

People power can stop war

Half a million people demonstrated in Washington last weekend. Two hundred thousand in San Francisco. Placards read: "No Blood for Oil", "Regime change starts at Home", "Would Jesus Have Bombed Them?" One protestor said, "It's really important for us to show Europe and the rest of the world that we oppose this so they may have the courage to say 'no'".

The city councils of more than 36 American cities have declared their opposition to a pre-emptive strike against Iraq as the "Cities for Peace" movement sweeps the nation.

Peace activist, Ron Solomon who helped steer a resolution against the war through the Baltimore City Council said, "Here in Maryland, we have 800,000 people who lack health insurance. The Bush administration can find billions for war on Iraq but our cities are in a deep fiscal crisis without funds for programs that help people."

Never before has such opposition to war swept the world in internationally coordinated actions.

This is the other America. This is the America for peace and sanity and against the warmongering of the Bush administration. "Today's demonstrations shattered the myth of consensus for war", said a spokesperson for the Partnership for Civil Justice, one of the thousands of organisations affiliated to ANSWER (the Act Now to Stop War and End Racism coalition)

In some cultures viewing images of the deceased may cause distress. Please be warned their is an obituary on Page 2.

which coordinated the demonstrations.

The snowballing opposition to war in the US has been strengthened with the involvement of trade union organisations. Labor Against the War has been formed, made up of representatives of local unions, central labour councils and labour peace groupings as well as individual labour leaders from across the country.

The Secretary of a Teamsters local, Jerry Zero, informed delegates to the formative meeting of the new organisation the result of a recent poll taken among the membership of the Teamsters Union. "Half our members think George Bush is a liar and the other half don't think you can believe a word he says", said Jerry Zero.

A poll conducted by *Time* magazine asking "Why does the US want to attack Iraq?" showed a very high level of understanding by the American people. Eighty-four per cent of those polled believed its aim was to "Get Iraq's oil". Only 3.1 per cent said it was "To disarm Saddam" and only 4.7 per cent thought it was "To make the world a safer place". There were 12,607 responses to the poll.

Another poll conducted by the *Miami Herald* found that 68 per cent favour achieving US goals without going to war while only 34 per cent favour "quick military action".

The demonstrations in the US were part of internationally coordinated actions in cities in no less than 30 other countries.

Demonstrators for peace and against war marched in the cities of the Netherlands, in Ireland, India, Canada, and France where up to 20,000 marched in Paris.

They took to the streets in Moscow, Hong Kong, in Turkey, Italy,



Anti-war protesters in Washington DC

Syria, Japan, Austria, Lebanon, Egypt, New Zealand and Pakistan.

Protestors in Cairo called on the Egyptian Government to prevent US and British warships from using the Suez Canal en route to a possible attack on Iraq.

In New Zealand the Green Party's Keith Locke told 500 demonstrators that "pressure from around the world can halt this war".

Putting their lives on the line, dozens of British volunteers and at least one Australian are travelling to Iraq to act as human shields protecting strategic sites.

The convoy is being organised by a former US marine, Kenneth Nichols, who served in the first Gulf War and won a combat medal but is now a vociferous opponent of another Gulf conflict. His experience of war left him disillusioned with American foreign policy.

Never before has such worldwide opposition to war swept the world in internationally coordinated actions.

Peace organisations throughout the world, including in Australia,

are now gearing up for the next round of demonstrations to take place over the weekend of February 15-16. (See details page 5)

Using threats and bribery, the US Government is attempting to force a decision endorsing war through the United Nations Security Council by the end of January. Its timetable for war is now reaching a critical point. But war is not justified. It is against the Charter of the UN, it would be a violation of international law and is immoral.

It is the human shield presented by the millions of ordinary people around the world that now stands in the way of the raging beast of warmongering US imperialism.

ACT FOR PEACE

In the event of war being launched by the US and its few allies, actions will take place in all capital cities on that day or the next. (See details page 4)

A statement by the Australian Peace Committee, Friends of the Earth, Ozpeace and Campaign

for International Cooperation and Disarmament (CICD) said, "Australian Government military action will take place without the consent, without the support of, and against the will of most Australians..."

"The United Nations inspectors in Iraq have announced that they can find nothing. It is quite clear that the Bush administration has wanted to go to war with Iraq all along, whether or not they actually have weapons of mass destruction.

"There is no excuse for war with Iraq. The ALP must immediately take a strong and principled stand with no ifs or buts, against military action."

The vast majority of Australians oppose war as has been revealed by a number of public opinion polls.

The Howard Government must not involve Australia in any war on Iraq, a war that would result in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqi men, women and children.

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The world's people demand peace

From Washington to Tokyo, from Melbourne to Moscow, across Europe and the Middle East, in Asia and Latin America there is one common demand coming from the streets and public opinion polls – NO WAR ON IRAQ!

One of the largest demonstrations took place in Washington demanding "No blood for oil". Two hundred thousand people are reported to have demonstrated in Paris.

A poll commissioned by the *Sydney Morning Herald* revealed an overwhelming rejection of war by the Australian people. Only six per cent supported an American first strike. A massive 30 per cent were opposed to a war under any circumstances. In a poll conducted by the ABC in which over 17,900 had responded by last Monday morning, 88 per cent answered "No" to the question: "Do you believe there is a case for war against Iraq?"

Despite the worldwide calls for peace, the warmongers of Washington, London and Canberra have not yet been forced to drop their war plans. Australian Minister of Defence, Robert Hill, bluntly declared, when confronted with the massive opposition revealed by the NewsPoll, that Australia would be taking part.

The dispatch of aircraft and SAS troops to the Middle East and the hosting of US navy vessels in WA (see page 3) confirms that the Australian Government has decided to take part in this monstrous, unwanted and illegal war. Statements by leading government figures from the Prime Minister down that no decision has been made is a lie.

However, the most bellicose statements have been made by Bush and Blair perhaps indicating their desperation to get a war going as quickly as possible in the face of the growing and already mass opposition. Blair has emerged as one of the most unconscionable warmongers, claiming that war can be launched by the US and Britain without UN Security Council endorsement. He declared that once the world had dealt with Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, other recalcitrant states such as North Korea would be next. "We must send a signal to the rest of the world that this trade [in arms] will not be tolerated", he said.

In the dirty game of war preparations, some of the UN weapons inspectors – in particular Hans Blix and the International Atomic Energy Agency chief El Baradei – are also revealing themselves as tools of the warmongers prepared to provide "evidence" of Iraqi non-compliance and, thereby, unleash a new terrible war.

Unfortunately, the Governments of France, Russia and China, which collectively have the power to stop the US and British war plans in the UN Security Council, are playing backroom games. Clear statements of principle and opposition to the warmongers, on the side of the people of the world, are required now.

A war against Iraq is just as much an attack on all other countries, including Russia and China, as it is on Iraq and opportunist manoeuvres and "quiet" diplomacy will not save other countries in the future from US imperialism's aspirations for world domination. Blair's statement is a clear indication of what the warmongers have in mind for the rest of the world.

World public opinion is more clear-sighted and more principled than many governments in its strong stand against the war plans. Answering the question of which state represents the greatest danger to world peace – the US, Iraq or North Korea, an overwhelming majority of Americans answered – the USA.

The answer to a few simple questions reveals the truth of this conclusion:

Which state is the world's leading producer and marketer of weapons of mass destruction?

Which is the only country to have used nuclear weapons?

Which country is US\$1.3 billion in arrears on its payments to the UN?

Which state is the world's leading producer of greenhouse gases and consumer of oil?

Which country believes that God is on its side and will approve any and every outrageous action that its Government undertakes?

Everyone knows the answer. But it is time to act to save the world from its greatest ever calamity.

PRESS FUND

This is a community service announcement. Buy *The Guardian*! You'll certainly be more enlightened than by listening to the Governments "terror" pronouncements. Incidentally, opposition to Australian involvement in war against Iraq is growing. A recent poll showed only 6% of interviewees in favour of involvement in a US-led war, 62% against participation unless sanctioned by the United Nations, and 30% against any involvement at all. *The Guardian* aims to do its bit to defeat the war plans, so why not help us by sending in Press Fund contribution? Our sincere thanks go to the following, for their final contributions for 2002:

Bert Appleton \$20, June Ayres \$50, Brad Bonden \$50, F and R Ellis \$20, B Griffin \$7, M H \$162, Ted Lawes \$20, D M \$50, Charly Maarbani \$12, Pio Paglinea \$20, Ron Reed \$60, Ray Scott \$20, T Wood \$11.50

End of year total: \$502.50. Grand total for 2002: \$11,277.50. Congratulations, a great result!

We also gratefully acknowledge the following, for their "getting the New Year off to an excellent start" contributions:

Bert Appleton \$40, Paula Bloch \$20, W Irving \$5, D L \$520, Ted Lawes \$10, M Rees \$20, P Smith \$15.

New Year total: \$630.

Obituary

Margaret Rachel Jacobs (Auntie Maggie) 1920 – 2002

The Ngarrindjeri people and Auntie Maggie's many friends in the wider community were shocked and saddened by her sudden passing in Adelaide last month. A health crisis brought on by a fall finally claimed the life of this very forthright defender of the rights and traditions of her people.

by Bob Briton

Margaret Rachel Jacobs was born on March 28, 1920 on what is now the self-governing community of Raukkan on Lake Alexandrina in the south east of South Australia. She was always very proud of the fact that she was among the last to have been born in a wurlu – a structure traditionally erected by the Indigenous people of the area. In her youth, Raukkan was a reserve run by the South Australian Government where the inhabitants were subject to the overbearing control of the *Aborigines Act* of 1911.

Not long before her birth, the area had been the undisputed home of the Ngarrindjeri – a skilful people living in an environment rich in the resources they needed. It was later the site of the Christian mission founded by George Taplin and the Aborigines Friends' Association. Established late in the 19th century, its strict, paternalistic regime sought to assimilate the Ngarrindjeri people and to weaken the hold of indigenous culture.

Auntie Maggie was raised by her grandmother and educated in the ways of her people despite ongoing official discouragement. For the rest of her life, Auntie Maggie was guided by both the traditional beliefs of the Ngarrindjeri and her Christian faith. "There's been so much religion through Raukkan they don't know who or what to believe. Now I go to the Baptist Church. He doesn't want me to lose sight of my culture. I don't do things I shouldn't do. I don't condemn other people", she once explained to anthropologist Diane Bell who was researching her *Ngarrindjeri Wurruwarrin* at the time.

At age 22, Auntie Maggie was allowed to leave the Point McLeay reserve to search for work. She lived in Darwin for several years before settling in Cairns. She worked at a variety of jobs – everything from cane cutting to singing in nightclubs. She married but her husband fell early victim to heart disease.

Auntie Maggie moved to Adelaide 30 years ago. One of her brothers had died and she wanted to be near her surviving brothers and sister. She worked at the factory of Hills Industries before taking up casual cooking and cleaning work with the Aboriginal Hostels organisation.

Her leadership qualities became obvious when she began travelling and teaching with the Nunga Church, a religious grouping headed by Brother Keith Milden and many other Nunga people. This organisation became the Aboriginal Congress. She worked alongside a committed group of Nunga people, including Pastor Ken Sumner, who officiated at her recent funeral.

With her direct approach and her strong, proud bearing she became a role model for many in her community. She will always be remembered

for the support she gave to families especially when death and illness came calling.

Auntie Maggie's renewed contact with her people and her grounding in their culture made her very insightful about the problems facing the Ngarrindjeri people. Along with other community leaders, she sensed the seriousness of the challenge posed by plans for what is now the controversial Hindmarsh Island Bridge. Close friend and fellow

community for the traditions of the Ngarrindjeri. A group of "dissident" women also denied the authenticity of the beliefs at issue. The Royal Commission upheld the proposition that the women's beliefs were fabricated.

All of these developments saddened Auntie Maggie. The implication that she and other Ngarrindjeri women were "fabricators" was, quite naturally, deeply offensive to her.

