

Hands off Medicare!

Medical care is a right not a privilege

Universal access to free medical care is a right. All Australians, no matter how wealthy or how poor, are entitled to the same treatment in a public hospital or from a medical practitioner. Prior to the last Federal Election Howard promised to maintain Medicare and retain bulk billing. This week John Howard promised Australians a "Fairer Medicare". What he has in fact announced is the end of universal access to bulk-billing and the eventual complete destruction of Medicare.

Andrew Jackson

No one, but no-one, believed Mr Howard's rosy spin.

"The impact of it ... I believe will be very beneficial on bulk-billing rates", Mr Howard told an astounded audience.

Dr John Deeble, the original architect of Medicare said he expects a dramatic decline in bulk-billing from 70 per cent to 50 per cent over the next two years.

"I don't think there's anything in this package to encourage doctors to inflate their fees", said Mr Howard with a straight face.

Dr Costa of the Doctors Reform Society tells us: "The new changes will make it easier for doctors to charge a hefty co-payment - and this co-payment will continue to grow over time".

Health Minister Kay Patterson said that under the Government's scheme, "nothing will change, except it will be more convenient for patients".

Disagreeing, Dr Kerry Phelps of the Australian Medical Association said the package represents a "seismic shift" in Medicare.

David Rivett, the AMA's spokesperson on General Practitioners said simply: "I don't think it's going to work".

What is clear is that the "Fairer Medicare" package will be the largest single backward step in Medicare's 20-year history.

Co-payments

Mr Howard insisted there would be no means testing and no "co-payments" - but this is exactly what his plan entails.

The Australian public will be separated into two distinct groups when seeking medi-

cal attention - those who hold Health Care Cards and those who don't.

Eligibility for a Health Care Card is already means-tested.

Australians who don't hold a Card will now almost certainly lose access to bulk-billing for a medical consultation.

Under the current Medicare system if the doctors want immediate payment they have to insist on full up-front payment and get the patient to claim a rebate from Medicare.

Originally, this was designed to make bulk-billing attractive.

Under Mr Howard's "Fairer Medicare" the attending doctor will be able to bill Medicare for the subsidised portion of the fee, but then also charge the patient a co-payment on top.

"The Government proposal to allow doctors to directly charge Medicare plus charge an up front co-payment simply makes it quicker and easier for doctors to charge what they like and retain bulk-billing just for the 'needy'", says Dr Tracy Schrader, Qld Secretary of the Doctors Reform Society.

Back of the queue

Mr Howard will then be offering an "incentive" of \$1-\$6 per patient, depending on geographic location, for doctors to bulk-bill Health Care, Veteran and Pension Card holders.

"The privately charged person will be paying \$50 or more and the pensioner will be rebated at \$26, so the poor and the elderly who really need to spend time with the doctor will be getting less time and less health care", said Dr Costa.

"The concept that bulk-billing should only be for pensioners and health care card holders will lead to many of those patients being treated as second class citizens, left to wait at the end of the queue behind the 'paying' patients", said Andrew McCallum, President of the Australian Council of Social Services.

"One of the major attractions of the present universal system is that such discrimination is much less likely."

Caught in the middle

"Low income families and the working poor will be the big losers", says Dr Costa.

"The bigger the family the more expensive the health care."



If a family is just \$1 over the Health Care Card cut-off line, then they will be hit with the same co-payments for health treatment as the very wealthiest in Australia.

Families, average and low-income earners will struggle to pay, queue in hospital emergency departments or end up not seeking medical treatment at all because of their inability to meet the co-payments on services.

Not just your GP

The changes will impact beyond bulk-billing by GPs. It also opens the doors for extending co-payments to other medical services currently bulk-billed.

The President of the Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association of NSW, Bill Whiley, said, "This package will encourage co-payments not just on GPs fees, but on other medical services such as pathology."

This fear was confirmed immediately when the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia said it was about to start negotiations on a new funding agreement, and bulk-billing "will certainly be on the agenda, particularly in light of the changes announced today", said Dr Debra Graves, CEO of the College.

