghurst and the other half at the George Hannah Memorial Library in King St, Mascot until January 30, 2005. ☪

Dulwich Hill Fair

Denis Doherty

Port Jackson Branch was out in force again at the Dulwich Hill Fair on Saturday December 4. The Branch made a hit selling those now famous revolutionary jams and the usual party literature.

A feature of the Fair was that we again used it to raise money for the

Iraqi hospital appeal. At the moment Port Jackson has topped \$200 for the appeal and is aiming for more.

We still had a number of people coming up to us and saying “I thought the CPA had gone out of existence”. “Oh, no”, came the reply, “We not only exist but we are going much better than the ALP and Mark Latham.” ☪

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 know it is an expensive time of the year, but for the Iraqi people are doing it much tougher. We urge you to give what you can – and a bit more!

Many thanks to the following for their generous contributions this week:

Port Jackson Branch \$229.50, Fred Rouady \$20, Bob & Jenny Saltis \$20, Pat & Janet Menz \$50, Anonymous \$20, Ian Pamment \$10, Tom Simmons \$100, Kathryn Clennell \$20.

This week's total \$469.50. Cumulative total \$793.50.

Hospital Appeal for Iraq

I.....Of

.....donate \$..... to the above appeal.

I agree/do not agree to having my contribution acknowledged in *The Guardian*.

Contributions by cheque, money order or credit card giving name on the card, card number and expiry date.

Credit card _____ Expiry date ____

Please send donations to: 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010

Derailed to privatisation

The NSW Carr Government has announced a new timetable for Sydney's trains to come into force in September next year. The extent to which the Government has allowed the service to deteriorate is evident in the proposed regime which will see 720 services a day cut from off-peak services, amounting to 3500 a week. The claim that fixing the system can be achieved by slashing services is not so ludicrous if seen in connection with the Government's longer term goal of privatisation.

The scheme is being implemented even though it has been pointed out by commuters that with the changes taking place in the workforce – increased casualisation and shift work being prevalent among them – many workers now go to and from work during non-peak hours.

Central to the privatisation process is the "clearways" program, which will break up the rails themselves into segregated lines. The Government says this is aimed at stopping a problem on one line from affecting other lines. Clearly the cause of such problems is not the integrated system but the failure to fully fund its maintenance. After the

lines are separated it will be easier to sell them off.

Already commuters who use the Inner West line between Homebush and the city are being forced to change trains at Redfern station on the outskirts of the CBD because their service now terminates at Central's Country Link platforms. This is because the Government has dumped what it calls "low-patronage off-peak services" which go through the city circle line – those CBD stations on the loop between Town Hall and Museum.

This change spells serious difficulties for disabled and less mobile passengers.

For example: this year the State Government spent \$6million upgrading Summer Hill Station with lifts and ramps to allow disabled access. However, disabled passengers who use Summer Hill will now no longer have direct access to the city. An announcement in transit advises passengers travelling to the city or transferring to other lines to change at Redfern Station. However, Redfern station is notorious for its inaccessibility with no lifts or ramps between platforms.

Disabled passengers who stay

on the train and terminate at Central are then forced to travel about 100 metres – and up and down two more lifts – before they can access a city-bound train and continue their journey.

North Shore line trains will be reduced by half between 10am and 2pm. The Southern Highlands line which services the towns between Picton and Goulburn – which were left without a direct service to the city when its weekend services were cut by 30 percent in July – doesn't even figure in the plan; no timetable has been developed for it.

For nearly a decade now people have been conditioned to accept that trains will not run on time, and in many cases not at all. This has now manifested itself into City Rail policy with trains that run five minutes late officially considered as on-time.

The cuts in funding and services are also reflected in the fact that, except for the Olympic year in 2000, there has been no significant increase in patronage on the service since 1996. This has another implication: Sydney has grown by almost half-a-million people in that time. This can only mean there are more cars on the road. ☹



Australia's nuclear proliferation risk revealed

A classified uranium enrichment project is underway at Sydney's nuclear reactor, according to a new report by Greenpeace. *Secrets, Lies and Uranium Enrichment: The classified Silex project at Lucas Heights reveals the full extent of the project and the Federal Government's involvement.*

The report highlights the hypocrisy of the Australian Government wanting to play "a vital role in helping stop the spread of WMD" (Weapons of Mass Destruction), as stated by Defence Minister Robert Hill, while allowing weapons-useable nuclear technology to be developed in Sydney.

"If this uranium enrichment research were being conducted by Iran or North Korea, our Government would call it evidence of a covert weapons program", said Greenpeace nuclear campaigner, James Courtney.

"Allowing laser enrichment

technology to be developed at Lucas Heights seriously undermines our Government's commitment to the elimination of nuclear weapons."

Uranium enrichment is a highly classified activity because it provides the main ingredient used in the production of nuclear weapons. The company conducting the research, Silex Systems Ltd, is the only company in the world pursuing laser enrichment of uranium. It claims its technology is to be used to create fuel for power reactors.

Former diplomat Richard Broinowski and author of *Fact or Fission – The Truth About Australia's Nuclear Ambitions*, has welcomed the Greenpeace report. "It's a nonsense to suggest that laser enrichment of uranium only has a civil application. If you can enrich Uranium-235 by 10% you can enrich it to higher percentages to make it weapons usable. The weapons application of this technology is

being denied by both Silex and the Government."

Launching the Greenpeace report at Parliament House last week, Greens Senator Kerry Nettle said:

"Alexander Downer describes Australia as a 'leading country in the area of nuclear non-proliferation', but has allowed the Silex project to continue to develop, with government support, a uranium enrichment technology. As this report shows the operations of Silex Systems and their relationship to government agencies is shrouded in secrecy."

On its website under "company history", Silex boasts of its government connections and its "classified" work:

• 2000: Agreement for Co-operation between the United States and Australian Governments paved the way for continued development of SILEX Technology for uranium enrichment, facilitating its future transfer to the US.

• 2000: Silex secured a "START" R&D Grant from the Australian Government to fund 50 per cent of the SILEX Stable Isotope Program.

• 2001: The SILEX Technology was officially "Classified" by the US and Australian Governments. The implications of classification relate mainly to security protocols.

The Greenpeace report further reveals that:

• Silex Systems Ltd leases more than 2000 square metres of space at the Australian Nuclear Science & Technology Organisation, and has

unspecified access to ANSTO technology and information;

• Silex Systems is the only private company in Australia to come under the regulation of the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA). However no mention of Silex Systems or laser enrichment has ever appeared in a publicly available ARPANSA report.

Senator Nettle promised that the Greens would pursue the truth of the Government's relationship with Silex through the Senate estimates process. ☹

Pete's Corner



Govt's disability hypocrisy

Bob Briton

Last week the ABC's AM program lifted the lid on the outrageous hypocrisy of the Federal Government in moving to deport an Indian family that has been living in Australia for 10 years. The mother and father have been highly-valued suicide and domestic violence counsellors working for the Queanbeyan Baptist Church.

However, when Jude and Daisy Morris recently applied for permanent residency, they were turned down. No new temporary visa was issued and the bridging visa they now have does not allow them to work. The Department of Immigration is now asking them to leave the country.

The reason for the dramatic turn of events? Rophin, the couple's 12-year-old son, is moderately autistic. This only became evident at age four, a couple of years after the family's arrival in Australia. The callous hypocrisy on the part of the government is that Rophin's photo appears on a Department of Family and Community Services calendar that urges people to focus on the abilities of people with disabilities.

The calendar was launched last week to coincide with the International Day of People with

Disabilities. A media release from Federal MP Sussan Ley had the following to say:

"It is often said that people with disabilities are more likely to be adversely affected by the barriers they face and society's attitudes than by the disability itself. International Day really gives us the chance to break down those barriers and to challenge people's perceptions of disability."

Nobody from the Department of Family and Community Services was available for comment. A spokesperson for the Minister for Immigration, Senator Amanda Vanstone, said that she could not comment on individual immigration cases.

Rophin's father Jude is still hoping that the government will review the case and allow the family to stay in Australia. "That is my only request. I hold no resentments, no bitterness against the Government. I am simply, as a father of a disabled son, requesting the Minister to intervene and to allow our son a future and a home."

Rophin's picture features on the government calendar for the month of December 2005. The Morris' many friends are now working hard to ensure that the family is still living in their home in Australia when that month rolls around. ☹

South Australia

Bosses' frenzied campaign

Bob Briton

Employer group Business SA kicked their ongoing industrial relations campaign into high gear last week. Half page ads appeared in the Monday edition of Murdoch's daily *Advertiser* carrying the crude propagandist image of a medicine bottle clearly marked "POISON". The supposedly deadly contents were the Industrial Relations Bill (IR Bill) being considered by the Upper House of the South Australian Parliament.

The "bitter Bill Parliament could make us all swallow" was the Rann Government's Labour Market Relations Bill – a piece of legislation viewed as conservative by SA unions that seeks to update the 1994 *Industrial and Employees Relations Act*. Bosses are alarmed that the latest Bill would clarify industrial relations developments of recent years that have worked overwhelmingly in their favour. Employers are outraged that there could be a minor pause in the legislative gift-giving season from state and federal governments.