Later, at the conclusion of a case for compensation brought by developers in 2001, Justice John von Doussa of the Federal Court found that "I am not satisfied that the restricted women's knowledge was fabricated or that it was not part of genuine Aboriginal traditions".



Auntie Maggie (right) with Auntie Veronica in 1996

elder, Veronica Brodie, remembers it this way in her book *My Side of the Bridge*:

"Auntie Maggie could tell you about the spirits she's been feeling of late, and the spirits that I've been feeling are the spirits that other people have been feeling. Now the funny thing is, somebody warned one day that when this Hindmarsh Island thing started, the spirits were going to rise up.

It was said years ago down along Raukkan that if the Ngarrindjeri people didn't pull together, the spirits would rise up and there would be trouble. Well look at what's happening – we've got lots of trouble now. Heaps of trouble."

The rest is history. The original proposal by developers to link Hindmarsh Island to the mainland at Goolwa is now a reality. Part of the objections to the project involved the beliefs of the Ngarrindjeri women that related to the island.

Eventually, a Royal Commission was set up in 1995 to find on the validity of these spiritual beliefs – a veritable religious inquisition that encouraged disrespect in the wider

Auntie Maggie celebrated the finding along with the rest of her community. Furthermore, the accuracy of some of her traditional knowledge was revealed when human bones were discovered during the excavation for a wharf near the Goolwa end of the Hindmarsh Island Bridge. Auntie Maggie was no "fabricator".

A great sadness at the damage that had been done remained with her for the rest of her life.

Auntie Maggie brought strength and love to the struggle for Hindmarsh Island and the other challenges faced by her people. The extent of the respect she had earned was demonstrated by the hundreds of people attending her funeral at the church at Raukkan recently.

She was buried, according to her wishes, in the community's cemetery. A collection is being taken up so that a fitting headstone can be placed on her grave.

Readers wanting to make a contribution should contact Auntie Veronica Brodie, 43 Lincoln Street Largs Bay 5016 or phone 08 8242 7445. ☎

Some are more equal than others

The pledge put out last week by Victoria's Australia Day Committee has a familiar ring with its overblown appeal to nationalism and abstract references to being "proudly brave, strong, open and tolerant ... equal, fair, true, free". Yes, it does sound somewhat like the US Oath of Allegiance, but in fact it derives more from the dog's breakfast (draft) preamble to the Constitution promoted in 1999 by Prime Minister John Howard.

by Tom Pearson

Defeated in the republic referendum that year, the draft preamble was a shopping list of extreme nationalism in which Australians were proclaimed to be "free to be proud", "free to pursue their hopes and ideals" and "free to realise themselves as individuals".

There was no reference to the place of Indigenous Australians as the original occupants and custodians of the land, a key to its class nature. The Northern Land Council described this omission as "a subtle affirmation of the myth of *terra nullius*".

The Australia Day oath is part of the creation of an atmosphere of dread and fear, of impending dangers to our "hopes and ideals", and of war.

Thus we are bombarded with adverts in a \$15 million taxpayer-funded PR campaign warning us to "be alert but not alarmed" and to look out for "suspicious activity".

To take a lead from the Australia Day Commitment oath, any "proud, brave, strong, open, tolerant, equal, fair, true and free Australians" who see any activity that might be suspicious should remain alert but not

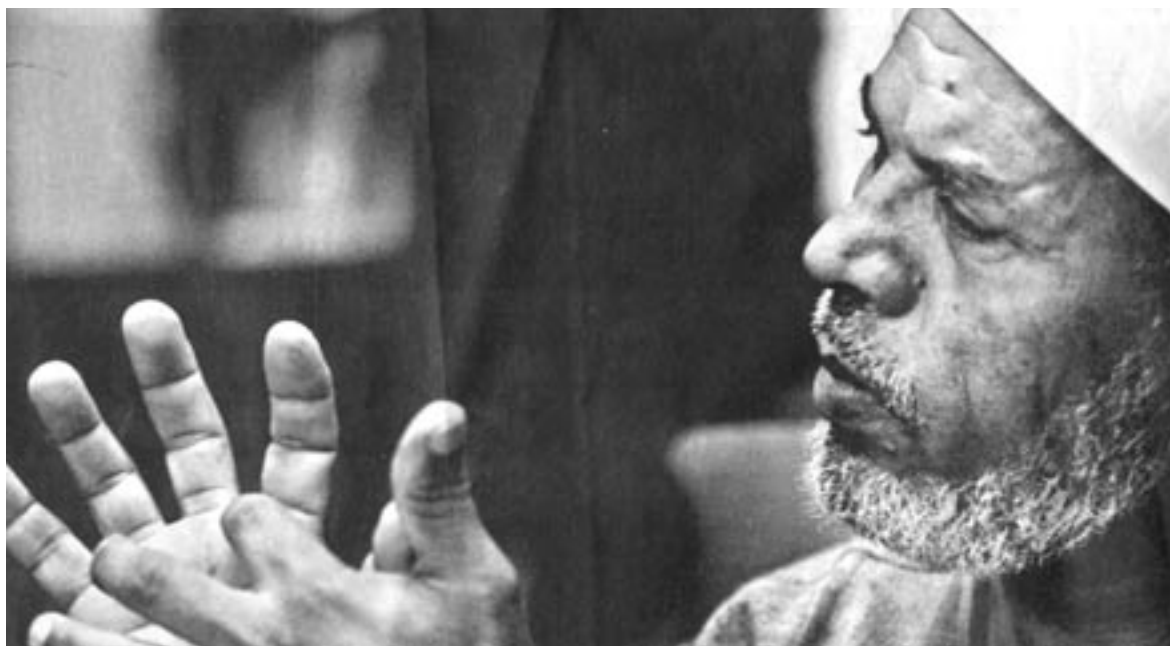
alarmed and phone a special hotline to "protect their way of life".

In Australia there are some 300,000 Muslims. They are a part of our "way of life". But in this land of the "equal" some are more equal than others, as the national leader of Australia's Muslims discovered when he was recently accosted by 11 police officers in Sydney.

Under instructions from ASIO, they assaulted and searched him. The police say they were acting on information that the Mufti of Australia - Sheik Taj el-Din Al Hilaly - was carrying a gun under his robes!

You may recall that in November last year NSW MP Fred Nile called for traditional Islamic dress to be banned by law. Nile, a reactionary from the Christian Right, called for the ban because he said the robes could be used to "conceal both weapons and explosives".

At the time this paper noted that "the agenda of the extreme right has emerged. Specifically, it is for the imposition of dictatorial rule by the means of rabid anti-democratic laws" and "involves the censorship and silencing of views that differ to those of the Government."



Part of our way of life - Sheik Taj el-Din Al Hilaly, the spiritual leader of Australian Muslims

This month the Federal Multicultural Affairs Minister Gary Hardgrave sent a letter to ethnic community broadcasters telling them not to "abuse" their "freedom of speech" by "inciting hatred or violence".

The broadcasters responded firstly by pointing out to the Government that the mainstream commercial media are somewhat prone to inciting hatred, though the warning wasn't sent to them.

The President of the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council, George Zangalis, also made this observation: "Some people may be offended by these references that seem to say 'watch your step, don't portray the country negatively, be objective'."

And Hans Degenhart, manager of ethnic broadcaster SEBI in Adelaide, noted that "it looks like he [Hardgrave] is trying to impose censorship on the programs."

That's where we're headed: the

next step is the passing of laws to allow government to force the closure of media outlets in the name of "national security" - to gag all questions and criticism.

What the Government is trying to drill into people's thinking is that we are at war and that this means the necessary curtailment of democratic rights, including freedom of speech. Howard and the head of his secret police agencies will also have noted the political position of the Mufti, who is savvy to the Government's terrorism scare campaign.

The Mufti said the Government had imported a terrorism problem it did not have. "There has not been any terrorist act in Australia. I don't believe there's any credible threat of a terrorist attack in Australia. If you take antibiotics when you don't have an illness, the condition is going to impact on your health."

In fact, if there is any threat of

terrorism to this country the fault sits squarely with the Howard Government and its right-wing mouthpieces. They, backed by the commercial television networks and the Murdoch press, are the only ones talking up death and destruction. If such an act did take place, their bloody-minded promotion of fear, hatred and war will have incited it.

As for the "war footing" line the Government wants us all to swallow by evoking a quasi WW2 atmosphere and pronouncing an indefinite state of alert, in that great struggle against fascism the government effectively nationalised all basic, essential industries and introduced harsh measures against anyone who sought to profit from the war effort.

That, of course, is precisely the opposite of why Howard is in government: he is there to perpetuate the absolute right of the transnational corporations to profit, including war profits. ☛

Perth peace rally a big success

Three thousand people at a meeting on Sunday January 17 outside the WA Parliament gave Carmen Lawrence long and outstanding applause even before she began speaking.

by Vic Williams

She said the world-wide demonstrations on this day showed that millions of people did not want war against Iraq. It was a time of great risk to the people of the world and there was need for the UN to be stronger.

Greens MLC Dee Margetts declared that Sea Swap* was part of the logistics of war and should be opposed by the great majority of people in WA who did not want a unilateral war on Iraq.

The meeting strongly endorsed her call "We must win!"

Speaking from a wheelchair, a spokesperson for the Lancelin people protested at the bush fires started daily by US bombing at the firing range at a time of great fire danger with other fires raging in WA and other parts of Australia.

She was outraged by the arrogance of the US military who blocked roads to make a no-go area around a crashed warplane from the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln.

(The plane referred to was a Hornet from the Abraham Lincoln which overshot a runway onto private property.)

A spokesperson from the Fremantle City Council said the war preparations were the beginning of a global nightmare. One motive of the USA was control of Iraqi oil.

Kathy Anketell, a Fremantle City Councillor, referred to the recent TV feature on Arcamides - how he had been killed in war, and

his very valuable book had been lost because of World War I - as an example of how brilliant men and their minds and achievements were lost in wars.

A Buddhist monk said that hate was a weapon of mass destruction and that discussion of the issues was the way to overcome hate and end wars. He asked "Is blood more important than oil?"

A message of support, just arrived from Puerto Rico, was broadcast, telling how mass pressure and demonstrations had forced the Congress and the President to announce that the firing range in Puerto Rico would not be used after May 2003.

The people have suffered greatly in the many years of the firing range and were celebrating their victory.

Wally Pritchard, MUA Assistant Secretary apologised for not attending.

He was taking up the safety of harbour workers in relation to the US warships in the harbour and has arranged a meeting in the coming week on this issue with State representatives and safety officers.

After listening to the speakers, the meeting marched down to the river and threw flower petals into the water as a peace gesture.

*Sea Swap is an agreement between the WA and US Governments for the use of local facilities so that the US can fly new crews out to WA to replace crew of warships coming to Fremantle and avoid the sailing of the ship back to USA.. ☛

National Sorry Day

On January 26, while other Australians are celebrating Australia Day, Indigenous Australians celebrate their survival at venues around the country. The principal Survival Day events are held in Sydney, the original site of European settlement.

The main event for this year is the Yabun Concert, a FREE day of entertainment on January 26, 2pm - 7pm, at Waverley Oval, Bondi Junction.

Yabun, meaning "music with a beat", will bring the community together in unity to experience the best of contemporary black music and dance.

New pop sensation Shakaya join the Stiff Gins, Jason Scott, Glenn Skuthorpe, MC Wire and Friends, Frances Williams, the Black Turtles, the Fresh Dancers and Jimmy Little

Jr, to complete an outstanding showcase of young black artists. The MCs will be Shaun Choolburra and Leah Purcell.

It will begin with a traditional welcome from Gadigal Elder, Alan Madden, and feature addresses from the Director of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Linda Burney and Democrat Senator Aden Ridgeway.

Information, Indigenous foods, drink, arts and craft stalls will be available but you are also encouraged to bring your own picnic bas-

kets and blankets to sit back, relax and enjoy the day. It is a drug and alcohol free event.

The Yabun Concert will be broadcast live nationally on the Community Radio Satellite (COMRadSat) Network with a delayed broadcast on the day by the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS). Gadigal Information Service Aboriginal Corporation is Sydney's premier community indigenous media and arts organisation incorporating 93.7 FM Koori Radio.