Also in line for co-payments would be

operators of other services that are currently bulk-billed such as radiologists conducting x-rays and CT scans

Push to the private system

Despite years of hard campaigning by the Howard Government less than half of Australians have chosen to take out private health insurance.

Mr Howard's "Fairer Medicare" package is designed to force more people into the private system.

For the first time, private insurance companies will be able to offer "gap" insurance to cover the co-payments paid to a GP.

This co-payment insurance will be set (only initially, no doubt) at \$50 per annum. The catch is that the insurance will only kick in after \$1000 in co-payments have already been made!

Mr Howard says only in "catastrophic" cases would the \$1000 limit be reached.

This \$1050 for medical expenses (instead of fee-free bulk billing) is not all.

The cost of a prescription under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) rose this year to \$28, and the government plans to increase it by \$10 to \$38.

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Happy May Day
 The Guardian wishes all readers a Happy May Day. The unity and struggle of workers is of the utmost importance at this time of war and intensified capitalist offensive against workers. We hope to see you on the marches.
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ATSIC hits back
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Blueprint for union bashing

One of the most important issues facing the trade union movement this May Day is the Cole Royal Commission's report into the Building Industry. The Howard Government is rushing to implement its recommendations.

The Commission in its report is quite open about its objectives of reducing the cost of building and construction in Australia. Its recommendations are aimed at taking back more than a century of hard-won gains by workers and their unions.

The Commission speaks of making a "cultural change" in the workplace. By cultural change it means class outlook – the militant tradition of trade unions in that industry. To bring about this change the Commission makes a number of recommendations aimed at preventing industrial action by workers and trade unions, removing the unions from the workplace and eliminating collective bargaining, in particular union agreements. On his or her own an individual worker has no hope of standing up to an employer.

The Commission devoted 90 per cent of its time to anti-union topics, and this is reflected in its recommendations.

At present the big construction sites are 100 percent unionised, and the employers and government hate it. In the name of "freedom of association", the Commission comes up with recommendations to deunionise building sites and release bosses from their obligations to workers.

It does this by attacking trade union rights, particularly where union officials have the right to enter workplaces to inspect books, check safety measures and ensure that enterprise bargaining agreements are adhered to.

It attacks collective bargaining, in particular pattern bargaining where there is an industry framework agreement with the employer body, where the union negotiates new enterprise agreements on different sites at the same time with similar demands at each site.

The Commission wants to outlaw pattern bargaining and the universal application of agreements to all workers on a site. It wants to see contractors and sub-contractors competing with each other and driving down wages and conditions, with workers employed by different contractors doing similar work as others on the same site but under different conditions and rates of pay.

Collective bargaining would be replaced by individual contracts, AWAs (Australian Workplace Agreements).

It attempts to pit workers against the trade union and its officials by portraying the union as a distant third party interfering in their affairs. Trade union officials would be banned from holding a union position if a union defies a court order to end industrial action.

To achieve these aims the Commission has put forward a host of draconian recommendations to break the trade unions and their collective nature.

These measures include abolishing any form of centralised wage fixing, deregistration of unions that carry out pattern bargaining, and the establishment of a new agency to police the industry.

Unions would lose the right to negotiate enterprise agreements on behalf of their members. Prior to every agreement there would have to be a secret ballot of the workers to determine who would carry out the negotiations at that workplace, leaving workers open to employer bullying and intimidation.

There is a raft of other provisions and penalties against union officials, individual workers and their unions. The Cole Commission report does not seriously address the corruption and criminal practices of employers in the industry, the many safety issues or protection of workers' entitlements. The report is a political document for immediate use by the government against workers and trade unions in the building and construction industry.

The Cole Commission's \$60 million report is a blueprint for an all out take-back of wages, conditions and trade union rights by the government and employers in all sectors of the economy. The government has tackled one of the most militant and highly organised sections of the workforce. If it can crush the building and construction unions first, then it believes the rest will be easy.