The Bill has been watered down a number of times to meet the demands coming from the big end of town. There is no move to ensure

casual workers can become permanent after six months of continuous employment – as the United Trades and Labor Council very defensively points out. The bosses have retained their "right" to spy on workers.

The Bill will, however, afford some minimum wage protection and allow for intervention by the Industrial Relations Commission where contracts are deemed harsh and unfair. It will better protect workers' entitlements, especially those of young, non-permanent workers. It will ensure that workers contracted from labour hire firms do not fall through the cracks of the state's unfair dismissal laws. It will preserve unions' right of entry to workplaces.

Business SA and other bosses' organisations have been campaigning vigorously since the Bill was first drafted in December 2003. They hired pro-boss outfit Access Economics to argue that 1700 jobs will go if the Bill were enacted. Their reading of the Bill would have it that unionists could demand to enter a boss' home to examine a business' most sensitive documents. And pigs might fly! The Master Builders put it about that 3500 apprenticeships would be under threat.



The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) submitted a tendentious document to the government in March in which it clearly threatened that more and more bosses would remove their workers from the state's jurisdiction and put them into federally administered Australian Workplace Agreements. As the submission pointed out, about half of SA's workers are already under federal IR control. It makes flattering reference to Victoria's abdication of its IR system to the Commonwealth. ACCI insists that the state should remain "neutral" on whether workers are casuals or permanent or hired as contractors. Like the various spokespersons for the Federal Government, the bosses' organisation insists that all of the employees working under these arrangements

are doing so out of their own free will. The gloves come off when questions of job security are raised:

"Whilst academics and theoreticians might like to think that a workplace can be micro managed by legislation and that the law can create employment security, the real world of workplace relations and business activity is quite different."

The "real world" the ACCI wants us all to accept is that of the master/servant relationship in every workplace in the state.

The ACCI document goes to great lengths in complaining how the legislation could allow a contracted worker to be considered an employee for purposes such as unfair dismissal. It is revealing that it uses terms like "genuine independent contractors" – inadvertently conceding that at least some workers are forced to become contractors

as a means of avoiding employer responsibilities and cheating workers. The whole Bill was written off as "policy adventurism". In common with Business SA, ACCI is not interested in further negotiation on the matters and simply wants the Bill withdrawn.

Fortunately, independent Bob Such and Greens MHA Kris Hanna saw to it that the Bill passed through the lower house. Maximum pressure is now on the Democrats, No Pokies MLC Nick Xenophon, independent Terry Cameron and Family First's Andrew Evans. It is obvious that great hope has been placed in the last-mentioned fundamentalist councillor. Business SA's pricey ad in the *Advertiser* last week told us that the IR Bill is "bad for business, bad for families and bad for jobs" [emphasis added]. SA bosses are not known for their subtlety. ☘

Apprentice stands up for rights

A Perth teenager has beaten a Howard Government move to prevent her seeking justice from a "deplorable" employer. Apprentice painter, Karen Cowley, 18, was awarded nine weeks pay after the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission found contractor, Joe Milici, had abused his position by sacking her after she insisted on being paid correctly.

The Commission described Milici's behaviour as "deplorable".

Under planned Howard Government legislation, Ms Cowley would have been unable to seek redress because Milici's company, JJ Painting Contractors, employs less than 20 people.

She began on leaving school but was only months into the job when warning signs starting flashing. She expressed concern about "low" earnings but Milici insisted her rates were correct until her mother intervened. Then it was discovered she hadn't been registered as an apprentice.

That was rectified last October, but Ms Cowley was out of a job within the month after a showdown over weekend rates.

She told the Commission Milici offered her \$50 tax-free for working weekends but she had insisted on the proper rate for the job. After a meeting at which Milici told her she wasn't worth it, and that he intended to extend her apprenticeship by another three months, she admitted breaking down.

She told the Commission she stuck a finger in the air, swore and turned away because she was about to cry. Milici sacked her.

The Commission found the "single incident" did not outweigh her good work record, or the fact that Milici wanted her to work for less than she was entitled to.

It had heard that, prior to the dismissal, Milici had talked about nominating her for apprentice of the year.

Ms Cowley was represented in the case by the CFMEU. ☘

Buckeridge Bill blocks entry

John Howard will over-ride state law to look after the interests of a Perth building magnate who has drawn up a hit list of worker representatives. Workplace Relations Minister, Kevin Andrews, confirmed his government would restrict trade union right of entry provisions, effectively overturning a Federal Court ruling against construction multi-millionaire, Len Buckeridge.

Andrews promised, last August, that a re-elected Coalition Government would trump a decision that workers on AWAs, the government's non-union contracts, were entitled to on-the-job access to union advice and assistance.

Construction, Forestry, Mining

and Energy Union (CFMEU) assistant National Secretary, Dave Noonan, tagged this week's legislation the "Buckeridge Bill".

"Buckeridge was using AWAs to deny workers' rights to union access. What the Federal Court found was illegal, this government is moving to make legal", Mr Noonan said.

The Western Australian case was sensational because it undermined arguments that AWAs were about freedom of choice. It revealed Buckeridge's company, BGC, bound sub-contractors to employ AWA labour only.

The court heard the Office of the Employment Advocate (OEA) was registering fraudulent AWAs, and green-lighting others lodged outside the time limit set in law.

In uncontested evidence, industry veteran Alan Kuret, said a non-union AWA had been registered in his name although he had never seen nor signed the document.

He said when he refused to sign a pre-dated AWA, his employment had been terminated.

Justice French rejected Buckeridge's argument that the CFMEU was not entitled to enter Burrup Fertilisers to speak with workers on AWAs.

Buckeridge has become a Hard Right hero for his aggressive moves to de-unionise workplaces.

He was awarded the HR Nicholls Society's Charles

Copeman Medal for services to industrial reform, after being convicted of assaulting a union activist. In accepting that award, Buckeridge revealed he had drawn up a "hit list" of trade unionists who had earned his ire.

Minister Andrews announced this week he would move well beyond the construction industry by over-riding state right of entry rules, across the board. Meanwhile, the CFMEU says the OEA has not taken any action over the fraudulent registering of AWAs.

"This government says it has a no tolerance policy towards law breakers. Clearly, that doesn't apply if you are an employer", observed Mr Noonan.

The Queensland Council of Unions has urged all state governments to oppose the Federal Government's proposed "right of entry" laws which would severely curtail the day-to-day work of unions.

QCU General Secretary Grace Grace said the proposed laws were unworkable and unnecessary.

"Right of entry has never been an issue in workplaces and there is simply no need for the government to impose these laws.

"Unions play a vital role when visiting workplaces by ensuring, amongst many things, that employees are being paid correctly and that the workplace is a safe one." ☘

Cleaners clean up

NSW school cleaners will have a key role in ensuring a \$200 million contract delivers healthy schools. Cleaners will be joined by employers and government representatives at a conference held just days before the cut off date for the lucrative state cleaning contract.

The contract is responsible for keeping over 2000 schools, TAFE colleges and other state agencies clean.

Earlier this year school cleaners won an important campaign

to protect their jobs and working conditions. The conference has been set down to ensure that the new contract addresses health and safety concerns of cleaners and school communities.

"This conference is about making sure our schools are clean and our educational environments are safe and that our cleaners are safe", said Jim Lloyd, president of the cleaner's union, the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union. "While the con-

tract cleaning industry is endemically non-compliant with legal requirements, including awards, cleaners will make sure that companies are compliant with this contract.

Issues such as asthma, occupational health and safety and "green" buildings will be addressed along with presentations by a range of experts. The conference, entitled "Cleaners and the Health of our Schools", is being sponsored by the LHMU. ☘

CPA celebrates Eureka

Last Sunday at the Gaelic Club in Sydney, a great crowd assembled to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of Eureka.

The program opened with a rendition of *Imagine* – the John Lennon song – sung by Larissa (10 years), the daughter of party member Samir Maarbani. Kassim Abood of the Iraqi Communist Party then sang a song in honour of all the Iraqi communist martyrs. Margaret Walters sang the *Ballad of 1891* – when the shearers went out on their historic strike – and other Australian working class songs.

Drew Cottle, senior Lecturer in politics at the University of Western Sydney, gave the keynote speech. Drew's speech concentrated on the economic and social conditions that added to the tension and caused the men to revolt against oppression. He outlined other struggles that have happened in the 150 years since Eureka where the first response was to raise the Eureka flag.

The flag, we heard often during the afternoon, is "more beautiful than any flag of Europe". The flag did not belong to one ethnic group; it belonged to all people struggling for rights and democracy.

Two publications produced by the CPA for the commemoration were launched: *Eureka 1854 to*

1954 by R D Walshe and a portfolio of prints, *Eureka 150th anniversary 1854-2004*. (See ad page 6)

Members of the Philippines group Migrante performed several songs from their heritage of struggle against Spanish and US colonialism along with a rendition of the *Internationale* in Tagalog.