For information about Survival Day events in your local area please phone your local ATISC office or visit their website at www.atsic.gov.au/events. ☛

People power can stop war

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In a statement CPA President, Dr Hannah Middleton and General Secretary Peter Symon called for intense activity so that the February demonstrations in Australian cities and towns present a wall of opposition to the war plans of the US, British and Australian Governments.

"In addition to the main city-based peace organisations, local and community peace organisations

need to be built. We call upon trade unions to throw their weight into the movement for peace now. Peace is union business.

"We call on the Australian Government to bring all Australian military, naval and airforce units home immediately.

"We demand that the Australian Government stop US forces from turning Australian territory into a bombing range for US aircraft.

"We protest the fact that the US

is treating Australian ports as though they are part of its territory and Australia its colony.

"We demand that the use of Pine Gap as a spy centre and an integrated part of the US war machine be ended.

"The US and British leaders need war now. They must be stopped. You can help. Act Now! The people of the world demand peace", concluded the Party leaders' statement. ☛

“Satanic” and “unclean”!

In an attack unprecedented in Australian industrial relations history, Sanitarium Foods has warned workers that trade unions will bring destruction of Biblical proportions upon the earth. When the workers promptly rebuffed this nonsense by voting down a non-union EBA, the company sacked the senior delegate at its NSW Central Coast factory.

*Andrew Jackson**

Sanitarium, the giant Australian health food company controlled by the Seventh Day Adventist Church, distributed propaganda to factory workers, including references to unions being the work of “satanic agencies”. Further, the material calls on workers to “have nothing of do with these (unions)” for they are “unclean things”.

Workers were also told “the trade unions will be one of the agencies that will bring upon this earth a time of trouble such has not been since the world began”.

The AMWU (Australian Manufacturing Workers Union) says that while it recognises the rights of anyone – including Sanitarium management – to freely associate themselves with any religious or other belief, their behaviour in this instance was intolerable, offensive and ultimately illegal.

“This outrageous abuse of workers’ rights of collectivism would be laughable were it not for the seri-

ous manner with which the company uses its religious dogma as an excuse to exploit workers”, says the AMWU Food Division. “Something is seriously wrong.”

The anti-union tirade was launched whilst workers were considering a non-union Enterprise Bargaining Agreement being offered by Sanitarium management.

Then, just one week after the Agreement was voted down, a senior union delegate was sacked.

The workers and the union believe the delegate was sacked because of his leading role in promoting the union at the Sanitarium Central Coast factory – where the religious rhetoric mentioned was being forced on the workers.

Jennifer Dowell, AMWU Food Division National Secretary, said workers at the Sanitarium factories were shocked by the unjustness of the sacking. “The union and Sanitarium workers are shocked by the bullying tactics being used by Sanitarium management”, said Ms Dowell.



True believers – Sanitarium workers protest outside the plant

“We will continue to fight for our members to exercise their legal right to be represented by their union.”

The union is taking an unfair dismissal case to the Industrial Relations Commission to have John Draper, the delegate involved, reinstated.

“I’m hoping to get my job back”, said Mr Draper. “The workers are scared, but I have had a lot of support. Even non-union members have

rung me to tell me they think it is wrong”, he said.

“I was the first employee to join the AMWU on the site. Since January 2000, I’ve been pointing out all the shortcomings of the inferior award we are forced to work under.”

Late last year Sanitarium workers and members of other unions held solidarity protests at Sanitarium work-sites and offices around Australia.

The peaceful rally held at Sanitarium’s Central Coast office was met by armed security guards and shut gates, and workers reported a sign was posted inside the factory that warned anyone attending the rally would be disciplined.

*Acknowledgement to the *AMWU News* for information used in this article. ☺

Centrelink workers hold out for union EBA

Centrelink workers have withstood a campaign of management coercion and intimidation to overwhelmingly vote down a second non-union wage agreement.

Andrew Jackson

Management had tried to lock the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) out of Centrelink workplaces by cutting off staff access to the union and offering a non-union enterprise agreement (EBA).

The union accused management of bullying and intimidation, providing a long list of anti-union incidents in workplaces, including:

- cutting off staff e-mail and internet access to the CPSU;
- threatening CPSU delegates with disciplinary action for even discussing the “Vote NO” campaign;
- throwing CPSU organisers out of workplaces;
- threatening managers with the sack unless they pushed staff to vote yes;

- telling a worker who politely questioned some aspects of the agreement “to look for another job”;
- bursting CPSU balloons with the “vote NO” message.

After the first non-union Agreement was rejected in November, Centrelink staff engaged in a series of strikes to force management to engage with the union.

A second rejection on December 20 – by a margin of 72 percent – has now forced management to the table.

CPSU Division Secretary Mark Gepp said, “An overwhelming majority of Centrelink’s 22,000 workers have now sent a very clear message to management. They want a better deal and one that is negotiated with their union.”

“These workers have not had a pay rise since July 2001 and are now running out of patience with

management’s approach to negotiations.”

Centrelink executives have announced that they will tour workplaces during January and February to listen to staff views. However, the union remains suspicious of their intentions.

The CPSU bulletin points out: “Time is money, and another two months touring the country rather than sitting down and negotiating a decent Agreement to finality with your union representatives shows Centrelink is still failing to understand the fundamental issues.

“After all, do you accept management’s claim that they have no idea why you have rejected their sub-standard non-union proposal?”

The union says that given the level of coercion and bullying during the NO vote campaign, staff will be fearful to speak their minds in the forthcoming management meetings.

The CPSU says it will include in any future Agreement strict rules for management behaviour.

“After all”, says Mr Gepp, “Centrelink workers are entitled to be treated with respect and not to be subject to bullying or harassment, whether you are carrying out your normal duties or negotiating a new wage agreement. There aren’t two sets of rules, only one.”

As part of the guidelines set out for the EBA negotiations the CPSU has promised Centrelink there will be no further industrial action as long as the union believes Centrelink is acting in good faith.

Both sides have stated the objective of having a new Agreement in place by March 31. ☺

Victory to Buildtech workers

Up to 300 building workers affected by the collapse of Sydney building company Buildtech are celebrating after vigorous negotiations resulted in agreement between the Construction Division of the CFMEU and the administrator for the workers to receive their pay and entitlements in full.

A picket line, operating since early this month at a site in Clarence Street in the city, attracted strong support from the passing public.

The workers, who had not been paid since mid-December, received their entitlements last Friday. Dozens of sub-contractors will also receive

money owed to them. The subbies and workers will be kept on by the new developer to complete the Clarence Street project.

CFMEU Assistant State Secretary Brian Parker, who led the negotiating team, paid tribute to the workers. “The result is a credit to our members

who have been doing it tough since before Christmas”, he said.

“The Federal Government needs to fix the problem of workers’ entitlements. It’s just un-Australian that years after Oakdale [sacked miners] and National Textile [sacked manufacturing workers] working Australian can still be duded like this.

“The reaction to our picket was so positive it really showed that the issue continues to have resonance within the community.” ☺

Industrial dispute flares as EBA settled

An industrial dispute has erupted at Port Kembla Copper on the South Coast of NSW after a worker on nightshift was splashed with hot wax and received second degree burns to his legs.

The man was one of two workers injured at the plant. The other was splashed with acidic electrolytes.

These two incidents have sparked an industrial dispute over safety at the plant. Workers are angry and would like to know why safety showers and emergency eye baths failed when other colleagues tried to treat the injured workers.

NSW WorkCover is investigating the incidents and has issued safety management orders to the plant’s owners.

These latest safety concerns follow an 18-month struggle for a new agreement over wages and conditions. The new agreement, which awarded an eight percent pay

increase over two years, was only finalised days ago.

Australian Workers Union Port Kembla Branch official Phil Reid said the union’s 145 members were pleased with the new deal won by collective bargaining.

“It’s a substantial improvement on what it was, there’s still a way to go but we will get there steadily”, Mr Reid said.

Staff will also get an extra public holiday off each year and a new classification structure enabling workers to move up the pay scale more rapidly.

Mr Reid said during maintenance shutdowns staff would now get the opportunity to earn more. ☺

If war starts, rally at:

Melbourne

5pm on the day at State Library

Sydney

5pm on the day Town Hall

Adelaide

5pm on the day, Parliament House steps

Canberra

5pm on the day at US embassy

Brisbane

5pm on the day in King George Square, and then on the following Saturday at 12 noon

Perth

5 pm on the day outside the GPO in Forrest Place

Hobart

5pm on the day in Frankston Square

Wollongong

5.30pm the day after at the Ampitheatre

Asylum seeker issues dog government

The Australian Government's asylum seeker policies have now resulted in fires in detention centres, international criticism of human rights aspects of government policy, and calls for an inquiry into the sinking of the asylum seeker vessel SIEV-X, with the death of 353 people.

by Peter Mac

Fires late last year destroyed buildings at a number of detention centres. One inmate said of Sydney's Villawood Detention Centre: "It's been on the cards for a long time... You can't sleep. It's 45 degrees at 4am."

The new Baxter detention centre, which was also subjected to fire, comprises a series of enclosures with no outside view. Inmates in one enclosure must make written application to visit another, and the centre's living quarters were described by a government MP's wife as "like horse stables".

Most detainees have been incarcerated for between 18 months and four years. Greg Barnes of the Coalition for the Reform of Refugee Policy, stated: "Nobody likes to see rioting and damage, but what are the root causes?"

A flawed system, which locks up people, including children, for long periods of time, and gives them very little information."

He stated that the government's mandatory detention policies had placed the asylum seekers under extreme mental and physical stress. "People don't resort to this sort of behaviour unless they are at their wits end. ... Until the government is prepared to address the fundamental flaw in its (mandatory detention) policy ... you can expect a repetition of this behaviour."

The government has declared that those deemed responsible for the fires will be deported in double-quick time. In contrast, however, they still refuse to take steps to cut the time required to process applications for refugee status.

The callousness of the government's policies is illustrated by the case of Kuwaiti and Iraqi detainees. One country through which these asylum seekers would have to transit on their return voyage refuses to accept them without a written statement that they are travelling of their own free will. Most of the refugees are, of course, unwilling to provide any such statement.

For its own reasons Kuwait also refuses to accept the return of these people, and the situation is complicated by the looming threat of unilateral US-led war against Iraq in which the government wants Australia to participate.

The result is that the Iraqi and Kuwaiti detainees cannot be returned, but the government refuses to vary its policy.

A group of experts is now mounting a legal challenge, arguing that in the circumstances the present treatment of these people amounts to indefinite detention without proper authorisation from parliament, and that they should be released pending the

outcome of negotiations over their removal.

The SIEV-X catastrophe also continues to haunt the government. The Federal Minister for Justice said that the man suspected of organising the SIEV-X voyage would be pursued relentlessly, yet the government has refused to initiate an enquiry into the tragedy.

There have been persistent rumours of complicity by Australian security personnel in a deliberate sabotage of the ship prior to its leaving Indonesia on its fateful voyage.

The head of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) has stated that the AFP asked Indonesian police to disrupt the people smuggler activities, but added somewhat evasively that the AFP had no control over what they actually did or how they did it.

The Howard Government's policies have resulted in many applicants for temporary protection visas being barred from seeking employment. There is evidence that as a result many applicants are suffering terrible exploitation, with some female applicants having been forced to work in brothels in order to maintain their families.

But there's some good news. Many members of the public are forming support networks for those in this terrible predicament. And in a more humane start to the new year, the New Zealand Government has announced that it will accept 150 asylum seekers who have been confined for up to 16 months in far flung detention centres under the Australian government's infamous "Pacific Solution" ☺



The mandatory detention of asylum seekers is a "fundamentally flawed system"



With the collapse of companies bloated with corruption there is now a push by business to prevent any regulations being introduced that would make them more accountable. The *Australian Financial Review* headline "Regulations are not the answer" is typical of the warning from the big end of town that it won't tolerate any interference in its profit-grabbing activities: in a system based on theft, business is business, after all. In that *Financial Review* piece Stephen Cohen, director the Business Ethics Centre (there's an oxymoron) said that the call for stronger regulations is a good idea but "we shouldn't miss the human element." By this he means "People failed". The bloodsucking system that's rotten to the core, it's OK. "More rules, laws, guidelines and systems cannot completely remedy human failure", says Mr Cohen, "or prevent it from happening again." The answer? Simply "ethical perception and the exercise of good judgement." Mr Cohen tells us that's what was missing at HIH.