The Commission's proposals, welcomed by the government, represent a major threat to the union movement in Australia and need to be fought with all the might the trade union movement can muster.

All out on May Day! If you don't fight you lose!

PRESS FUND

For the first time in its long and distinguished history, the CSIRO will now be required to carry out research on military and security projects. The government downplayed this bit of news. Perhaps they thought no-one would notice. *The Guardian*, on the other hand, seeks to bring these things to your attention! However, in order to do so we need your support for the Press Fund. We offer our sincere thanks to all this week's contributors, as follows: E and M Ainsworth \$12, Bert Appleton \$20, L Cockram \$30, "For Palm Sunday" \$200, "Round Figure" \$8.

This week's total: \$270. Progressive total: \$4145.

Australia's GE-free status at risk

It seemed like an horrendous April Fools' Day joke on the people of Australia when the Office of Gene Technology Regulator (declared on April 1 that the release of Bayer's genetically engineered (GE) canola into Australia would pose no risks to our health or environment. Environmental and consumer advocate groups greeted the Regulator's findings with outrage.

"April fools day is fitting for the release of this long awaited plan from the Office of Gene Technology Regulator", said Greenpeace spokesperson Jeremy Tager.

"The Gene Regulator's risk assessment is based on unbridled optimism. It assumes GE organisms are safe until proven otherwise – the opposite of the precautionary principle.

"Based on the same risk assessment process, tobacco and chemicals like DDT would be considered safe and welcomed into our food chain", Mr Tager said.

In Australia, the release of GE organisms is regulated by the Office of Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR).

The OGTR takes a narrow view when interpreting the environmental and health impacts of GE crops. It doesn't consider issues such as the economic impacts of GE crops on farmers or markets.

Applications for the commercial release of GE canola were lodged by agrochemical companies, Monsanto and Bayer, in June 2002.

The public now have until May 26 to make submissions on the Bayer application before the OGTR makes its final decision.

If the OGTR decides in favour

of its release for commercial production the GE canola will be able to be planted immediately – unless State Governments declare GE free zones.

Irreversible economic damage

GE crops are risky for our environment and a financial risk to farmers and rural communities.

Australia's three major export markets for canola, China, Japan and the EU, reject GE crops.

China and the EU are introducing tough new labelling laws that include labelling of oils.

If GE canola is brought to Australia, it will be difficult and expensive to maintain our GE-free status.

Separating GE grains from non-GE grains will mean that non-GE farmers will have to set up expensive segregation systems. Even then, contamination will still occur.

In Canada, canola fields have been almost totally GE contaminated. Canada once exported canola to lucrative European markets, which have since rejected GE foods.

In 2000 and 2001, Canada's canola exports to Europe fell to

zero. Legal action is under way against multinational chemical companies, Monsanto and Bayer, which introduced GE canola.

Time to act

There is time for Australia to retain its GE-free status and avoid the huge and still mainly unknown environmental, health and economic consequences.

The NSW, WA and Tasmanian State Governments have all declared that they will maintain or impose moratoriums on GE crops after the decision by the OGTR.

South Australia has also indicated that it will not allow planting this year.

It is now critical that Queensland and Victoria declare a moratorium on GE in their states also.

It is urgent that residents of all States write to those two Premiers and demand they join with the other States to ensure Australia remains completely GM free.

All emails must include a postal return address.

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A pillar of strength

Tributes to Sheila Suttner on her 80th birthday flowed with warmth and admiration at a function in her honour organised by the WA Branch of the Communist Party on April 12.

by Joan Williams

More than 50 people attended, representing the wide range of organisations to which she belongs or supports. They were welcomed by a representative of the Nyoongar people.

Sheila has inspired people and organisations with her confidence and vitality, welcoming all she meets as part of her family, accepting them as they are, with consistent warmth that makes many friends from many countries.

She had a rib cracked in the historic demonstrations on the site of the Swan Brewery, which transgressed the path of the Wagyl, the snake of Aboriginal Dreamtime belief.