One of Australia's best-known folk singers and songwriters, John Dengate, finished the program with rousing songs and poetry about Eureka – including one of John's own poems.

Perth

About a hundred people celebrated the Eureka anniversary in the State School Teachers Hall in Perth.

John Picton-Warlow, who co-wrote the opera *Eureka Stockade*, told the meeting how the idea of the libretto began with Italian interest in the role of Carboni at Ballarat. They writers wanted to repay the support they had found in Australia, and saw the opera as one way to do this. John pointed out how Italians had enriched the culture of Australia.

Chris Cain, WA Secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia, declared that the lessons of Eureka were relevant today, that there had to be united resistance to the attacks on union rights. He pointed to the

example of the jailing of union leader Craig Johnson, whose main crime was winning improved conditions for his union members. A petition was circulated calling for his release.

Another well-received petition called for humanitarian justice for Kashmiri asylum seeker Stephen Khan to allow him to stay in Australia.

Lechie Hopkins of Women's Studies at Edith Cowan University, held the meeting's attention with examples of the role of women in the Ballarat struggles. She highlighted the story of Anastasia, the wife of Timothy Hayes, a leader of the miners and one of the 13 tried for high treason, and the militant influence she had on Tim and Peter Lalor.

Consistent work beforehand brought many descendants of Stockaders to the meeting. In conversation before the meeting and in the time set for discussion they added a militancy and spoke proudly of their Stockader heritage.

The singing and the music of the Working Voices Choir and other singers made for an enjoyable afternoon.

Adelaide

About 40 people attended the CPA's lunch and celebration in the Semaphore Workers' Club in Adelaide. Stirring Irish music was played by Sam on the pipes, Craig on the whistle and Lesley on the fiddle.

Retired unionist Cam Johnson spoke on the various interpretations of the 1854 uprising and how the enemies of the working people have consistently tried to downplay its importance. He quoted Raffaello Carboni and Monty Miller to demonstrate the united, working class nature of Eureka and the cruelty of its suppression.

The musicians then accompanied George Cochran in a powerful, deep rendition of the *Ballad of 1891*.

Bob Briton thanked the gathering for their participation on behalf of the State Committee of the CPA and noted that the spirit of unity evident at Eureka is still visible in the local community. Public forums dedicated to finding ways to fight back against the right-wing Howard agenda will be held at the Semaphore Workers' Club throughout 2005.

Contributions from Denis Doherty, Vinnie Molina, Bob Briton



Adelaide: Lesley on the fiddle

Photo: Avante Media Australia



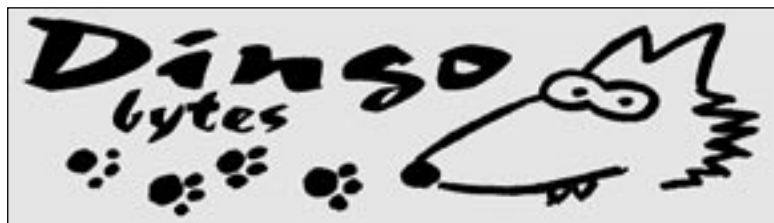
Sydney

Photo: Warren Smith



Perth: Working Voices Choir

Photo: Vinnie Molina



Primary schools around the country protested in 2000 against school books not being exempt from the GST. As a result the Howard Government introduced funding for primary schools to buy new books for their libraries. The Grants to Primary School Libraries program had the proviso that the new books be written by Australian authors or be published in Australia. During the four years each school bought an average of 350 books, worth a total of \$45 million. Now Education Minister Brendan Nelson has refused to extend the program. Said one teacher/ librarian, "The GST is still there, we still need to buy books for our schools, but we're not getting that allowance. And during the four years the price of books has gone up. It's going to be tough."

Private means unaccountable, and so it was that Tara Anglican School for Girls in Sydney was being sued by a student's parents for allegedly failing to provide adequate care during a school trip to Italy in 2001 where the teenager said she was pack raped. The school last week suddenly decided to settle out of court. And no wonder. It was a disgrace from beginning to end. Beginning with the legal representative for the school who in court told the girl she had "led the boys on, flirted and encouraged them". He introduced a series of recent surveillance photos of her in a public place (who took them?), questioning whether her self-esteem had been affected when she was able "to sit on a bar stool with a skirt as short as that..." Back in Sydney, after the trip, the girl was reportedly ordered to write out a statement saying she wouldn't return to the school. The principal arranged for her to do her final examines in a room by herself.

ALP policy has been backsliding since the elections. It now endorses the Government's plans to strip back EBAs; supports the plan to remove all tariffs on textiles, clothing and footwear; has thrown away its list of rich private schools that were to have their funding reduced; will back government moves to increase the private health insurance rebate for older people; and do an about turn on its promise for an inquiry into an \$800 million jobs fund for Tasmanian forests. They must have sore bottoms.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is telecommunications parasite Optus. Known for its anti-union stance and ruthless treatment of its workforce, it is less well known for its role in the trade of pornography. Until last week in the NSW Supreme Court that is. In a deal with telcos from Vanuatu to the USA it turned out that Optus's "Yes" advertising logo has a double meaning. Porn merchants have been serving graphic sex photos and videos through its Australian data computer centres. Optus refused to comment.

War profiteering

Susan Webb

"Outrageous!" That is what many are calling the war profiteering by US corporations who have flocked into Iraq. In particular, Halliburton Corp, which Vice President Dick Cheney used to head, has come under scrutiny over its US\$10 billion Pentagon contracts, many obtained without competitive bidding, its fuel-price gouging and other improper or illegal actions. Meanwhile, US cities and states are starved for cash.

In a new scandal, a top government inspector has reported that Halliburton lost millions of dollars worth of government property that it is being paid more millions to manage for the US occupation in Iraq. The missing property includes generators, trucks, laptops, armoured vests and helmets.

The Coalition Provisional Authority inspector general found that Halliburton subsidiary Kellogg Brown and Root (KBR) "did not effectively manage government property", and that "its property records were not sufficiently accurate or available".

KBR was unable to account for one-third of the equipment it was supposed to manage, with a value of about US\$20 million.

Associated Press reported on the audit the day after Thanksgiving, a "slow-news day", and few media picked up the story, evidently preferring to focus on holiday shoppers lining up at 4am at discount stores.

Pratap Chatterjee, director of CorpWatch, says the missing equipment is only part of a larger, "more damning" picture of mismanagement, incompetence, corruption and in some cases fraud on the part of US corporations reaping profits from Iraq. "This is not what we want people to be doing with our tax dollars", he noted dryly.

Halliburton chairman, president and CEO David Lesar received US\$7,751,018 in total compensation in 2002. Vice President Dick Cheney was CEO of Halliburton for five years before running for the White House. Since taking office as vice president, Cheney has continued to receive payments from Halliburton totalling about US\$2 million in bonuses and deferred salary, and also holds Halliburton stock options.

Despite numerous charges of mismanagement, overcharging,

kickbacks and other questionable practices, Halliburton continues to be paid in full by the Pentagon.

In November the House Government Reform Committee, released internal US embassy documents indicating that KBR officers in Kuwait solicited bribes from those seeking subcontract work from the firm. Kuwait is the main supply and staging area for US operations in Iraq. Senior administration officials, including the US ambassador to Kuwait, steered a lucrative fuel contract to a favoured Kuwaiti subcontractor, documents showed.

FBI and Army criminal investigators are now pursuing charges made by Army Corps of Engineers contract officer Bunnatine Greenhouse that the Pentagon improperly favoured Halliburton in awarding no-bid contracts for Iraq.

As the Pentagon continues to pour millions into the Halliburton trough, a new report by the Center for American Progress and the National Priorities Project shows that American states and cities are being short-changed. The report, *Americans Pay High Price for War*, shows how much tax money each state pays for the Iraq war and occupation, and how little it gets back for homeland security and "No Child Left Behind".

Ohio, for example, spent US\$5.7 billion on Iraq in fiscal year 2003. In the same period it received only US\$200 million for homeland security, and US\$659 million for "No Child Left Behind". Cleveland, which sent US\$153 million to Washington for Iraq in 2003, now faces a US\$60 million city budget deficit, and another US\$100 million deficit in its school budget.

More than 1000 teaching staff have been laid off. Seven percent of the city's firefighters have been laid off this year, along with 250 police officers. Among the police units eliminated are those for the harbour, street crimes, auto thefts, narcotics, youth gangs and community policing.

In a recent issue of *Online Investors News*, Bill Ridley crows that "the big dogs of the corporate world stand to clean up" by "carving up the spoils" from the Bush administration's Iraq occupation. The "big prize", he writes, is "the Iraqi oil fields and putting these prized assets into the hands of friendly US oil corporations."