The *Financial Review* also informs us of "director bashing", apparently a new pastime of the economically deprived lower classes (i.e. the public). It transpires that demands for greater accountability are making some company directors think twice about taking new directorships. Not only that, these victims of "director bashing" cry that the push for a "culture of compliance" will be at the expense of innovative and strong leadership. Tragic, ain't it?

The bulk grain carrier *Ocean Emperor* has been cruising the Australian coastline with a load of corn containing genetically engineered varieties. The Greens have called on the Australian Government to prevent the unloading of the 50,000 tonnes of corn. Drew Hutton of the Queensland Greens points out that the corn is unnecessary, possibly harmful to human and animal health, potentially harmful to Australian food exports and unpopular with the Australian public. "We have enough imported, non-GE wheat and sorghum available for drought relief and there are also plenty of Australian grains that could be used", said Mr Hutton. "This is a sneaky, backdoor way of getting GE foods into Australia."

And the Howard Government is set to politically engineer the National Museum of Australia, appointing its conservative supporters to a panel that is to review the Museum's constitution. For example, one of the appointees is the La Trobe University sociologist John Carroll, a vocal supporter of the Howard Government and a contributor to the reactionary *Quadrant* magazine. The constitution has a stipulation that the Museum must have an Indigenous gallery. You get the picture.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is investment bank ABN Amro. Public-private-partnerships (PPPs) are a means for the privatisation of publicly owned assets. Toward this end ABN Amro is setting up a \$1 billion fund for PPPs targeting education, prisons, transport and health. Government's role will be to keep the machine of state well oiled and running smoothly with plenty of taxpayers' money ... and a raft of police state laws to quell public unrest with an iron fist.

PEACE ACTIONS

Melbourne

No war on Iraq: Rally for Peace
Friday 14th February 5pm
State Library, City

Public Meeting:

Counting the cost of war on Iraq
Wednesday 29th January 7pm
Storey Hall, RMIT, City

Sponsored by Victorian Council of Churches and Medical Association for Prevention of War
Speakers: Dr Carmen Lawrence, Dr Sue Wareham, Dr Scott Burchill + others

People for Peace daily vigil:
12.30 - 1.30 PM, 22 - 31 January outside
Saint Paul's Cathedral

Further information:
Stephen Ames 0425 765 467 hosea@bigpond.com
Harry Kerr 5221 6694 ahmkerr@hotmail.com
Wes Campbell 9375 1065 wcampbell@vic.uca.org.au

Sydney

Walk for Peace
Sunday 16th February noon
from Hyde Park North

Contacts: Alison 9389 2084; Nick 0409 762 081;
Bruce 9386 1240; Hannah 0418 668 089

Adelaide

Don't attack Iraq
Sunday 16th February 11.45am
Victoria Square for 12 noon
walk to Parliament House

Speakers: Brian Deegan, Mem Fox & David Palmer

Canberra

Anti-war rally
Saturday 15th February noon -
further details soon

Contact: ACT Network Opposing War, actnow_ canberra@hotmail.com or phone 0417 2699 8402

Darwin

Contact: Environment Centre
ecnt@octa4.net.au, 08 8981 1984

Brisbane

Rally for peace
Sunday 16th February 12 noon
QUT Riverstage,
march across Goodwill Bridge

Contact: Queensland Peace Network phone
Gavin Sawford (QCU) 3846 2468

Perth

Dawn-to-dusk fast for peace
every Friday
on Parliament House steps

Contact: NoWar Alliance (08) 9218 9608
or (08) 9277 6307

Launceston

Contact: Launceston Peace Action Network
http://www.elaunceston.com/people/peace/
Terence Seymour 0409 414 562

Hobart

Rally Saturday 15th February
details to come

Contact: Peace Trust -
David Burn david@lhmu.org.au 6224 9288
or Unions Tasmania 6234 9553

Wollongong

Saturday 8th February 10.30am
March from Fred Moore House
to Ampitheatre

Contact: South Coast No War,
Leanne Ph: 02 42251 339

Turn off the lights : Here comes "Full Retail"

From New Year's Day 2003 South Australians have been enjoying the benefits of "Full Retail Competition" within the National Electricity Market. This is the final step in a process begun with the corporatisation of the State's electricity utility ETSA, its dismemberment and eventual privatisation in 1999.

by Bob Briton

The Olsen Liberal Government of the time said that the sale was necessary in light of the debt left by the State Bank debacle. However, it went on to promote other, even more spurious advantages for the sale.

In the best economic rationalist tradition, the government claimed that competition would lower prices, and private interests would have to shoulder the risks associated with moving into the scary, unpredictable "National Electricity Market".

Consistent with experience from all over the world, these prophecies have been shown to be wrong and wrong again. On July 1 last year, larger electricity consumers were the first to be charged at the deregulated rate. Charges increase by 80 per cent as a result.

This month, households and other smaller consumers will be charged an extra 32 per cent until the end of March and an average of 23.7 per cent more over the year. The average household electricity bill will rise from \$950 to \$1175 per annum.

Competition was meant to weaken AGL's ability to demand exorbitant amounts from householders when it lost its status as a regulated monopoly retailer at the beginning of 2003. Only Origin Energy, Texas Based TXU and (belatedly) the NSW Government's Energy Australia have shown an interest in the SA market. Origin Energy won't be ready to offer contracts to clients until the end of January and TXU won't be doing anything until March.

The only company talking discounts at present is AGL, which has "invited" 10,000 out of the potential 700,000 households to lock themselves into a two-year contract in return a \$70 reduction in their bill. That is about 70 cents a week over the life of the contract. Big deal!

The Rann State Labor Government has not only gone along with the privatisation and deregulation, but has steadfastly refused to soften the blow to consumers by subsidising the introduction of deregulated electricity to householders as was done in Victoria.

Energy Minister Pat Conlon is resisting demands from his Opposition counterpart and bodies like the SA Council of Social Service to increase the subsidies to pensioners from \$70 to \$86.60 and to provide interest-free loans for the purchase of energy efficient white goods.

The lone item of good news on the charges front recently is for the operators of big business. Essential Services Commissioner, Lew Owens, has announced that these large consumers will now be charged an average of 8c/kWh – that's less than half the 17c/kWh that householders will be paying from January 1!

Myths exploded

Day by day, it is becoming clearer in whose interests the "free market" in electricity is being run, who will pay for it and what the real purpose of the changes is.

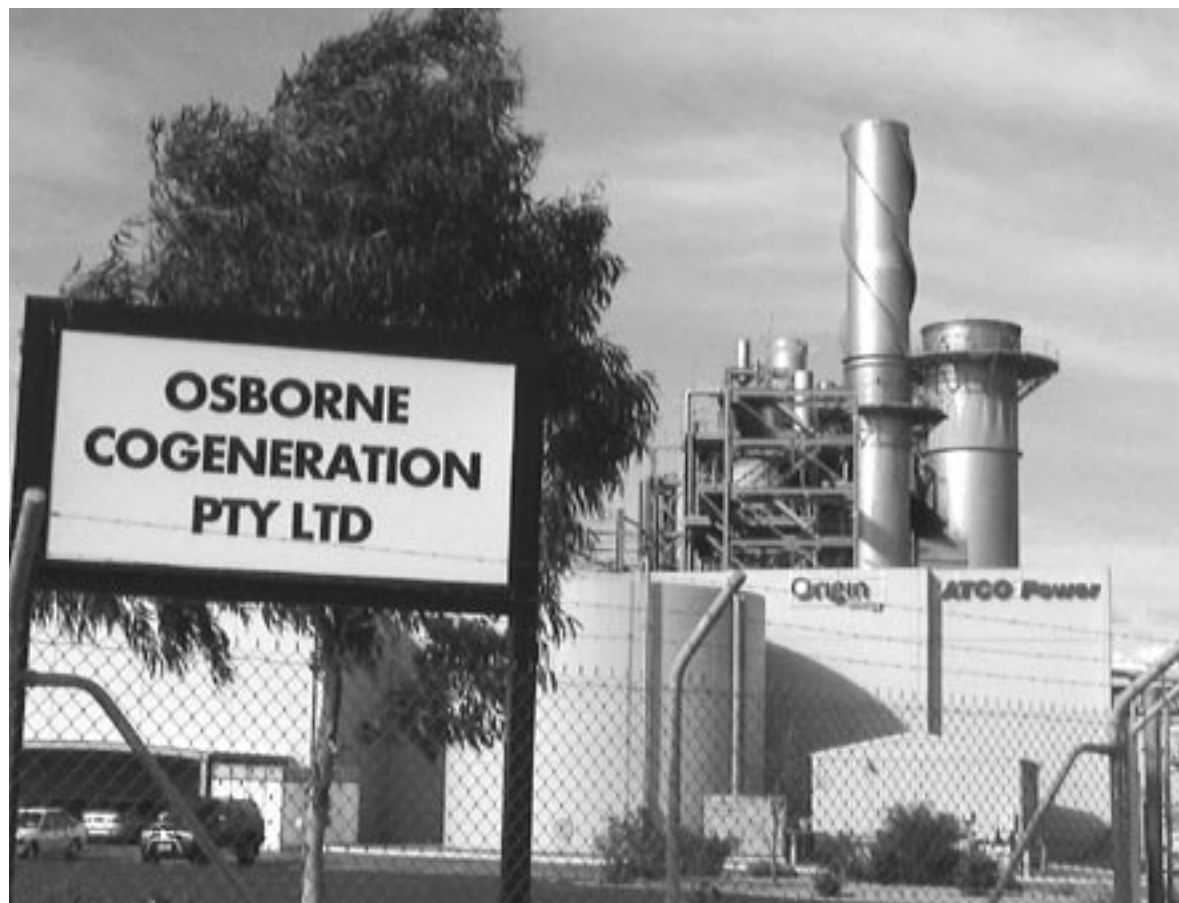
Meanwhile, the last of the myths peddled about the advantages of free enterprise utilities is being exploded. The risks that were supposed to be borne by transnational corporations operating in the interconnected National Electricity Market – with its wildly fluctuating "spot prices" for power – were actually being guaranteed by SA's taxpayers.

In December the Government was informed that, as a consequence of its US parent company's financial woes, NRG Energy would not be able to pay the latest instalment of \$10 million required every six months until 2018 for liabilities owing from its cogenerator at Osborne.

At first it appeared that it wouldn't even be able to pay for the gas needed for electricity production until the end of March. For a while, until NRG found that it actually did have the \$4.5 million to pay for the gas, it looked as though the State Government would have to pay the bill itself or at least guarantee a loan from a group of banks led by the ANZ.

Never the less, the state is still staring at a debt of \$140 million over the next 16 or 17 years squarely in the face. Treasurer Kevin Foley said that there may be other privatisation "time bombs" set to go off.

The Liberals, rather than hanging their heads in shame, are trying to appear very wise on the issue. Some, like former Liberal Treasurer Stephen Baker have suggested that



Avante Media Australia

GLOBOCOFFEE STRIKES

Food shortages in Ethiopia are at a critical level. The crisis has been exacerbated by a drop in the world price of coffee to a 30-year low. Coffee is Ethiopia's main export. As Raisa Pages, of *Granma International*, reports, the fall in coffee prices also has an impact on countries in Central and South America, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia as well as East and West Africa.

Showing again the ruthless and inhuman nature of corporate profit-making, transnational Nestlé and 40 other companies are suing Ethiopia – which has a per capita income of \$100 per year – for \$500 million, claiming compensation for when their operations were nationalised by the then socialist-oriented government in 1975.