Speakers at the celebration included Fay Hannah from the CPA, Giz Watson Greens MLC, Paul Kaplan from WARE (formerly CARE), Ralph White from WA Voluntary Euthanasia Society (WAVES).

Sheila's daughter Anne and son Alan spoke lovingly of their mother. Alan Suttner had come over from Singleton, NSW for the occasion.

Sheila is an inspiration to us all in her dedication to the plight of others.

In South Africa, Sheila and her son Raymond are noted figures in the struggle against apartheid.

When Sheila came to Australia she took up the Aboriginal cause. Luckily for us, she settled in Perth.

A distinguished lecturer, speaker, writer and social worker, she has helped young people who came to

her, and drawn others into activity for democratic rights, peace and social justice.

She is respected as a Communist by all who know her. The Party congratulates her for her dedication to the cause of socialism and the struggles of working people.

There was something in the air that all present agreed upon that comrade Sheila has been a friend, a comrade and an inspiration for us all in the Wild West.

Vic Williams thanked Giz Watson and her staff for allowing us to celebrate Sheila's birthday at her office in Leederville WA.

Dear Sheila, on your 80th birthday, you will be forever young. We wish you health. ☺



Sheila Suttner with local Aboriginal activist Clarrie Issacs

Sydney
**Celebrate May Day
With the Communist
Party of Iran**
Cultural Program & Speakers
Saturday 3 May 6.30pm
at the Greystanes
Community Centre
732-734 Merrylands Rd,
Greystanes

Australian nature under major threat

Many of Australia's native plants and animals are threatened with extinction, according to a major Federal Government report, *Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment 2002*. The problems revealed in the report could be remedied by urgent and determined government action but so far no federal or state government has shown any willingness to do so.

by Peter Mac

The report, prepared after extensive national research, concluded that at least 1595 native plants and animals face extinction from land clearing, cattle grazing, feral pests and inappropriate fire regimes. Some 2900 ecosystems may soon disappear. The threatened plants include varieties of those Australian icons, the eucalypts and wattle trees.

Vast areas of the continent have been devastated by salinity from land clearing and irrigation. Some 73 percent of Australia's once mighty Murray River is extracted for intense irrigation. It is silting up and will soon cease to flow altogether. Global warming has exacerbated all these trends, and Australia is one of the worst emitters of greenhouse gases.

The crisis has the potential to change forever the landscape that Australians know and love.

Amazingly, the Howard Government's response to the report has been upbeat and positive!

For example, regarding land clearing (confirmed as the single most significant threat) Environment Minister David Kemp trumpeted: "Under the NHT (National Heritage Trust) almost 400,000 Australian volunteers have so far participated in over 12,000 projects which have seen ... 98,510 hectares of predomi-

nantly cleared land replanted with native vegetation species."

Kemp overlooked the fact that the NHT scheme was intermittent (compared to land clearing, which is proceeding all the time) and that the manual replanting was slow and minuscule in extent, compared to the highly mechanised agribusiness land clearing programs. The new species planted were also often inappropriate for the area.

Funding for the NHT scheme was provided by blackmailing Parliament into approving the sale of the second part of Telstra.

State and federal governments have so far refused to clamp down on the agribusiness and heavy industry firms that are ruining the Australian environment.

Greens Senator Bob Brown commented: "...the peril for thousands of Australia birds, animals, reptiles, plants and insects has become far worse due to land clearing, deforestation, urban sprawl, salination and global warming.

"All these are government-promoted, or at least made worse by government inaction at local, state and federal level.

"The destruction of rainforests in Tasmania is authorised by Prime Minister Howard. The awesome land clearing in the eastern mainland states is allowed by Labor Premiers Beattie, Carr and Bracks.



Once fertile farmland marred by massive salt pans, SA.

Photo: Ana Pha

"The release of imported and potentially disease-carrying food stocks to fish farms in SA and the loss of wetlands in SW Western Australia are monuments to how quick dollars lead to dead species.