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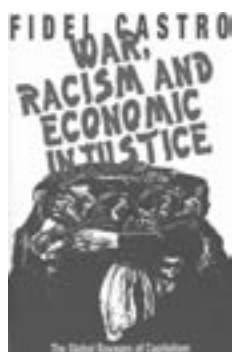
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THE EUREKA STOCKADE 1854-1954 by R.D. Walshe

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. **\$6 plus \$2 postage & packing**

EUREKA – 150TH ANNIV – A PORTFOLIO OF PRINTS

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. **\$20 plus \$3.40 postage & packing**

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I'm a torture survivor

Tito Trico

No one can really understand what being tortured means until that fateful moment when you find yourself naked, blindfolded and tied up at the mercy of your captors. Your entire life is confined to that fragile moment when darkness becomes your enemy, yet at the same time, is your only ally, a refuge from madness.

There is neither past nor future, only the present of screams, fury and impotence when you find yourself defenceless at the mercy of the torturer's rage and coldness. You

Chilean Government, after pressure from human rights organisations, issued a report about Torture and Political Prisoners in Chile during the dictatorship that ruled the country between 1973 and 1990.

The truth is that it was an open secret that at least 300,000 Chileans had been detained and tortured during that period, the report only makes official such a reality, although only 35,000 people came forward to testify before the commission. Many of those who did not testify are still afraid of their memories or simply did not believe in the commission's work.

It was a crime against mankind and those responsible for this crime must be brought to justice, anything else simply amounts to impunity.

never know when he is going to hit, shout, kick, hang, electrocute or kill you. You wait in darkness, disoriented, trying to guess where the next blow will come from, your heart escaping through your dry mouth hoping that your bones will resist the incessant pounding.

You just try to stay alive, breathe madly after every electric shock, because you scream so much and so loudly that you feel that even the earth's entire air supply will not be enough for you. But you keep on screaming amidst an explosion of a thousand colours that burn your flesh and shake you body.

You can't control electricity, you can't tame electricity, but amidst the bewildering storm of sparks and death rattles you can dream of green unicorns and the first time you made love right by the sea. Then it becomes somewhat easier to dream of the day when no human being would ever torture another human being just because he thinks differently.

Unfortunately today, 30 years later, I'm not sure this will never happen again in my homeland. Because, although for the first time in three decades it has been officially recognised that thousands of Chileans were tortured by the military dictatorship, not a word has been said about bringing those torturers to justice.

So, what will prevent them from doing it again? After a year's work, a special commission set up by the

Thirty-five thousand people tortured whose names have been consigned in the report, but not a single name of any of the torturers is included. We know their names, we know the places where they tortured and we know which branch of the armed forces they belong to, therefore, there is no valid reason whatsoever to withhold their names.

An offence to the victims

It is an offence to the victims of the repression, to all those defenceless men and women, to the 90 children who were tortured, to those who died under torture and to those of us who survived, to keep silent while the torturers laugh while they read the report.

Because there is no doubt that they enjoyed what they did, they rejoiced at human suffering, they enjoyed beating people up, fright-

ening people, executing people. No one told me this, I was there, I know they loved crushing bones and raping women of all ages. They loved the power they held over other human beings for 17 years.

The horror of the torture chamber will never go away, the military



Dictator Pinochet (centre) and his fellow officers have never been brought to justice

did not only torture individuals, but also the very soul of our nation. They did not only torture somebody for a few hours or a few days, they destroyed their life forever. It was a crime against mankind and those responsible for this crime must be brought to justice, anything else simply amounts to impunity.

It is not enough for the military to admit for the first time that they did indeed torture, because we already knew that. It is not enough either for them to express their sorrow for what happened or ask for forgiveness – which they have

an institutional practice. How can it be courageous to admit the obvious after 30 years of lies? It is shameful on the part of President Ricardo Lagos to issue such a statement.

It is also shameful that the government has proposed to compensate torture victims with a life pension of merely US\$180 a month. Pain cannot be measured in monetary terms, however, the meagre figure offends rather than compensates for 30 years of suffering.

It is even more offensive for the minister for finance to point out that these pensions will cost

to feel guilty of the fact that we will receive money depriving our countrymen of a new highway!

Why not compare these \$60 million a year with the military budget? The Navy is acquiring five new warships from Holland; the Air Force is getting new F-16 from the United States. Are these war machines more important than helping torture victims whose lives were destroyed by the same people that will use them?

The fact is that the report loses a substantial and fundamental part of its historical validity if it reduces

The horror of the torture chamber will never go away.

the government \$60 million a year and this will imply "painful budget readjustments".

Or, as the president did, to state that with this amount of resources in 10 years the government could build a brand new highway. So, not only were we tortured, but we are made

never done – for the only acceptable path is for justice to be done. Each and every one of those who tortured must be tried and sentenced to prison.

The government has stated that they value the army's courage for admitting that torture constituted

the government \$60 million a year and this will imply "painful budget readjustments".

Or, as the president did, to state that with this amount of resources in 10 years the government could build a brand new highway. So, not only were we tortured, but we are made

compensation to financial help, even if the announced pensions are eventually raised by parliament. The only true and acceptable compensation for torture victims is justice.

Tito Tricot is Sociologist Director, Center For Intercultural Studies, Ilwén Chile ✪

– made up of three military officers – were set up in June when the Supreme Court ruled that detainees could ask US courts to challenge their detention. They have just finished reviewing 440 cases and released just one detainee.

Detainees cannot have a lawyer at CSRT proceedings and are not able to see secret evidence against them.

At the military's annual administrative review, the authorities determine whether the detainee still presents a danger to the US but there is no review of the "enemy combatant" status. So far there have been only 161 such administrative reviews. ✪

US okays evidence gained through torture

Last week US military panels reviewing the detention of prisoners at the naval base at Guantanamo Bay were given the green light to use evidence gained by torture to keep them imprisoned.

The announcement was made by Principal Deputy Associate Attorney General Brian Boyle during a hearing of a US District Court into lawsuits brought by 550 prisoners who have been held without charge on Guantanamo for up to three years. Answering allegations that some foreigners were being held solely on the basis of evidence obtained under torture, Boyle argued that the detainees "have no constitutional rights enforceable in this court."

Boyle also insisted that there is nothing in the US Constitution to prevent the military's Combatant Status Review Tribunals (CSRTs) from relying on evidence of "questionable provenance" if those in authority were to deem it reliable.

Answering questions from US District Judge Richard J Leon, Boyle said that the US would never adopt policies on evidence that could have prevented attacks like that September 11. However, as Harvard Law Professor and former deputy US Attorney General Philip B Heyman has pointed out: "About 70 years ago, the Supreme Court stopped the use of evidence produced by third-degree tactics largely

on the theory that it was totally unreliable".

Other High Court rulings were based on revulsion at "the unfairness and brutality of it and later on the idea that confessions ought to be free and uncoerced", the professor added.

Torture is illegal in the US and violates its much-vaunted standards of due process. Boyle insists, though, that evidence gained under torture would necessarily come from foreign sources and refuses to concede (despite mounting evidence) that the US military engages in torture. He maintains that allegations of mistreatment of prisoners at Guantanamo would be passed

through the chain of command and be dealt with. Boyle noted that some US soldiers had been disciplined for misconduct at the base, including a female interrogator who removed her top during questioning.

However, the International Committee of the Red Cross takes a dimmer view. It handed a confidential report to the Bush Administration that insists that even the regular treatment of detainees on Guantanamo is tantamount to torture.

Boyle would have it that the existence and operation of the CSRT argues against claims of mistreatment of detainees. The panels

Primakov: Milosevic did not want to create a "Greater Serbia"

Yevgeny Primakov, former Russian Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, giving testimony in the Hague last week said that former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic was a peacemaker who did not want to fight for a "Greater Serbia". Primakov was testifying in defence of Milosevic, who is charged with genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in the Balkans in the 1990s.

Primakov said the Western media had portrayed Serbs as "aggressors" and after Bill Clinton was elected US President in 1992, Washington became increasingly anti-Serb.

"It became ever more apparent that their course was to weaken Serbia, to not allow it to gain strength and possibly even to complete the process of Yugoslavia's complete disintegration", he told the UN tribunal in The Hague.

Primakov, blamed the West, in particular Germany, for fuelling violence in Kosovo in the late 1990s by supporting the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) despite earlier labelling them terrorists.

"The initiators and provocateurs of so many events in Kosovo was the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army", he said, adding that a mass exodus of refugees from the region started only after NATO launched airstrikes in March 1999.

Primakov pointed out that Kosovo in an allusion to the US-led war in Iraq, had set a precedent for military action without a UN mandate. "This undermines undoubtedly the international order", he said.

Primakov said the West was wrong to assume that Milosevic wanted to create a "Greater Serbia" or to unify all Serbs in a state as the

multi-ethnic Yugoslav federation crumbled.

During his first meeting with the former Yugoslav President in 1993, Primakov said he specifically asked Milosevic whether he had plans for a "Greater Serbia".

"He said this could only be achieved in theory and at the price of great bloodshed and I'm not prepared to do that". Primakov said of Milosevic's reply. "He had no plans and conducted no actions to achieve a Greater Serbia."

Primakov noted that Milosevic accepted the 1993 Vance-Owen peace plan for Bosnia and imposed an economic blockade after the Bosnian Serb parliament rejected the plan. "You wanted a peaceful solution", he said to Milosevic.