Said the chief executive of Nestlé, Peter Brabeck, flaunting the arrogance his corporation is famous for, "We think it's important for the long-term welfare of the people of Africa that their governments demonstrate a capacity to comply with international law."

Every year an average of over 400 million cups of coffee are consumed throughout the world. It is the planet's favourite beverage. In fact coffee is the second most important raw material in commercial volume, following oil.

Coffee production employs 25 million people working in a small-

scale family economy, where the entire farming production process is virtually done by hand, demanding a delicacy and expertise passed down by ancestral tradition.

But today, behind every cup there is a story of poverty and death for coffee farmers in countries held hostage by blind market forces. On average coffee is priced at US \$1.10 per kilogram, even though the production cost is more than US \$1.76 per kilogram.

The drop in prices means a great crisis for small producers, especially in Central America and other areas of Latin America and the Caribbean, East and West Africa and Southeast Asia.

IMF and World Bank policies that fix market processes for basic products and prevent governments from regulating those prices or protecting their farmers, have resulted in calamity for coffee growers.

Ever since the International Coffee Agreement clauses were broken at the end of the 1980s, coffee producers have been left without any

serious means of coordination or organising policy. Before this rupture policy was clear-cut: neither banks, nor multilateral institutions, nor governments were authorised to promote expansion in coffee-producing areas.

"All this disappeared", said Jorge Cardenas, who presided over the first International Coffee Conference, held in London in 2001. "Every country set its own policy; everyone thought they could sell and trade on better terms than the others."

Central American exports have fallen by more than US\$1 billion in the past two and a half years. In Costa Rica, where some of the best coffee in the world comes from, coffee producers are asking why the government allows its best cultivators to bleed to death and its farmers to be without work.

In Central America alone, almost 600,000 full-time and part-time jobs have been lost in the coffee sector over the past few years. According to a report from British-based charity Oxfam, many children in some coffee growing areas in Central America and East Africa are seriously malnourished.

Under the title "Mugged: Poverty in your coffee cup", Oxfam proposes that the main process-

ing companies (Proctor & Gamble, Kraft, Sara Lee, Nestlé, Starbucks and Tchibo) who together buy over half the world's coffee produce, should pay higher prices for the bean.

In 2000 coffee-producing countries received only 10 percent of their total profits, according to Jorge Cardenas. The rest was given over to distribution, commercialisation and transportation. Every day, marketing, promotion, local handling and product management costs more than the pound of coffee bought by consumers.

The most sensible thing for producer countries to do would be to coordinate the sale of coffee themselves. If each one makes its own policy alone then the long-term results are extremely negative.

The current low prices may also be due in part to better offers for Brazilian coffee and the strong emergence of Vietnam on the market. Some 20 years ago Vietnam produced 5000 tonnes of coffee; now it produces 800,000 tonnes. But Vietnam, where coffee cultivation was promoted to boost rural employment, has also experienced one of its worst years.

Production costs are almost double what the country currently receives for every tonne it exports.



Picking beans in Costa Rica – coffee pro

Coffee is Tanzania's main crop and one of its most important exports, but since 1994 producers have suffered by the introduction of a free market. Under nationalisation farmers were assured of sales to cooperatives, but sale guarantees were lost with liberalisation of the market.

Production costs also went up. For example, chemical pesticide prices rose, increasing production costs by between 25-30 percent. For many

tail Competition"

NRG was able to withhold supply on Tuesday December 17 and force up the spot price of electricity from \$59 MW/hour to \$3012 MW/hour. This produced earnings of \$2.17 million in one afternoon for NRG – nice work if you can get it!

the conditions of the original sale were too hard on NRG.

NRG was obliged to buy the loss-making Osborne cogenerator as part of a package that included the Northern and Playford power stations at Port Augusta and the coalfields and township of Leigh Creek. The assets produce a total of 35 per cent of the state's electricity.

To manage the financial affairs of the Osborne plant, NRG set up a paper company called Flinders Osborne Trading. This company paid Boral and Atco to run the plant, bought the gas required for production, sold steam to fertilizer manufacturer Penrice and electricity to NRG at prices fixed above current market levels.

However, the liabilities outstanding on this operation are making NRG's assets hard to sell and, predictably, the government is now looking into letting the troubled transnational off the hook by dropping the Osborne plant from the package.

Whoever buys the generating capacity will inherit quite an earner. Despite "competition"

from generators from the increasingly interconnected eastern states, NRG was able to withhold supply on Tuesday December 17 and force up the spot price of electricity from \$59 MW/hour to \$3012 MW/hour. This produced earnings of \$2.17 million in one afternoon for NRG – nice work if you can get it!

So while South Australians watch powerlessly as these events unfold and while the Hong Kong-based owner of ETSA remains tight-lipped about the causes and extent of blackouts in the State – a new chorus is going up among commentators.

The Energy Minister is saying that, if market forces don't produce lower prices within four years, then price caps will have to be imposed. Others, including Richard Blandy of the Energy Consumers' Council of SA, are calling for the re-nationalisation of at least the generating assets of the State.

Sooner or later, this is the bullet that the SA Government – together with its interstate counterparts and governments the whole world over – will have to bite. ❖



duction employs 25 million people

farmers it is simply too high a price, especially if one takes into account the uncertainty of finding a buyer.

In Cuba, where the state guarantees buying the coffee harvest from growers and even raised prices for small farmers and workers in order to stimulate production, the price crisis has also affected exports. The difference is that Cuban coffee producers have not been harmed.

Cuba is looking to improve

prices by promoting organic options, an experience that has been successful in diverse mountain areas.

While the situation of small farmers becomes ever more desperate, coffee transnationals are becoming increasingly richer. Starbucks tripled its profits between 1997 and 2000, while Nestlé made a 26 percent increase in profits from its instant coffee alone. ❖

That's capitalism You beaut!

As part of its January 1 New Year coverage, *The Sydney Morning Herald* devoted a whole page in its business section to what it called "Fifty stupid moments in 2002". A better headline would have been "Fifty greedy and corrupt moments". We reproduce a small selection of the 50 items listed by the SMH – lest we forget!

What are friends for anyway?

Self-made millionaire Martha Stewart resigned as the director of the New York Stock Exchange. Her resignation letter contained no details on how she pocketed about US\$228,000 for selling 4000 ImClone shares the day before the US Food and Drug Administration rejected the firm's application to use its Erbitux drug on cancer patients.

The former CEO and founder of ImClone, Sam Waksal, pleaded guilty to charges of fraud, perjury, conspiracy, securities fraud and obstruction of justice.

But whether Waksal told his friends, including Martha Stewart to dump their shares has not been proven. Stewart has not been charged and denies any wrongdoing.

Thieves fall out

Adler reportedly invited Brad Cooper to a meeting in a North Sydney hotel to ask Cooper what he intended to tell the HIH Royal Commission the next day about short-selling HIH shares.

Cooper alleged Adler offered him \$500,000 to change his evidence. Cooper accepted the meal but was later accused of trying to extort \$1.8 million from Adler before the Monday morning.

Adler has been charged with manipulating the stockmarket and making false and misleading statements.

And weren't shareholders delighted!

The internal audit review of HIH's executive expenses revealed that former chief Ray Williams liked the occasional snack.

These included: \$2462.50 (\$700 for a tip) at the Nautilus Restaurant at Port Douglas and \$2197.50 (\$700 tip) at Pier Restaurant.

All this was in addition to the \$157,796 spent on travel expenses and \$38,165 spent by his wife, Rita.

Other goodies included \$86,442.43 spent on watches for staff.

A tycoon with a bent for culture

Before his indictment on tax cheating, Tyco chief Dennis Kozlowski knew how to live it up.

He spent US\$6000 on a shower curtain and US\$15,000 for a dog umbrella stand and US\$2.1 million on a 40th birthday party he threw in Sardinia for his missus.

It was a tasteful affair featuring a giant cake with exploding breasts and an ice sculpture of Michelangelo's "David" dispensing vodka through an appendage minus the fig leaf.

The cheque is in the mail

The chief executive of Perth's New Tel, Peter Malone, told one of his shareholders that he was expecting a \$750,000 exit payout. New Tel has now been placed in receivership by Optus.

Who me?

As the debts piled up at New Tel, Mr Malone was asked if he was the same Peter Malone who had ordered a \$370,000 black Aston Martin DB7 Vantage Volante and then paid \$210,000 to have it stretched 15 centimetres.

Malone's PR machine insisted he was driving a 14-year-old Mercedes, forgetting that Malone had told the whole story to the UK's ClassicDriver.com website.

Filthy lucre

US regulators started to look into the accounting at oil services company Halliburton for cost overruns incurred when it was run by Dick Cheney before he became US Vice-President to George W Bush.

Halliburton is well known for its ability to win contracts to help build US military bases in other countries.

Lost

Brambles chairman Don Argus denied that the company had lost its pallets. According to Argus, the missing 15 million or so CHEP pallets weren't really lost. Brambles just had to find them, that was all.

Let me say it again

US Treasury Secretary, Paul O'Neill demonstrated his mastery of putting his foot in it. When Enron collapsed, facing angry creditors, more than 4000 ex-employees, some of whom had lost all their

retirement savings, and a criminal probe by the US Justice Department, O'Neill said: "Companies come and go. It's part of the genius of capitalism."

A good idea at the time

Three years after promising to increase rail patronage by 84 percent and 40 percent for trams, and to achieve what no government could ever do – make a profit – UK transport giant National Express said it was all too hard.

Writing off \$400 million, it handed trains and trams back to the Victorian Government.

Using other people's money

The Tesna syndicate, headed by Solomon Lew and Lindsay Fox, announced a \$2.5 billion plan to revive Ansett's operations with 29 new planes flying major routes and 4000 staff working for lower wages and reduced conditions in return for a share of profits.

Four months later, Fox and Lew pulled out when the Government declined to foot the bill.

Only a few mistakes

Jean-Marie Messier, disgraced ex-chief of the world's second largest media group, Vivendi Universal, said his only big mistakes were that he should have sacked his directors, not done so many deals, sold the group's utilities subsidiary, got on better with politicians and listened to warnings from his family.

That didn't stop French investigators swooping on his home looking for evidence that the company had issued misleading financial information. "I don't have time to be depressed", Messier said.

What a guy!

Former GE *ubermensch* Jack Welch said he had finally decided that GE shareholders should not be expected to pay for his retirement package, which included maid service, corporate jets, the best seats at the US Open and basketball games, wine, food, newspapers, laundry and toiletries at an US\$80,000-a-month Central Park apartment because of "perception matters". Not because it was wrong.

And so on and so on ... ❖

Venezuela

Masses back Chavez and his reforms

The strike by the opponents of the government of Hugo Chavez is the longest in Venezuela's history. The oil industry strike, orchestrated by right-wing union officials and backed by reactionary business interests, has hit Venezuela's economy hard. The opposition's aim is to sabotage the economy and force the popularly elected President to either resign or call for a binding referendum on his rule.

The US administration has backed the push to oust Chavez, having been in on the coup last April which saw him briefly replaced by a member of Venezuela's business elite, who in turn was tipped out by the mass actions of government supporters and support from the main pro-government section of the military. The US is now calling for new elections in Venezuela.

Toward the end of last December Chavez responded to this interference in the country's affairs by sending a copy of the Venezuelan constitution to the White House, highlighting that elections are not due for another four years.

The military has signalled its support for the government if it were forced to take steps, including the imposition of a state of emergency,

to rescue the country from the current impasse.

The elite in Venezuela initially tolerated Chavez in the hope that he could be co-opted. But Chavez was determined to adopt his agenda of social and economic reform. He has made it clear he intends to use Venezuela's huge oil wealth for the benefit of the downtrodden, who constitute the vast majority of the population.

Chavez said that his country faces "a colossal challenge that pits the past – hatred desperation and death – against the future – love, hope and life." In pursuit of this vision, the Government has nationalised huge tracts of land and given it to landless peasants and introduced much needed industrial and labour law reforms, the latter anger-



Chavez – "A colossal challenge that pits the past against the future"

ing the entrenched conservative trade union leadership.