"In Tasmania the current regeneration burns under Premier Bacon are a travesty of both forest ecosystems preservation and the urgent need to halt the release of global warming greenhouse gases.

"Last week's legislation to build Meander Dam directly overrode a court ruling to protect an endangered species in Tasmania.

"The Howard Government and Crean Opposition's policy directions are a prescription for the next generations of Australians living on a continent studded with monuments to deliberate extinctions of species and ecosystems." ❖

Boundless greed

Cotton agribusiness RMI, a division of Carrington Cotton, proposes to create a vast new cotton growing property in north-west NSW. The company is said to already own a quarter of the entire Macintyre River water concessions. The company appears unconcerned at the fatal impact the scheme would have on local plant and animal species, and the further huge loss of water from the stricken Murray-Darling river system. The owners of adjacent farms have protested that the scheme would reduce further the amount of water available to them from the river, and that its levee banks would also divert water onto their properties during floods. But as Rhett Butler might have observed: "Frankly, my dear, they just don't give a damn."

The crisis has the potential to change forever the landscape that Australians know and love.

Media manipulation of Baxter Events

The Easter weekend's National Convergence on the Baxter Immigration Detention Centre outside Port Augusta brought out the usual responses from the usual sources. The mainstream media locked on to images of police facing down demonstrators, responding to breaches of fences and, in general, maintaining the peace despite the supposed best efforts of the protestors.

by Bob Briton

Even before the events of the long weekend unfolded, an image was being painted in the media of small numbers of police being left to deal with thousands of extremist thugs. "When our people are at risk - their physical being is at risk - we'll then utilise the equipment available to us", Assistant Commissioner Graham Brown told the press.

In the end, some of the 357 South Australian Police present chose to use the "civil disorder" gear in far less dramatic circumstances - in fact, in circumstances for which they bear a heavy responsibility.

A disturbing incident on the first day set the tone for the type of confrontation that marred the weekend.

Initially, protestors were told that they would have to camp beyond the roadblock set up three kilometres from the detention centre. They were later permitted to carry their camping gear beyond this limit and to set up camp about

one kilometre closer to the Baxter facility.

The police then changed their attitude and charged the new camp on foot and horseback in a frightening display of "get out of our way" authoritarianism. The five-minute warning to move on given by the police before mass arrests were to take place had not even expired.

In the end, 33 demonstrators and one journalist were arrested over the four days of the protest for a variety of offences including "offensive language" and "loitering".

Premier Mike Rann made the most of the opportunity to pander to what he must think is a large parochial section of the SA electorate.

"There is a small minority of protesters, that come from Victoria in particular, who are simply over here on some kind of violent frolic ... they are more interested in having a stoush... I actually believe that there is a minority group from interstate that are basically 'dial-a-demo'", he is reported as saying in Adelaide's daily *Advertiser*.

Elsewhere, Mr Rann described the activists as "ferals" and "meat-heads".

Other outrageous events of the weekend and of the days leading up to it got scant attention in the media. These were to do with the treatment of asylum seekers detained at Baxter during the lock down of the facility in preparation for the protests.

Despite reassurances from Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock that life was going on as normal in the former army facility, the truth was that repression had been drastically increased.

Melbourne Refugee Action Collective protest organiser Fleur Taylor told the media that on the night of April 6 eight men held in the Red 3 compound at Baxter were taken to the isolation cells known as the "Management Unit". They were bound hand and foot with "flexi-cuffs" and a special tape was applied to further restrict movement.

Tape was placed over their mouths for periods of up to ten hours. At least one of the men was severely beaten by a guard employed by Australasian Correctional Management (ACM) - a fact independently verified by a visiting GP.

A further 14 Iranian men were held in the isolation block for more than two weeks. They were

released only after several of them had slashed themselves. While they had been held for allegedly intending to start fires, none of the men have since been charged with any offences.

Visitors to Baxter reported that during the four days of the demonstrations, 30 ACM guards in navy blue uniforms and in full riot gear would march round the compound shouting "hup two-three-four".