The 1992-5 Bosnian war ended after US-sponsored talks in Dayton, Ohio. Primakov said former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had told him Dayton would not have worked without Milosevic's support.

Primakov said Milosevic also tried to stop violence in Kosovo and told the Russian Prime Minister on a visit to Belgrade on the eve of the NATO bombing he was prepared to pull his forces out of Kosovo if NATO withdrew from the border with Macedonia.

"We never had the chance to tell what we had achieved", Primakov said. "Barely had our plane taken off than the bombing of the airport started."

Milosevic is a graduate in law and has sought to conduct his own defence. He refused to enter a plea to the charges laid against him, and pleas of not guilty were recorded. The court appointed two lawyers last September to conduct his



"Freedom for Slobodan": protestors demand the release of the former President of Yugoslavia

defence, claiming it was to prevent delays to the trial due to his poor health. During the trial he has been held under poor conditions, denied basic justice including medical treatment that was needed.

He wants to call more than 1000 witnesses in his defence including British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Albright and Clinton.

Milosevic has accused the tribunal of bias against him and the Serb people, saying it is designed to cover up NATO war crimes in Kosovo. ☛

Chinese trade with African countries makes steady progress

Zimbabwe's national airline is to start flying to the Chinese capital Beijing twice a week. The plan was announced by the Chinese media recently. There are a number of other Zimbabwe-China projects on the drawing board.

The long-standing relationship between the two countries has seen floods of cheap goods imported from China, and big construction deals going to Chinese firms.

Air Zimbabwe is thought to have only two working long-haul aircraft, although it expects another two from China thanks to the airlines deal.

China's relationship with Zimbabwe dates back to the liberation struggle of the 1970s, when troops were trained by Chinese advisers – as well as those from North Korea and elsewhere. Once independence came in 1980, China continued a small but reliable economic interest in the country.

As Western aid dried up in the 1990s to be replaced by sustained hostility from those countries, the Chinese extended assistance.

Despite Zimbabwe's economic difficulties China strengthened its relationship. As many as 9000 Chinese are believed to be in Zimbabwe working on a wide range of projects.

These projects include hydro-electric and coal power stations, bridges, airports, and the reconstruction of Zimbabwe's most important border post at Beit Bridge with South Africa.

A Chinese consortium has a

management contract with Zisco, the state steel firm, while technology firm Huawei has a \$440m contract to supply telecommunications equipment.

Zimbabwe has rich mineral wealth, including platinum, gold and diamonds which is behind the West's attempt to overthrow the Mugabe Government and install a puppet government.

China has also developed substantial interests in the oil resources of a number of other African countries.

In Sudan, the China National Petroleum Corporation owns 40 percent of the Greater Nile crude project, and has long-term contracts with Nigeria and Angola. It is undertaking construction projects in Botswana. In all, China-African trade is expected to top US \$20bn in 2004. ☛

Big protest at "School of Assassins"

Laura Massey

I'll be honest: I usually sleep as late as possible on Sunday morning. So it was a major struggle to pull myself out of bed when the alarm went off at 4:45am. Groggily, I wiped the sleep out of my eyes and remembered why I was awake — to make the two hour trip from Atlanta to Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia, for the annual School of the Americas protest and vigil on November 21.

In the pre-dawn darkness I dressed, packed a lunch, and headed to campus where I met with a large group of students organised by a local Amnesty International chapter. Though I've known about the School and SOA Watch's activities for many years, this was my first time participating and I wasn't sure what to expect.

Arriving in Columbus, we parked in an aging strip mall populated by fast food and discount stores and joined the stream of excited people making their way to the base. The protest took place on a long stretch of road, which the police had closed to traffic, leading up to Fort Benning.

At the end of the road there was a small stage and behind it a new 10 foot [three-metre] chain-link fence in front of the base property. Many regular attendees complained about

their lack of visibility to the people on the base.

We arrived just in time for the opening ceremony – a traditional Mayan prayer saluting the four directions and giving thanks to the Earth and Creator for sustaining us. The mood was peaceful and reflective as thousands of people stood silently. We then recited a pledge of non-violence.

Soon several activists came onstage and testified about their experiences in Latin America. Many had been the victims of torture by graduates of the School of the Americas. Particularly moving was a woman who, her voice broken by sobs, told of being tortured until she miscarried.

The vigil was followed by a funeral march, led by a large mourning puppet and a group of people dressed in black robes carrying coffins. They solemnly recited hundreds of names of the dead, victims of US-trained assassins and torturers. Between drumbeats, the name and age of each victim was sung and the crowd responded by chanting the word "Presente!" and raising crosses, banners, signs, or their hands into the air.

As we neared the fence, people placed their crosses and other symbols into the chain-links to pray and reflect. The fence, minutes before a symbol of military might,

had become a beautiful makeshift memorial.

From a distance we began hearing intermittent bursts of applause. I asked someone what it meant, and was told that activists were "crossing the line" over the fence and onto federal property to be peacefully arrested. Crossing the line is a powerful statement of commitment to the cause and requires planning, sacrifice and patience. Even first-timers can be prosecuted and given fines, probation or serious prison sentences.

According to School of the Americas Watch, 20 people were arrested this year in acts of non-violent civil disobedience.

The march was the culmination of the entire weekend's activities, and with an estimated 16,000 participants, it took over two hours to complete. Afterward, my friends and I lingered, taking photos and digesting what we had just experienced.

People of all ages, races, and faiths had joined together in solidarity to remember the dead and to fight torture and exploitation, not just for a day or weekend, but a lifetime of commitment that would last far beyond our goodbyes that evening. The protest had exceeded all my expectations, and I felt emotionally renewed and eager to continue the struggle.

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Equatorial Guinea in the crosshairs

Ron Bunvon

Imperialist conspiracies to seize control of natural resources and to dominate peoples of distant lands are in full swing. Apart from the Iraqi debacle, the events unfolding in the former Spanish colony of Equatorial Guinea, on the West African coast, are particularly instructive.

The discovery of huge oil deposits there in recent years, on the mainland and offshore, has been a catalyst for profit-driven proponents of imperial conquest. Some of their agents were caught red-handed last spring.

Government investigators have established that dozens of mercenaries and co-conspirators planned to oust President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo through the use of assassination and brute force. The coup plot unravelled when a plane-load of 60 South African mercenaries and weapons were discovered by airport security on the tarmac of Zimbabwe's Harare International Airport on March 7, en route to Equatorial Guinea.

But that is just the tip of the iceberg. Evidence is mounting that British Prime Minister Tony Blair and US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld were both aware of the plot's outlines months before it began to unfold.

In a statement given to lawyers in Equatorial Guinea, and reported by the British newspaper *The Observer*, Johann Smith, a former commanding officer in the South African Special Forces, said that he "submitted a report in December

2003 of what I discovered [about the plot] to Michael Westphal of the Pentagon. ... I expected the US Government to take steps to warn Equatorial Guinea or to stop the coup.

"This was also my expectation as regards the British Government, which I warned through two Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) people I knew."

Michael Westphal is US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence in charge of special operations and combating terrorism.

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw denied prior knowledge of the coup conspiracy as recently as last August. In November, however, he conceded he knew quite a bit more. The British Parliament has called for an investigation.

The trial proceedings against the coup plotters have taken place in Malabo, the nation's capital, and in Zimbabwe and South Africa, as well. The sentences handed out range from one year to 64 years. A political opponent to President Obiang, Severo Moto, who maintains a government-in-exile with his own appointed cabinet in Spain, received a 64-year sentence in absentia.

Mark Thatcher, an alleged financier of the coup plan, faces trial in South Africa. He was detained as he was about to flee his home in Capetown, and is presently under house arrest. A very wealthy man, Thatcher is the son of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Equatorial Guinea gained political independence in 1968, under the presidency of Francisco Nguema.

Opposition parties were banned in 1970, and Nguema declared himself President for life in 1972. In 1979, Lt Col Teodoro Obiang, his nephew, initiated a coup d'état, and has been in power ever since.

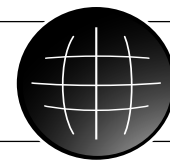
The country's leadership is notorious for its corruption and for committing human rights abuses and torture. The recent trials in Malabo were criticised by Amnesty International as unfair "in view of serious procedural flaws and the admission of confessions allegedly extracted under torture". An alleged co-conspirator of the coup attempt died in custody under questionable circumstances.

Before the discovery and extraction of its oil, the country's economy was primarily based on agricultural exports, namely cocoa, coffee, and timber. Today, about 90 percent of Equatorial Guinea's export revenue comes from oil, with output at about 360,000 barrels a day.

Whether its oil revenue has benefited the indigenous population is highly questionable. The government's finances are anything but transparent, and its share of oil revenue (most of which is kept by the oil monopolies) has been estimated to be as low as 15 percent. Most of the population lives in extreme poverty and lacks electricity, running water or adequate nutrition.

From the vantage point of the imperialist West, however, the flow of oil remains paramount. An estimated 15 percent of US oil imports come from Africa, with Nigeria, Angola, and Equatorial Guinea at the top of the list.