It was the passing of the rural land reform law in November 2001 which signalled the start of the opposition protests. And it was Chavez's attempt to restructure the state oil company – Petroleos de Venezuela – and make it answerable to the state and the people, that set in motion the April coup attempt.

The Chavez Government infuriated the Bush administration by openly questioning the rationale behind the US's global "anti-terror" strategy and by its support for socialist Cuba.

The man in charge of the US State Department's Latin American Desk, Otto Reich, is a former CIA operative who was deeply involved in the Iran-Contra scandal in which drug money was laundered to arm forces trying to undermine the Nicaraguan Government in the 1980s.

He is very close to the exiled Cuban Mafia in Miami. As ambassador to Venezuela in the '80s, Cuban born Reich established a CIA network in the top echelons of the Venezuelan army and bureaucracy. This stood the US in good stead as they set about destabilising the Chavez Government.

The key civilian conspirators in the coup attempt regularly met with

the current American ambassador in the capital Caracas, Charles Shapiro, a former head of the US State Department's Cuba Desk.

The country's Supreme Court – like other important state organs is still packed with supporters of previous governments – in a scandalous majority judgement, set the main coup plotters free. After that, forces led by the union federation CTV, the Chamber of Commerce and the two former establishment parties (which had cosily alternated in government) began organising a series of strikes.

Oil company officials openly support the strike, and the takeover of state oil tankers, which Chavez described as "an act of piracy". The Government gets US\$9 billion revenue a year from Petroleos de Venezuela and provides 15 percent of the oil exported to the US.

The Venezuelan middle class, sections of which had previously backed Chavez, has been adversely affected by the county's economic troubles. The devaluation of the currency by 50 percent and skyrocketing inflation have hit the middle class more than any other social strata.

Unemployment jumped from 12 percent in 2001 to 35 percent in 2002, an economic downturn due mainly to the international fall in

the price of oil. The state budget had to be reduced by seven percent. The April coup added to the problems, hastening the flight of capital out of the country.

Nonetheless, the poor have benefited a lot in the four years since the election of the Chavez Government. For the first time they have access to free medical care and education. The state-run schools provide three full meals a day, an added incentive for the children of the poor to attend school.

In a national address in December, Chavez warned that the opposition was moving toward another coup and that a plan was in process to defeat the constitutional government.

He told supporters who had packed the city centre that his opponents "continue to play the coup card, they continue to play the fascist card, they continue to play the destabilisation card".

The supporters of the Government, the poor, dispossessed, unemployed – half of Venezuela's 23 million people live in poverty – have shown they will not abandon the revolution Chavez has started.

Acknowledgements: *People's Democracy*, paper of the Communist Party of India (M) ♣

Vieques: "Say NO to war"

Statement from the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques

In these days of Christmas, New Year and the celebration of the Three Kings, it's difficult for our community to enjoy what should be moments of happiness and joy. Because at this special time of the year, we await not only the visit of the Three Kings, but also the warships and war planes of the US Navy.

So, together with typical foods of the season and family gatherings that characterise the end of the year and beginning of the next, this year begins with here with war activity and the death and destruction the Navy has imposed on Vieques for more than six decades.

We cannot celebrate the news of possible certification by the Secretary of the Navy of substitutes for Vieques.

(The US subsequently announced it would be withdrawing from Vieques after naval gunfire exercises at the end of January. The Navy stated that the reasons as the long simmering resentment from the local people, including ongoing protest, and "the cost of maintaining security given the civil unrest which accompanies the Navy's presence".)

Our duty is to struggle to deter the bombing in January that will put into the air and the sea more of the military toxics that will sicken and kill our children.

The US military forces – directed by a government that would make war on the world – prepares to massacre innocent people in Iraq, while we make preparations at the Peace and Justice Camp to defend the right to life.

During this past weekend, a brigade of volunteers from Vieques and the main island carried out multiple chores to get the camp ready to offer housing, a place for meetings and protest, a space for conspiring for peace during the coming days of bombing and disobedience.

The Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques maintains a clear and firm position against war and for peace. We denounce the use of our waters, air and land to attack Iraq. For over half a century, US armed forces have made us accomplices - hostages - of their policies of aggression against countries of this and other regions of the world.

They used Vieques to impose that policy in Guatemala (1954), Vietnam, Chile (1973), Nicaragua, El Salvador, Grenada (1983), Panama (1999) and more recently in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Palestine, among other places.

Not only does the Navy presence imply death and destruction for us in Vieques, its training here contributes to the misery of other peoples whose "crimes" include having petroleum, defending their sovereignty, not being white or speaking English, or occupying a strategic point on the globe.

We have a commitment to peace – for us in Vieques as well as for all peoples on the planet. We oppose war in Vieques and war against Iraq. We work for peace in Vieques, but also for peace in the Middle East and the rest of humanity.

**Say NO to war,
YES to peace!
NO to military violence,
YES to life!
Let this be a year of
struggle and perseverance
for justice and peace! ♣**

Britain

Blast from the past

Official government files released on January 1, 2003 expose plans by a former British Government to settle "unwanted" immigrants on an island. "Heath sought island to discard immigrants", the British left daily *Morning Star* reports. The Australian Government's "Pacific Solution" for refugees is not an original idea when it comes to the ruling class's racist, discriminatory policies.

The government files reveal that former Tory (conservative) Prime Minister Edward Heath launched a frantic search for a remote island where immigrants could be dumped instead of allowing them to live in Britain.

Ministers were under pressure from racist right-wingers, who had whipped up a scare campaign following the entry into Britain of 25,000 Ugandan Asians with British passports, who had been expelled by dictator Idi Amin.

The government feared that Tanzania and Zambia could follow Mr Amin's lead and expel their Asian populations, who also held British passports and so were entitled to claim residence in Britain.

Officials scoured British overseas territories across the world for possible island sites, but only the Falkland Islands showed any willingness to accept significant numbers of new immigrants.

Foreign Office officials reported

little enthusiasm among island territories for the resettlement plan.

They warned of "strong prejudice" in the Seychelles and claimed that the Solomon Islanders had "xenophobic tendencies".

Cabinet records show that Mr Amin's decision to expel the Ugandan Asians had caught the government by surprise.

"We always thought that Amin was a decent chap", one Home Office official said. "After all, he served in the British Army for 15 years".

Mr Heath told the Cabinet that the public must be reassured that that the government "would not tolerate a second expansion of this kind". ♣

USA

GE strike hits health care costs

SCHENECTADY, NY: As part of the first national strike against the General Electric Company in over 30 years, members of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) Local 301 walked out of the GE Power Systems factory here, at 11 pm on Monday, January 13.

by Tony Pecinovsky

The 2000-member local went out with 15,500 other union members at 48 GE plants scattered across 23 States to protest an increase in co-payments for health care.

The increase, imposed by GE on January 1, will cost each GE worker an estimated \$400 per year and affect the families of nearly 145,000 active and retired union members.

Even with wind chill temperatures of minus 15 degrees, hundreds of UE members set up picket lines at 5 am Tuesday morning and braved the cold.

A giant rat was inflated in front of the plant's main entrance. As one GE worker explained, "These rats want all the cheese. But, we're gonna make them share it."

More than 17,500 members of UE and the International Union of Electrical-Communications Workers of America (IUE-CWA) went on strike against GE. But, tragically one IUE-CWA picketer was killed in the early morning hours of January 14 when hit by a police car.

The victim, a woman in her mid-40s, was walking from one gate to another at the huge GE appliance factory in Louisville, KY.

According to Edward Fire, IUE-CWA President, "GE has provoked a strike through its greed. A company that sets record profits each year – \$14.1 billion in 2001 – can afford to maintain health benefits without forcing workers and retirees to pay more."

Recently GE won the Jobs with Justice (JWJ) "Grinch of the Year"

award, outpolling George W Bush and Wal-Mart.

JWJ, a national grassroots coalition that brings together community, student, religious and labour organisations, said, "This award is given to those who have done the most damage to working families during the past year."

According to the UE website, former General Electric CEO Jack Welch has a US\$9 million a year pension, US\$22 million in GE stock and an "unconditional and irrevocable" perks and payments contract with GE.

Many union members think Welch's GE retirement parachute would be a much fairer way to pay the health care cost increases.

Union members hope that the two-day strike sends a message to GE that they won't take concessions of any kind sitting down.

People's Weekly World, paper of the Communist Party USA (abridged). ✪



Sharon & sons in trouble

Kibbutz Beit-Oren, Israel: Can you imagine a Supreme Judge ordering the shutdown of a TV broadcast of a press conference by incumbent US President George W Bush? It happened, albeit not in the US, but in Israel with the incumbent Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. On January 9, PM Sharon had hardly started his address when our screens turned dark and the news studios of the various channels appeared. The moderators announced that on an urgent order of the chairman of the Central Election Board, Supreme Court Judge Mishael Cheshin, the broadcast had been blacked out.

by Hans Lebrecht

The matter was about the latest offence against the law by our highly esteemed Prime Minister. Supreme Court Judge Cheshin had ordered the state-owned TV and radio channels to stop the broadcast because Sharon had used the TV screening of his press conference for electioneering propaganda, and thus had contravened the election law.

Sharon was supposed solely to tell the media his version about the accusations against him and his sons, Gideon and Omri, concerning a multi-million dollar bribe and fund-raising scandal during his 1999 election drive against his party rival Benjamin Netanyahu for the Prime Minister's post.

The daily *Ha'aretz* had published a document the Israeli police criminal investigation department had sent via the Foreign Ministry to

South Africa, asking for assistance in the investigations of the Sharon file regarding a wealthy Cape-Town businessman.

The Israeli State Attorney is investigating the Sharons over allegations the Prime Minister lied about US\$1.5 million used to repay illegal campaign funds.

The investigation goes back five years.

The Sharons are alleged to have approached Cyril Kern, a British businessman living in South Africa who had served under Sharon in the fighting against the British in 1948, and that Kern paid the sons the money.

Sharon's financial scandal has become public interest number one. If and how far these two matters will influence the results of the forthcoming Knesset elections has yet to be seen. ✪

Conscientious objectors on hunger strike in prison

Statement from Israeli organisations:

On Thursday January 16, two imprisoned conscientious objectors to military service, Noam Bahat and Hillel Goral, went on hunger strike. Both are among the signatories of a letter signed last year by over 300 high school students, declaring their refusal to serve in the Israeli army*. Both objectors are serving a second consecutive prison term in defence of their convictions and are held in the isolation ward of Military Prison No. 4, south of Tel-Aviv.

According to Noam Bahat, the hunger strike is to protest his imprisonment for opposing the occupation of the Palestinian people, as well as to protest against the occupation itself.

We demand that the democratic right of these conscientious objectors not to perform military service be recognised and call upon the Ministry of Defence and the Israeli military to release them at once.

Draft resisters are being sentenced to several consecutive terms of imprisonment for the same 'offence'.

On Thursday, January 16, conscientious objector Jonathan Ben-

Artzi was sentenced by Gen. Gil Regev, head of the military manpower division, to 35 days in military prison. This is the seventh consecutive prison term for Ben-Artzi, raising the total length of his imprisonment so far to 196 days.

A recently opened online petition against the practice of repeated imprisonment of objectors has already gathered over 1000 signatures worldwide – www.petitiononline.com/091202/

The imprisonment of these objectors is in clear violation of their fundamental human rights as recognised in international treaties signed and ratified by Israel.

All in all, we are presently aware of 10 young men held in prison due to their refusal to perform regular military service on conscientious grounds. They are joined by regular and reserve soldiers imprisoned due to their refusal to fight in the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

The Israeli movement of objectors, including organisations, such as New Profile, the Seniors' Letter, Yesh-Gvul and Courage to Refuse and supported by Gush Shalom calls for the immediate and unconditional release from prison of all objectors, without fear of further imprisonment of young people obeying their conscience.

New Profile – Movement for the Civilization of Israeli Society
The Seniors' Letter (Shministim)
The Objectors' Parents Group
Yesh-Gvul
Courage to Refuse
Gush Shalom.