People's Weekly World ☪



Global briefs

INDIA: A high-profile Hindu religious leader, Shankaracharya Jayendra Saras-wathi, has been arrested as a primary suspect in the September 3 killing of one his most vocal critics, A Sankaraman, the manager of the Varadaraja Perumal temple. Jayendra Saras-wathi, 70, is very close to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other "hindutva" (Hindu nationalist) forces in India and abroad. The behaviour of the hindutva forces shows they want to capitalise on the arrest for narrow, partisan ends. They are trying to fan religious intolerance, and – through tactics like staging a sit-in on the steps of Parliament and a three-day, nationwide hunger strike – have scored some initial success. Jayendra Saraswathi is also infamous for his negative attitude towards lower-caste people who live below the poverty line. Left parties in India welcomed his arrest and said in separate statements that everyone should be equal before the law. The Congress Party is silent, probably because some of its leaders are also very close to this guru.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: Over three-quarters of sub-Saharan young people between 15 and 24 living with AIDS are women, as are over half the adults living with the disease, according to a United Nations report released on November 23. The report, prepared by the UN Secretary-General's task force on women, girls and AIDS in southern Africa, attributed the increased vulnerability of women to sexual violence, unequal access to information, gender-power relations and traditions like wife inheritance, whereby a male relative of a deceased husband may marry his widow. The UN is calling for measures ensuring women have access to education, prevention information and treatment, and are guaranteed the right to own property.

USA: Some 4300 hotel workers have returned to work triumphantly at 14 of San Francisco's premier hotels. Their victory came when area health providers announced their decision to extend workers' medical coverage for December and January, a main demand. This pulled the rug from under a weeks-long lockout imposed by the hotels' management. The union's call for a public boycott was heeded by a growing number of associations and corporations, who were cancelling or moving scheduled meetings, and guests who did check into the hotels had to run the gauntlet of the workers' lively picket lines.

CHILE: The Chilean Government is to compensate 28,000 victims of torture after a report concluded that Augusto Pinochet's regime in the 1970s and 1980s had organised a state policy of terror. A year-long commission heard testimony from 35,000 people who had been victims of torture during the 1973-90 dictatorship. Ninety four percent of those detained had been tortured the report found, and of the 3400 women who gave evidence almost all had been victims of sexual violence.

BRITAIN: The Blair Govt has put forward eight more law and order bills, as outlined in the Queen's Speech last week, bringing the number of crime bills introduced since the 2001 general election to 34 – more than one for every month that parliament sat.

Guatemala: fear for safety of Congress member

Congress member Nineth Montenegro has received a death threat, which appears to be linked to her work investigating corruption among high-ranking military officers.

Nineth Montenegro is the Chair of the Congressional Commission on Human Rights. She has been investigating government spending from 2000 to 2004, and has discovered that over a billion quetzals (US\$133 million) has been embezzled from the budgets of the Ministry of Defence and two other military institutions.

On August 23 she filed a complaint with the Public Ministry, which prosecutes criminal cases, accusing senior military officers of embezzlement and corruption, including Colonel Raul Cerna, the former Financial Head of the Estado Mayor Presidencial (EMP), Presidential High Command. On November 22, a man approached a member of the human rights organisation where Nineth Montenegro's husband works, and told him, "algo grande en contra de Nineth o su familia iba a ocurrir antes de fin de año", "something big will happen to Nineth or her family before the end of the year".

Colonel Raul Cerna had not been seen since April 2004. His body was found recently: according to the press he had been poisoned, and died on April 12. The public prosecutor's office began an investigation, but stopped it without giving any reason. The authorities identified and buried the colonel's body, but gave his family no infor-

mation on his death. The Minister of Defence claimed that the colonel had simply deserted. In the complaint filed with the Public Ministry, Colonel Raul Cerna was accused of

involvement in the embezzlement of 250 million quetzals (US\$33 million) from the EMP budget. It is feared that he was killed to prevent him implicating others.

Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible:

- calling on the authorities to provide meaningful protection to Nineth Montenegro and her family;
- calling for a prompt, impartial and exhaustive investigation into the death threat received by Nineth Montenegro on November 22, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- asking the authorities to carry out a full, prompt and impartial investigation into the killing of Colonel Raul Cerna, to publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to secure the creation of an effective independent mechanism to investigate and prosecute illegal groups operating in Guatemala.

APPEALS TO:

Presidente of the Republic of Guatemala
Licenciado Oscar Berger Perdomo
Casa Presidencial, 6 a. Avenida, 4-18 zona 1
Ciudad de Guatemala
Guatemala
Fax: 0011 502 2221 4423 / 2239-0090
Salutation: Excelentísimo Sr. Presidente/Dear President Berger

Attorney General
Fiscal General de la Republica y jefe del Ministerio Publico
Juan Luis Florido
8a. Avenida 10-67, Zona 1
Antiguo Edificio del Banco de los Trabajadores,
udad de Guatemala
Guatemala
Fax: 0011 502 2251 2218

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Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo
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Ciudad de Guatemala
Guatemala
Fax: 0011 502 2220 0606

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



email: guardian@cpa.org.au

The significance of Eureka

The Eureka Stockade of 150 years ago has been touted by some commentators as the beginning in Australia of the concept of a "fair go". This is nonsense.

The Eureka Stockade was a rebellion against police oppression and harassment and for "no taxation without representation". At that time there were only British colo-

onial administrations in each state of Australia. No elected parliament and no adult franchise, not even male adult franchise.

The Stockade was in a sense Australia's democratic revolution. After the Eureka Stockade male adult franchise was achieved and later this was extended to women as well. British colonial administrations survived for another 50 years to be finally replaced by Federation and the election of a Federal parliament in 1901. This started the process to end British colonial control.

In some other countries these issues were fought out in civil wars and wars for national liberation. The fact that neither civil war nor an armed national liberation struggle took place in Australia (apart from the Stockade) does not detract from their political significance.

As with many other former colonial countries full national independence has not yet been achieved.

We have only to look at Howard's slavish relationship with the US and the fact that our economy is tied up and largely controlled by foreign transnational corporations.

The idea that these events were nothing more than a struggle for a "fair go" is to belittle and smother their real significance. The idea of a "fair go" contains within it an acceptance of the existing situation and that all that is needed is a few peanuts. Peanuts are for monkeys as the saying goes!

Bruce Gillman
Sydney, NSW

Political correctness

The hullabaloo about Sydney not being tricked up for Christmas, mainly stirred up by the gutter media, is another example of the right organising against what they call "political correctness". The Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore,

has had to come out and deny saying that the city would not be overtly marking Christmas because we live in a secular and multicultural society.

The howls from the right demanding a Christmas celebration to outdo the rest of the Christian world (presumably meaning America, the land of commercialised Christmas) were not an uncoordinated barking but a carefully orchestrated chorus.

Indeed the mayor pointed out that spending on Christmas hoo ha such as fireworks and carol singing and so on, had increased this year. What the rightward chorus demonstrates is that we as a society have become less tolerant to views that diverge from what is considered the norm.

Recall the statement by boxer and Aboriginal activist Tony Mundine a few years back when he said that the attacks on the US in

2001 were a result of that country's belligerent foreign policies, some which deliberately target Islam. The right jumped all over him.

Now it's come down to something as inconsequential as Christmas, the meaning of which has anyhow long since been killed off through a massive corporate takeover.

The real political correctness police are those, such as John Howard and NSW Premier Bob Carr, who are setting the agenda on "values" that they claim define us as a people. These values are tied very closely to Christian fundamentalism.

Included also is the militarisation of society, so we have seen the concerted promotion of Anzac Day.

We are reaching the point where there is to be no questioning, no criticism, of such values lest you be branded unpatriotic.

Marcus Browning
Sydney, NSW

Sydney

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Photo: Ana Pha

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Culture & Life

by
Rob Gowland

Prisons and punishment

In post-Civil War Russia, in the early '20s, the streets swarmed with waifs and gangs of homeless children living on their wits. So serious was the problem that Lenin gave the task of rounding up these "wild" children to Felix Dzerzhinsky and the Cheka (forerunner of the KGB).

To the amazement of foreign observers, who saw the Cheka in terms of their own anti-Soviet propaganda, Dzerzhinsky's men and women did a splendid job of rescuing kids off the streets. But what to do with them then?

The answer was revealed in what became a Soviet classic, *Road to Life* by Makarenko. It is the story of how he founded and ran for many years a labour camp for juvenile delinquents or "young offenders".

Makarenko's approach was not to punish but to build up – in often very hostile youngsters whom life had treated harshly – a sense of their known worth and a pride in their own contribution to the advancement of their society.

No small achievement in the circumstances. Like the rest of the population, while being educated they also constructed, applying the skills they were learning and

in the process completing projects for which they themselves were responsible.

Such a program is by no means an easy task and requires a great deal of sympathy and understanding – and resilience – on the part of the person administering it. Makarenko certainly had those qualities to spare, but he was also operating in a society that was conscious that it was building a new life for everyone.

Housing, working conditions, education, farming methods were all undergoing revolutionary changes that were altering fundamentally people's way of life and the way they perceived their society and their own place in it. In these conditions, Makarenko's approach was very much a product of his time and his (socialist) society.

I was reminded of Makarenko and his pioneering efforts by the transfer on November 10 of management of the Kariong Juvenile Justice Centre near Gosford from the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice to the Department of Corrective Services. The latter Department promptly demonstrated its enlightened approach to juvenile detention and rehabilitation by filling the Centre's swimming pool with sand!

NSW Justice Minister John Hatzistergos told the Parliamentary Press Gallery that by filling the pool with sand "we are sending a very clear message to the inmates and the public that the centre is being operated in a very different way".

Not content with this bloody-minded act, Hatzistergos announced a whole raft of punitive measures for the Kariong facility, including the extraordinarily petty and vindictive removal of the barbecue from the visitors' area with food only available in future from vending machines.



The Road to Life – building a sense of their own worth

Other "reforms" announced by the NSW minister include daily musters and daily "hygiene checks" (a euphemism for intrusive harassment of inmates). In future, visitors will have to book their visits in advance and inmates receiving visitors will be searched and made to wear pocketless overalls.

A graduated system of "rewards and sanctions" is expected to be introduced shortly. This will allow guards to punish inmates who show spirit or defiance and to reward those who metaphorically touch their forelock (however insincerely).

Robert Stroud, the "Birdman of Alcatraz", showed years ago how ineffective and counterproductive such prison regimes were, but it seems that with nothing positive to offer young people, punishment is the best capitalism can do.

Opposition Liberal Party MP from Gosford Chris Hartcher fully supports the government's harsh new regime at Kariong, demonstrating in the process his belief that "corrective centre" is synonymous with "punishment centre".

"We have long argued", he told the press, "that Kariong was run more as a holiday camp than a corrective centre and it's taken the Government five years and innumerable riots to accept this".

Leaving aside the considerable exaggeration of "innumerable riots", it has been known for decades that prison riots are the result of intolerable situations and conditions. Removing the causes, not harsher, more punitive conditions is the solution.

The ruling class sits atop a system of inequality and exploitation that blatantly robs the poor to make

the rich even richer. They hold that position with the help of misinformation and fear.

As the people overcome (and see through) the misinformation, the ruling class will have to rely more and more on fear – and outright repression. Prisons, and prison camps as used for the refugees, are going to become much better known to a much wider section of the populace.

As we move towards neo-fascist conditions in Australia, we can expect to see the steady abandonment of the last vestiges of progressive prison administration and its replacement by the same cruel and brutal methods that already distinguish the prisons of the United States.

After all, under Howard and co, the USA is now our role model for everything else, isn't it? ☹



Sun December 12 ~
~ Sat December 18

December, month of shop windows full of fake snow, everybody else complaining of all the parties they have to go to, and television littered with "Christmas Specials". The latter, of course, are almost all from the Northern Hemisphere, where Christmas images of snow and sleighbells aren't inappropriate.

For many years Australian writers strove to create a Christmas tradition rooted in the reality of this country in mid-December: heat, flies, bush-fires and native wildlife instead of reindeer.

Regrettably, the domination of the mass media by big business means that we get mainly imported North American Christmas stories. We certainly see few stories anymore like the lovely Aussie realist classic *Santa Claus in Boyangs*.

So, to SBS' Christmas Special, *The Christmas Tree* (SBS 7.30pm Sunday), tracing the origins and associated practices of the decorated fir tree.

Apparently, it originated in Alsace in the 16th century, and spread through Germany and then elsewhere in Europe. But if decorating a tree at Christmas is thus a rather recent practice, using green trees in ceremonies on December 25 dates back to long before the birth of Christ.

The Romans used evergreen trees on December 25 to celebrate the winter solstice and the return of the invincible sun god, Sol Invictus. So the next time some dour bible-basher complains that the "real meaning" of Christmas is being forgotten, tell him to get out of the sun.

Grass (SBS 10.30pm Tuesday) follows the trail of dubious 20th century propaganda,

legitimate scientific enquiry and knee-jerk policing that produced the modern-day US narcotics policy.

Narrated by pot activist Woody Harrelson, the program tends to restrict itself to the absurd propaganda and often extraordinary moral arguments used to justify the criminalising of marijuana. These included claims that pot smoking would turn America's younger generations into "insane murderers", "sex-crazed maniacs", "heroin addicts" and "Communists" – and sometimes a combination of all four.

It would have been a stronger – but a longer – program if it had also covered the covert campaign by the Dupont Chemical Company, inventor and manufacturer of Nylon, to destroy its popular, organic and cheaper main potential competitor, hemp (derived, like marijuana, from the cannabis plant).

55 Degrees North (ABC 8.30pm Tuesdays) is the latitude of the English city of Newcastle, and that's where this new police series is set. If the series is any guide, then it's a rather racist city, at least within the police force.

The central character is a black London detective, Dominic 'Nicky' Cole, who has been relocated to Newcastle after blowing the whistle on police corruption.

Made to work the nightshift by a superior who does not want him, surrounded by unfriendly colleagues and very quickly aware that the local criminals have a contact in the nick itself, Cole has to work extra hard to keep himself out of trouble and to do his job.

Although the setting is north east England, the series is made by BBC Scotland, and is a well-made, exciting police series laced with humour and some astute observation. Cole is excellently played by Don Gilet, and he receives good support from some accomplished actors such as Dervla Kirwan (from the original series of *Ballykissangel*) as a Crown Prosecution Service lawyer and Andrew Dunn (from *dinnerladies*) as a not very friendly police sergeant.

There is a type of program, almost always from the US, which seeks to demonstrate the "historical truth" of the Bible. **Moses** (ABC 8.30pm Wednesday) is one such program.

They are all alike: they pose the



Butch and Sundance (*The Legend of the Tamworth Two*)

question as black or white. Either the Bible account is all fiction or it is entirely true.

That the stories of the Old Testament (and the Koran and the Torah) are a mixture of myths and legends, of embroidered oral history and outright invention, augmented by tales from other lands and cultures, is raised as a possibility (to show the program's objectivity).

But it is then dismissed, in favour of literal interpretations based on the flimsiest of archeological evidence.

It is a pity, because a genuinely scientific program on the same subject using the same archeological evidence would be very interesting. But not nearly so certain!

The French-made **Iraq: War At Any Cost** (ABC 9.25pm Wednesday) essentially sets out to show that France did not try to sabotage the US in the United Nations during the leadup to the invasion of Iraq.

What the program succeeds in showing very clearly is that the combination of lying and bullying used by the US was singularly unsuccessful in persuading most other countries to support its war drive.

That it was a war drive, and that the US was operating to a military

timetable which required that they go to war when they did regardless of any vote at the UN, is also demonstrated clearly.

As the French Foreign Minister points out towards the end of the program, the US withdrew its second resolution on Iraq in the Security Council because it had failed to get support. Put to vote, the US would have lost.

So they simply went to war behind a smokescreen of bullshit. UN weapons inspector Hans Blix, ever the diplomat, nevertheless makes it very clear that there were no Iraqi weapons of mass destruction to justify the US claims.

But it is the French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin who makes the most eloquent speech, when telling the Security Council – to uncharacteristic applause from other delegates – that France will veto any resolution to go to war.

This is a fascinating piece of television journalism. Well worth watching.

The Legend Of The Tamworth Two (ABC 8.30pm Thursday) is based on a true incident from 1998: two Tamworth pigs escaped from an abattoir and eluded recapture for a week.

The tabloid media, of course,

made stars of them, and the public took up their cause, sending donations and offers of homes, etc. By the time they were recaptured they *couldn't* be killed, so one of the papers bought them and sent them to an animal sanctuary.

Inately amusing, this tale is ripe for satirical embroidering. Unfortunately, here it labours under a heavy dose of whimsy, which makes the story pall after a while.

The ABC is repeating the two Doc Martin dramas, starting this week with the first, **Doc Martin** (ABC 8.30pm Friday), in which successful London obstetrician Dr Martin Bamford discovers that his wife has been sleeping with all three of his best friends, and heads off to Cornwall on the spur of the moment to get his head together.

There he finds himself contemplating a possible future as a lobster fisherman while also caught up in the mystery of the "jellyman", a local poison pen letter writer whose missives are left on villagers' doorsteps in a plate of jelly.

Martin Clunes, from *Men Behaving Badly*, does quite a good job of the Doc and it is not surprising that they made a second one (to be re-screened next week) and then a whole series, to be shown next year. ☼

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SA Museum

December - January

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From the collection of Mr Ali Kazak, Head, General Palestinian Delegation, Canberra.

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This is an inspiring story of courage, determination and the high principles of the men and women of the Pilbara, fighting these huge and powerful transnational corporations.

Most Australians have an image of the Pilbara – one of a vast unforgiving and red landscape, of huge holes in the ground where millions of tons of iron ore have been gouged out and railed to the coast for export overseas. The picture is one of huge dump-trucks dwarfing the anonymous workers wearing hard hats. All this is associated with the logo of BHP, the allegedly “Big Australian”. Some will know of the huge mineral resources of the region and the fantastic profits of the corporations. There may be memories of the name Robe River and Hamersley Iron, the scene of major attacks on the Australian trade union movement, and not just the workers of these mines.