*See their website at www.shministim.org ✪



Global briefs

INDONESIA: Indonesian Foreign Ministry officials said that President Megawati Sukarnoputri would visit Russia in March or April, possibly to buy weapons for the armed forces.

ANGOLA: The discovery of landmines has halted food aid delivery to an estimated 40,000 people in Angola, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) said. Last April saw the end of nearly three decades of civil war, but large areas of the countryside remain scattered with mines from the conflict. The agency intends to identify key routes to be demined to allow deliveries and is preparing for a possible airlift of food to the worst-hit areas. Nobody knows how many landmines are buried in Angola's soil, but estimates reach into the millions.

CHINA: China has warned the United States that taking part in Taiwan's annual war games would damage the relations between China and the US. "Any form of military exchange and cooperation between the US and Taiwan will bring harm to China-US relations", said a Beijing spokesman. The US switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979, but it remains Taiwan's main arms supplier and trading partner. Taiwan's *China Times* reports that US military personnel will be present at Taiwan's command centre during this year's war games. But, to avoid controversy, US participation would be based on preparation for a possible evacuation of US expatriates from the island, the paper reported.

PALESTINE: British stop the War activist David Halpin said he hoped to sail with 17 tonnes of medical supplies and food and clothing to help the 1.1 million Palestinian refugees from Israel who live in Gaza. "It is a crumb", the 62-year-old surgeon and peace campaigner said, "but a useful crumb. I have always disliked injustice". The voyage by the 108-tonne Brixham-based beam trawler *Jacoba* will take up to two weeks. Mr Halpin is funding the voyage.

MEXICO: More than 25,000 women, children, and men of all ages, wearing masks and brandishing machetes, came streaming into the city of San Christobal on January 1. They called on the indigenous people of Mexico to maintain their autonomy without the permission of the government, to express publicly that the Zapatista communities will not accept the forced removals of people and to emphasise the importance of a global resistance to imperialism.

INDIA: Over 15,000 people, representing social movements, non-governmental organisations, trade unions and activists, gathered for the Asian Social Forum (ASF) in Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, India, meeting under the theme "another world is possible". The ASF began on January 2 with an encouraging call for the struggles against neoliberal globalisation to continue to be rooted in Gandhian values of non-violence, despite the landslide election of a fascist government in Gujarat.

The world waking up

Despite the fact that the UN inspectors have found no Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) left in Iraq and that the US, Britain, Australia and Israel have not a shred of evidence, these countries continue to promote and prepare for war against Iraq over this issue.

According to Scott Ritter, the former United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) chief inspector "Iraq has been disarmed. Iraq today possesses no meaningful weapons of mass destruction".

This absurd situation clearly shows that these so-called leaders of the democracies have lost all semblance of principle in their political positions and are left with only propaganda to pursue their aims.

The world anxiously waits for the next pathetic act from Bush and company as they play their dangerous game, trying to find just one WMD in Iraq to justify another war. Many independent observers estimate that a million Iraqis have already died since 1990 as a result of sanctions and US and British bombings.

The world's leading possessor of all the WMD is the US, which has over 10,600 nuclear warhead stockpiles and refuses international inspections of these and other WMD.

The world is starting to wake up to the blatant hypocrisy, deceit and bullying of the USA. Not so

long ago Iraq and the fundamentalists were useful friends of the USA, in containing Iran and the USSR respectively.

In the 1980s the US supplied Iraq with most of its weapons, including chemical and biological weapons.

It's just not good enough for the likes of Bush and his Australian spokesman to look for any excuse to start a war; rather war should always be the last resort. Especially when the list of foes makes the conflict look like the beginning of an endless war.

The world is in this present dire situation because of the arrogant intervention and interference of the USA in the affairs of other countries over many decades.

Despite what the US says about the other side, they don't have a monopoly on fanaticism, terror or injustice, as past and present US foreign policies show.

Steven Katsineris
Hurstbridge, Vic

Gulf War – more depleted uranium casualties

As the Howard Government prepares to hurl our troops into another Gulf War, they keep silent about the use of depleted uranium (DU) weapons and the thousands of veterans and civilians suffering from the mysterious Gulf War Syndrome which may be linked to DU ingestion.

Lord Gilbert, responding to a question on DU contamination in

Kuwait, states that 50,000lbs of DU tank ammunition alone was released with the potential to cause 500,000 deaths.

"Obviously this theoretical figure is not realistic, however it does indicate a significant problem ... if DU gets into the food chain or water then this will create potential health problems ... a further concern is a political one of leaving significant quantities of uranium around Kuwait.

"The problem will not go away and should be tackled before it becomes a political problem created by the environmental lobby. It is in both the Kuwait and the UK interest that this is not left to rear its head in the years to come." (UK Parliament Hansard, 2 May 1998).

It is inconceivable that Australia can contemplate participation in such a massive assault on humanity and the environment and for what exactly?

Please explain Mr Howard.

Gareth W R Smith
Byron Bay, NSW

Legislation required on handouts to CEOs

The obscene salary packages of CEOs and senior executives are in the public eye again following the revelation that Mr Brian Gilbertson can expect a severance payment of up to \$30 million for his six months at BHP-Billett.

The usual reprimands of politicians won't do anything to curb this institutionalised and legalised robbery.

While the obvious question needs to be asked who has been so incompetent at BHP to frame a contract for Mr Gilbertson which makes this possible at all, no sanity will emerge unless a political party is prepared to tackle this trend head on in legislation.

Obviously, in this regard too, the famous market mechanism simply doesn't work either. It is PLP policy to aim for the net remuneration of senior executives to be no more than five times average wage.

We think that is quite generous especially when we know from research that there is actually no positive correlation between performance and scandalously high packages of senior management.

Klaas Woldring
Media Officer
Progressive Labour Party
NSW

One bushfire ...

Now that John Howard has seen the results of the conflagration in the ACT where 400 homes, public health laboratories, a fire station, a sewerage treatment plant and a high school have been destroyed perhaps he has developed an awareness of what is about to happen to Iraq.

On January 17, 1991, the first day of the Gulf War, Iraq was hit by the explosive equivalent of one Hiroshima atomic bomb, and by war's end 140,000 tonnes of high explosives (7 atomic bombs) had

Got something to say?

Got an opinion about the system, about human rights, the labour movement, peace, land rights, socialism, privatisation, child care, your local community? Then write it down and send it to us.

Letters of up to 400 words in length are preferred.

been slammed into mainly civilian populated areas.

Three hundred tonnes of this contained poisonous and radioactive depleted uranium which got into the air, soil and water.

It is this battered and bewildered country that one of the largest invasion forces in history is now poised to pulverise with the Howard Government, but not the Australian or American people, an enthusiastic participant.

John Howard has seen what bushfire can do, it's time he withdrew from inflicting hellfire on innocent people.

Gareth W R Smith
Byron Bay, NSW

Culture & Life

Dubya having a hard time

So, we are back from the Christmas-New Year break and nothing seems to have changed. But that, when you think about it, is by way of being an astonishing achievement in itself.

by Rob Gowland

After all, if the jolly band of oil and aerospace industry honchos and Christian fundamentalists who run the USA today had been able to have their way, Iraq would by now be a smoking ruin over which the stars and stripes (the "flag of freedom" you understand) would proudly fly.

Down at ground level, various US corporations (assisted by well-meaning and well-funded NGOs) would be vying with each other to establish hamburger concessions and oil concessions, depending on the size and influence of the corporation.

But it didn't happen, did it? Too many people – and their governments – declined to support the new US crusade, at least not without a more credible justification than the eyewash being advanced by the Bush White House.

This has been a very serious setback for poor George Dubya. The seizure of Iraq's vast oil reserves would have to be a key (if discrete) campaign promise on his part to the energy sector corporations that bankrolled his election. His failure to deliver would not endear him to them nor bode well for his future.

While the White House desperately ploughs ahead with its war plans, the influential voices raised against war with Iraq grow every day. Bush's approval rating has sunk to its lowest since the events of September 11, 2001.

In the US itself, media commentators openly and regularly castigate the Administration's charge to war. According to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, one radio commentator in California expressed the view that Bush actually did not want to attack Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein, because Saddam was his "weapon of mass distraction".

What a wealth of cynicism is encapsulated in that crack, eh?

Every day that goes by without the US and its tiny band of allies (Britain, Australia and Israel, at last count) being able to launch their war sees the support for it fall away a bit more. Time is running out for Bush and his rapacious corporate backers.

Meanwhile, Tony Blair has had to call in the security services to provide some much needed backup for his shrill demands for war now, preferably today. The opportune timing of the discovery of "evidence" of biological and/or chemical weapons in a London flat must have been such a relief to him – and so unexpected.

Even if in most cases the subsequent well-publicised raids by Scotland Yard have failed to find any further evidence of anything, the media beat-up is enough for Tony's purpose. Facts are the least of his concerns.

He also dismisses the fact that the UN weapons inspectors have found no evidence of weapons of mass destruction anywhere in Iraq. Instead he declares that he is "quite sure" not only that Iraq is hiding chemical and biological weapons (where, Tony, where?), but that those weapons pose a "direct threat to British national security". Talk about drawing a long bow!

Tony Blair is a Labour Party politician, but his foreign policy alone – on Iraq, Yugoslavia, North-



ern Ireland, Africa, etc, etc – marks him down as one of the most reactionary imperialists ever to occupy Number 10.

The blatant racism of British policy towards Zimbabwe, and the campaign of disinformation and vilification being waged by Britain against the ZANU-PF Government and President Mugabe, have failed to win support in various international fora, except from fellow racists like our own John Howard.

While Mugabe or his representatives have scored successes at major world gatherings, those leading the attack on Zimbabwe, like Howard, have had to eat crow. The governments of Africa and the rest of the Third World will not support them.

Undeterred, those behind the undeclared Anglo-Australian war on Zimbabwe (for that is what it is) have opened a new front: Cricket.

The level of disinformation and arrant nonsense being peddled about Zimbabwe was well illustrated on TV the other night, as protesters tried to influence the cricket authorities' decision on whether to play an international match in Zimbabwe (and one in Kenya, too).

One demonstrator solemnly told the media: "Sending a team to play cricket in Zimbabwe is like playing cricket in Nazi Germany." Actually, it is nothing of the sort.

Mugabe and ZANU's great crime is that they have refused to meekly allow imperialism's chosen political team, with lots of foreign money, foreign advisors, and for-

eign-based radio support, to subvert the democratic process to gain control of the country.

Everything that the people of Zimbabwe have struggled to build up over the last 20 years, after winning independence at the cost of great suffering and loss of life, would be handed over to foreign companies and private pirates if imperialism's man, Morgan Tsvangirai, was to gain power.

Zimbabwe has lots of problems, which they are the first to acknowledge. Refusing to play cricket with them, or playing cricket but snubbing the country's President, is not going to assist the people of Zimbabwe to overcome their problems, which are mainly the result of economic sanctions and blockade by Britain and other capitalist countries. ☺

Rob Gowland

previews

national public television programs

**Sun January 26 ~
~ Sat February 1**

Gene Kelly said that it was his aim to take dancing in films out of the realm of white tie and tails associated with Fred Astaire, and restore it to ordinary "working stiffs".

Kelly's characters, instead of being part of high society, were more likely to wear a T-shirt and work for a living. Hollywood being Hollywood, his films were hardly going to raise the Red Flag, but at least his intentions were good.

His story is recounted in *Gene Kelly: Anatomy Of A Dancer* (ABC 2:00pm Sunday).

The repeats of *Hornblower* (ABC 8:30pm Sundays) remind us that this should have been a rattling good adventure series. But it's just not vivid enough, is it?

From its awkwardly stiff hero to its stolid plots, the series just did not ignite. It lacks the spark that would make it come alive.

In this week's episode, *The Frogs And The Lobsters*, the British Navy (including young Hornblower), are helping French aristocrats to fight against the Revolution.

Typically, the series tries to have its cake and eat it too, with the French aristocrats portrayed as cruel debauched oppressors of the people, with the implication that the well-brought-up British would never be so beastly.

The series *Black Cab* comprised short (about 15 min-

utes) stories basically about a passenger and the driver of one of London's Black Cabs. The tightly written and succinctly directed stories were sometimes funny, sometimes eerie, sometimes sad, but usually well worth watching.

Short films don't get much of a look in on TV obsessed with everything starting on the hour or half hour, so one should welcome the ABC giving this a repeat season. *But at five minutes to midnight?* (ABC 11:55pm Sundays).

If you're interested in animals or in watching real people cope with real jobs, then you should catch the fly-on-the-wall documentary series from Britain, *Vets In Practice* (ABC 6.00pm Monday to Thursday).

This began life as an observational series about a group of trainee vets, but was so successful that they continued to follow their chosen students after graduation, as they began working. It has the drama and humour of real life; reminds me of *Harry's Practice* without the smug self-satisfaction.

Watching a favourite film again is like revisiting an old friend: it gives you a warm, happy feeling inside. You know that nothing unexpected or untoward is going to happen and you know in advance that you are going to like it (you've seen it before, after all).

I had a mate, an otherwise sober, intelligent chap, who saw MGM's lumpy epic of ancient Rome *Quo Vadis* 27 times! That pales into insignificance beside the accomplishments of Sydney's Dalton sisters, who have seen the stage show *Les Miserables* "500 times and counting".

But it's not just *Les Miz*. Joanne and Susan Dalton, ages 35 and 32, are addicted to theatre. For 20 years, the sisters have seen every show on offer. They saw *Hamlet* 24 times, *Phantom of the Opera* 60, *Cats* 120.



Trying to have its cake and eat it too (*Hornblower*)

Their obsession with the theatre is presumably a way of escaping an otherwise humdrum existence. (They have had the same jobs since leaving school, and still live with their mother.) But it is not cheap.

They have spent over \$60,000 on *Les Miserables* alone, following the show around Australia and the world. Some weeks they spend more on the shows than they earn.

Not surprisingly, although few have met them, they are notorious amongst Sydney theatre crew and performers. The sisters always sit in the middle of the front row.

The sisters and their passion for the theatre form the subject of *The Dalton Sisters* (ABC 8:00pm Mon-

day), a first-time documentary by Josie Mason and Mark Lillis.

The US Government's "War on Drugs" is as bogus as the "War on Terrorism". It is a convenient cover for other more sinister activity, and a cloak for extending US power.

Oh, the people waging the war at the grass roots level, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) officers and the like, are no doubt genuine. But their bosses are not. Indeed, "war" is hardly the way to tackle social problems like drug abuse anyway.

The consistent hostility of successive US administrations to adopting a medical cum social program to deal with drug abuse is no accident. The ABC's publicity for its documentary series *Drug Wars* (ABC 8.30pm Mondays) from US Public Broadcasting's *Frontline* team begins:

"For thirty years the United States Government has struggled to stamp out the use of illegal drugs. The drug wars have absorbed hundreds of billions of dollars, altering the criminal justice system and putting millions of people in jail.

"Yet, despite the United States' vast efforts to stop the flow of illegal drugs, heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and other illicit drugs continue to thrive on America's streets. Meanwhile, international drug trafficking has become a globalised multibillion-dollar industry; one that is now an integral part of the world economy."

There it is, in a nutshell. But typically, the *Frontline* series is full of detail about operations against specific drugs while it misses the point.

Capitalism, and the US Government in particular, need the drug trade.

The series *Greatest Heroes In History* (ABC 8.00pm Tuesdays) appears to have redefined the term "hero". Look at their list: Nelson, Washington, Lincoln, Napoleon, and so on.

Being a famous or popular military leader does not make you heroic.

The early to mid '30s saw a number of British adventure films (usually spue stories) set in WW1. One of the more unusual was *Everything Is Thunder* (ABC 11.30pm Thursday), in which a German girl helps an escaped British POW on the run.

Made in 1936, it starred Constance Bennett and Douglass Montgomery.

Graham Greene called it "Very good entertainment of a kind, the kind that deals with disguises and pursuits and incredible resourcefulness, with policemen on the stairs and hunted men in bathrooms." Gosh.

If *Taggart* didn't cure you of a lingering belief that Scotland is picturesque, the re-runs of *Rebus* (ABC 8.30pm Fridays) certainly would. John Hannah stars as Detective Inspector John Rebus in a very dark and sordid Edinburgh. It's a good cop show, if a bit too miserable for its own good.

As It Happened: The Mystery Of The Persian Mummy (SBS 7.30pm Saturday) deals with a real life mystery in Pakistan in November 2000, when a newly discovered archaeological treasure was found to be not what it appeared. Intriguing stuff. ☘

Melbourne film screening
AUSTRALIA'S PACIFIC SOLUTION
a documentary about the
NAURU DETENTION CAMPS
6.30 pm Wednesday 5th February
Followed by a presentation from film-maker Kate Durham
Trades Hall Cnr Victoria and Lygon Sts, Carlton Sth
\$5 entry

In June 2002, Kate Durham assisted the BBC documentary maker Sarah MacDonald to portray the Pacific Solution for a world audience, and for the ABC's Four Corners program. The ABC declined to show the documentary, in spite of great reviews and the strong public reaction when it was broadcast on British and European networks at the end of September.

The program reveals the squalor of the Nauru detention camps, as well as the brutality - and even torture - perpetrated by our defence forces on shipwrecked asylum seekers. It introduces the opposition party of Nauru, and survivors who lost family members at sea. It also speaks of Kate's arrest and assault by the manager of the camps in Nauru.

A recent showing at RMIT sold out. Don't miss this special repeat screening in Trades Hall

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Feb 7
No War on Iraq No Australian Involvement
- next National Rally weekend 15/16 February

Please note that the Gaelic Club, like all clubs, is now required to have non members sign in. To avoid queues you may wish to become a social member for \$5.

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The nuclear weapons issue

The nations that are known to have nuclear weapons are the US, Russia, France, Britain, China, Israel, Pakistan and India. Before the overthrow of the apartheid regime in South Africa, that country had also developed nuclear weapons but after its election the ANC government had them destroyed. South Africa is the only country in the world to have carried out total nuclear disarmament.

At the time, the development by South Africa of a nuclear capacity was kept quiet and no protests were made by the Western powers.

To this day, there has been silence on Israel's development of nuclear weapons. No mention is made in the mass media. Western governments are party to this policy of silence. Nothing has been said by the International Energy Agency (IAEA).

The UN Security Council has said nothing. Israel is not a party to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty.

The Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) was first adopted in 1968 and many countries have adhered to it including the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

For many years the governments of the People's Republic of China and France criticised the Treaty as being a means to ensure the maintenance of the monopoly of nuclear weapons by the major powers. These countries only joined the Treaty in 1992, thereby becoming members of the exclusive nuclear club of big powers.

For many years the Soviet Union and China waged a strong campaign for the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons but with the break-up of the Soviet Union little is now being said by the five big powers about this obligation which is contained in Article 6 of the NPT.

Breach of treaties

Article 6 says that the parties will undertake negotiations "in good faith" on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

There was a Review Conference in 2000 of the NPT, but the nuclear powers did not find the time to negotiate complete nuclear disarmament. The United States and the other nuclear powers are, therefore, all in violation of their obligations under the Treaty.

The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), an agreement between the US and the Soviet Union, did result in some reduction of nuclear weapon stockpiles by these two powers, but

this Treaty has been unceremoniously torn up by President George Bush, signalling an open go in the nuclear arms race.

The Star Wars program now being pushed by the Bush administration will result in the nuclearisation of space.

The Western powers looked at this issue from the point of view of "evil" powers – the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China – and "good" powers – the US, Britain, France, Israel and apartheid South Africa.

Pakistan and India were also condemned by the West when they developed nuclear weapons but they are "big" powers and it was impossible for the UN or the IAEA to do anything about it.

In any case they fell between the "evil" powers and the "good" powers. As we know, Pakistan is now on "our" side, meaning on the side of US imperialism and the other Western powers.

It is on this background that the present virulent campaign is being waged against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) because it has pulled out of the NPT on January 11 this year.

North Korean statement

In a statement the Government of the DPRK says: "Though we pull out of the NPT, we have no intention to produce nuclear weapons and our nuclear activities at this stage will be confined only to peaceful purposes such as the production of electricity.

"If the US drops its hostile policy to stifle the DPRK and stops its nuclear threat to the DPRK, the DPRK may prove through a separate verification between the DPRK and the US, that it does not make any nuclear weapons."

The Government and people of the DPRK have faced 50 years of hostility from the US. The US has imposed a trade embargo, has occupied South Korea with about 37,000 troops, has stationed their "good" nuclear weapons in South Korea, has built a 10-metre high wall on



the South Korea side from one side of the Korean peninsula to the other and has made many threats of aggression.

Anti-American demos in South

What is new in the situation is the widespread anti-American demonstrations in South Korea over the killing of two South Korean schoolgirls by an American vehicle the crew of which were exonerated by US authorities.

The demonstrators are also demanding the removal of American troops from South Korea. More and more the South Korean people are in favour of the reunification of the two Koreas.

This is also a major factor behind the whipping up of a crisis atmosphere and the renewed threats being made against the DPRK.

There is another worry. It is that other nations may acquire nuclear weapons. The technology to manufacture such weapons is well known.

But would the world be a more dangerous place if other nations had nuclear weapons? Are other (smaller) countries all to be branded as "evil"?

The only country to have actually used nuclear weapons is the United States. The country that threatens

to use nuclear weapons to enforce its dictate is the United States. It has once again made such a threat in connection with its campaign for war against Iraq.

Similar threats have been made in the past against the DPRK. The DPRK Government's statement says, "A dangerous situation where our nation's sovereignty and our state's security are being seriously violated is ... due to the vicious, hostile policy of the US towards the DPRK".

US failed to deliver

The US and its lackeys refer to an earlier agreement made between the US and the DPRK in 1994. This agreement arose out of a similar "crisis". The "Agree Framework" provided that the DPRK would freeze its then existing nuclear power generating plants in exchange for the supply of heavy oil to the DPRK by the US and the construction of light water reactors which do not have by-products which could be turned into nuclear weapons.

Last year the US suspended its supply of heavy oil on the basis of a "nuclear suspicion". **Furthermore, the US failed to build the light water reactors.** The result is to undermine the ability of the DPRK, faced with the onset of winter, to supply electric power to its people and its industries.

The DPRK has called for the conclusion of a non-aggression pact between the US and the DPRK only to be met with the assertion by the US leaders that they will not negotiate.

The IAEA is also being manipulated by the US to put pressure on the DPRK. The IAEA has had nothing to say and has done nothing to protest against the continual nuclear threats by the US against other countries.

It has done nothing about the possession of nuclear weapons by Israel. The IAEA has not demanded that their inspectors be located in Israeli nuclear weapon plants.

The IAEA has not based its resolution on the full terms of the 1994 agreement. It only refers to part of it. It turns the DPRK into the victim and as responsible for the present situation.

It has not protested over the declaration of the US that the DPRK is part of an "axis of evil".

The IAEA appears to be hypocritical in its assessment of the role played by different powers with a fundamental policy that aims to maintain the "big" power monopoly of nuclear weapons.

The US attempts to portray itself as the only "moral" country, but what moral reason did earlier US Governments have to build the first atomic weapons and then to drop them on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

In effect the US is demanding that it and those countries that it regards as being "good" have the right to have nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and that all other countries must disarm and, in effect, place themselves at the feet of the US master-race.

Asked to comment on the present situation, Peter Symon, CPA Secretary told *The Guardian* that "the only sane policy for the world is the complete elimination by all countries of all weapons of mass destruction including nuclear weapons.

"The US leaders have consistently rejected such a demand in the past and are now planning to use their huge stockpile of weapons of mass destruction to impose their military, economic and political will on all other nations in the world without exception.

"To this end the US and its allied politicians and the owners of the mass media are piling up lies and half-truths to deceive the people and justify the monstrous plans that they are now implementing.

"The threat to the world's peace and security and to the sovereignty and independence of nations does not come from Iraq or the DPRK but from the leaders of the United States." ❖

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