It was the mid-1980s and early 1990s, when economic rationalism was being pushed by the Labor and Liberal Parties. In 1983 the trade unions entered into an Accord (social partnership) with the ALP with all its subsequent consequences for the trade unions. New Right ideologists such as Charles Copeman became the CEOs of major companies, including the mining companies of the Pilbara. Both State and Commonwealth Governments were enacting laws that weakened, quite severely in some instances, the rights and functioning of trade unions.

The restructuring of the trade union movement by the ACTU led to bickering and in-fighting between trade unions – no less than for the bodies of mine-workers in the Pilbara.

Employers sensed that their time had come and their objective was nothing less than the elimination of trade unions from workplaces. Their weapon in the Pilbara was individual work contracts which set out to re-establish the master-servant rela-

tionship of the 18th century between employer and employee.

Removal of trade unions

This ploy at Robe River and Hamersley Iron together with questionable trade union tactics and in-fighting rapidly led to the virtual elimination of trade union influence at these two mine-sites.

On November 11, 1999 BHP moved to bring about the same result at its mines and very quickly almost 50 percent of the mineworkers signed the contracts. It appeared that the last bastion of trade unionism in the Pilbara was about to fall.

Brandon Ellem’s book of 78 pages simply but graphically tells the story of the survival and revival of trade unionism not only at the BHP pits but in the Rio Tinto mines as well.

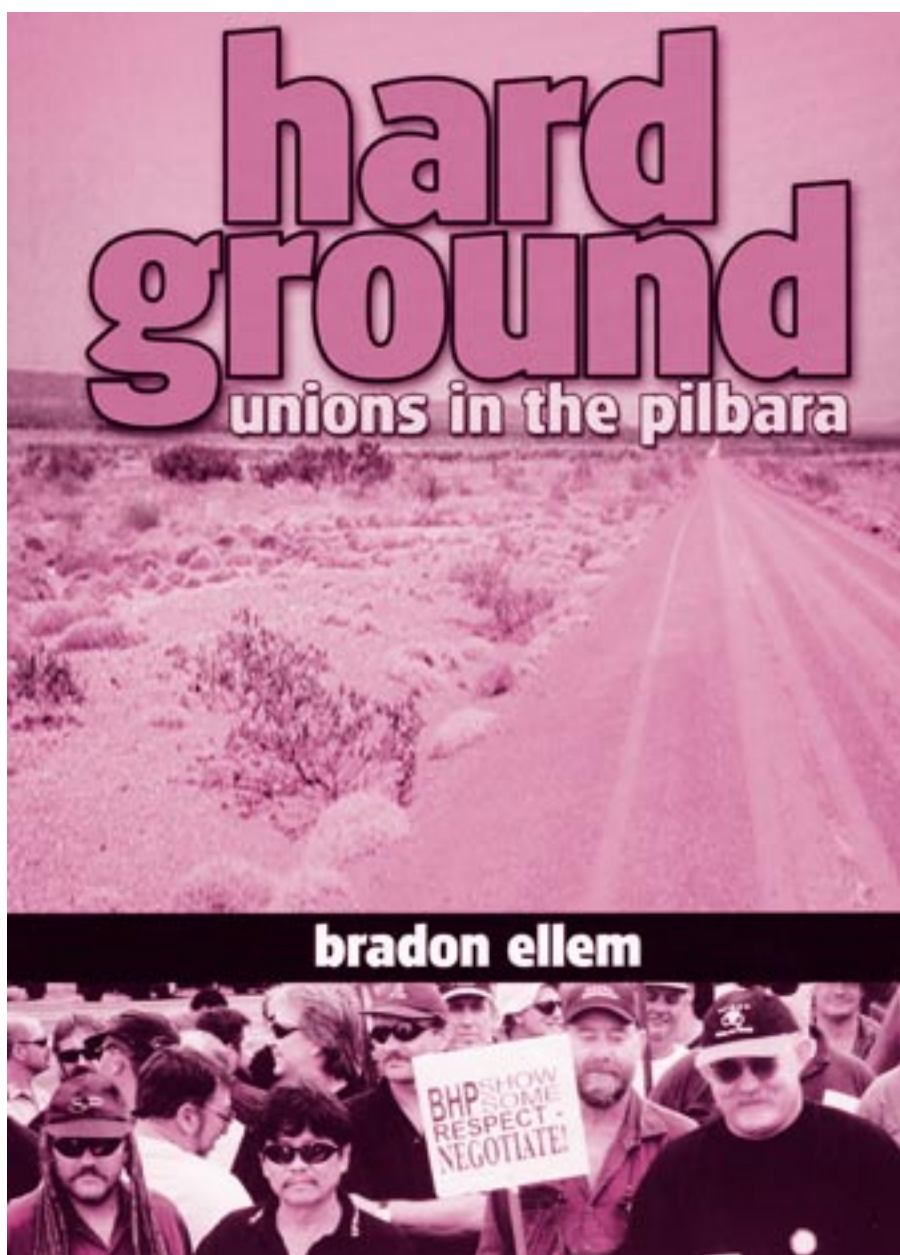
It is as well to put the whole story on the background fact that BHP-Billiton (as it is now known) and Rio Tinto are arguably the most powerful resource mining companies in the world.

In simple and very readable text the author traces the story of the last five years and poses many questions for the whole trade union movement – when to struggle and when not to struggle; what issues unite and which divide; what tactics; are scabs always scabs; why has unionism revived at BHP mines and what went wrong in Rio Tinto mines?

The answers spring out of the story itself.

Out of defeat ...

Out of the trauma of defeat sprang the necessity for new forms of trade unionism such as the formation of a single negotiating unit, but not a new union in its own right. It



is called the Pilbara Mineworkers Union (PMU).

It is a creation of the rank and file and is an industrial union formation uniting all mine-workers.

It is not just an industrial body but one that not only thinks about the collective and solidarity but also about community, taking up issues of health and education and even the survival of the mining townships. Rio Tinto is attempting a new tactic called FIFO, meaning, fly in/fly out, thereby destroying the townships which themselves became a collective challenging the unfettered power of the mining companies.

To rebuild support for trade unionism those who retained their trade union commitment had to go house to house to talk to the families. An important part of the process was the formation of Action in Support of Partners, a women’s group. Workplace bulletins were published and websites established.

Above all, this is an inspiring story of courage, determination and the high principles of the men and women of the Pilbara, fighting these huge and powerful transnational corporations which have the support of State and Federal industrial legislation and traitors within the ranks of the trade union movement.

At the very moment the mineworkers at Robe River and Hamersley Iron were beginning to tread the path of the BHP-Billiton mineworkers and build new trade union structures based on rank and file membership with new community based policies, officials of the

Australian Workers’ Union (AWU) did a secretly negotiated deal with Rio Tinto management.

“... ‘betrayal’ was only the gentlest word for feelings on the ground”, writes Brandon Ellem. The names of Bill Ludwig and Bill Shorten the national president and national secretary of the AWU are mentioned. But while there was betrayal at the top, the unity on the ground remained intact.

They sold their “deal” by claiming that it allowed trade unionism back in the gate forgetting, perhaps, that it was precisely their activities and divisive policies that put unionism out the gate in the first place.

The author draws some conclusions from the regrouping of unions at the BHP mines: “First, the workers took the initiative back from the company. They resisted on every front: locally, nationally, globally and at the state scale. They put their own stamp on all these things.

“Secondly, the workers buried the rivalry between unions that had done so much to damage their cause ... they started to make a new kind of union, a one-union site and what some people might call a community union ... Something was happening that no-one had really anticipated.”

He ends on a positive note while recognising that the struggle is far from over.

“The story of the PMU is one of how activists learn from others’ experiences and apply them to their own circumstances. Despite the great size and fragmentation of

the Pilbara, despite the years of anti-union propaganda, some workers knew [what] was happening at BHP. The past remained a big obstacle though. Local officials knew that any union revival in Hamersley would have to be from the ground up ...”

“... the PMU has now become the official form of unionism at BHP. It may be that this kind of unionism, melding unions together in new ways with new tactics and methods, is a sign of things to come here and elsewhere.”

This is a book that every trade union and political activist must read and study. It is an inspiration to all who may feel despondent when considering the re-election of the Howard Government, the trough into which the Australian trade union movement has sunk, the weakness of the left and the apparent overwhelming power of the transnational corporations.

Hard Ground – Unions in the Pilbara by Brandon Ellem, published by the Pilbara Mineworkers Union, 80pp, illustrated. ☺

The following poem by Nancy Missler, a shovel-operator on the BHP Newman mine, was one of the most popular contributions on the union’s website and is reproduced in *Hard Ground*.

**There is a place far to the north
Where the true believers have come forth.
Shoulder to shoulder, a united band
This is where the last 500 stand.**

And then in the last verse:

**Now you will see our flag again
We fight the odds, we fight to win.
A watershed across the land,
We’re the FIRST 500 and here we stand.**

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