Five men were "extracted" without notice from Baxter to other facilities. The sudden, unexplained disappearances added to the frightening and unsettling atmosphere in the camp.

Men in some compounds were strip-searched daily, being forced to remove all their clothing, bend over and spread their buttocks in a humiliating fashion.

Children were threatened that their recently granted "privilege" of attending local schools would be withdrawn if they "misbehaved". Four of the Baxter children are permanently denied schooling.

Some sort of over-reaction to the protests was expected. Greg Wallace, the Department of Immigration officer in charge of Baxter, headed the now closed Curtin "hell-hole" in WA.

When asked by a former ACM guard at that facility: "What regula-

tions govern these people?" Wallace is reported to have said, "What regulations we say."

Pamela Curr, the Australian Greens National Spokesperson for Refugees, told the media that these possibilities were considered before the convergence on Baxter but that representatives in the detention centre had asked them to go ahead to focus attention on their plight.

The sorts of incidents described above happen on a continuing basis and, because they take place on Department of Defence property, the SA Police cannot investigate them. The Australian Federal Police has shown itself to be reluctant to get involved.

"So what do we do - just sit quietly while people are locked up in 'the management unit', beaten - it has happened before, and it will happen again - and there is nothing we can do about it until one day ACM go too far: someone dies and even then, it will no doubt be covered up."

At one point during the Easter convergence, detainees managed to contact the protestors by phone and told them that their chants had been heard inside the facility and that it had lifted the people's spirits to know that such solidarity with them exists. ❖

The Magdalene Sisters

Beautifully filmed, the story begins in 1964 with three so-called wayward young women being placed in a "Magdalene" home run by the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland. The reasons for these placements are very trivial. Bernadette (Nora-Jane Noone), an orphan, was too friendly to the boys. Rose (Dorothy Duffy) is a young unwed mother whose family had abandoned her, and Margaret (Anne-Marie Duff) was sexually abused and was sent there to protect the family name.



At the beginning of the film the Sister in charge states that "Mary Magdalene was a sinner of the worst kind ... and that by hard work and earthly means the soul can redeem itself." Mary Magdalene is the "fallen woman" of the Bible, the prostitute who found redemption through hard work and became a hand maiden to Jesus.

This was the path these poor young women were to tread, of exploitation as slave labour in a commercial laundry, "The Magdalene", owned by the Catholic Church. They were assaulted and denied basic human rights. One of the women was not even permitted to keep her own name.

The actors are exceptional and one feels their every sadness.

One wonders how such an inhumane institution came into being and still existed in Ireland until 1996. It has been estimated that 30,000 women and young girls lived and died in the Magdalene laundries.

The period of the film was a time of women's liberation in the Western world but these young women were stripped of their liberty and condemned to indefinite sentences of work in order to atone for their so-called sins, in the footsteps of Mary Magdalene.

Australia, like Ireland, also had its own institutions. An estimated

40,000 Aboriginal children, 10,000 child migrants and as many as 100,000 non-indigenous children were institutionalised in Australia in the last century.

Up until the 1970s there were commercial laundries run by the Good Shepard Sisters – an order of Catholic nuns – in the capital cities of Australia. Many of the girls who worked in these laundries had come from Catholic institutions.

The Magdalene Sisters was directed by Peter Mullan. It is the winner of the prestigious Golden Lion for best film at the Venice Film Festival. It is currently showing at independent cinemas in capital cities. ❖

"Like giving Dracula the keys to the blood bank"

"Vanishing girl Natasha Ryan on her years in the cupboard" was an article in the Murdoch tabloid *Daily Telegraph*, about a girl who went missing for five years since the age of 14. Thought to have been murdered, she was discovered living nearby with her boyfriend. The capitalist media love that stuff. Kerry Packer's Nine Network shelled out a small fortune to get exclusive rights to the television version of her story. Natasha Ryan is hot property, for TV ratings and newspaper sales.

by Tom Pearson

On the other hand you have to search harder for stories on things that have a profound effect on workers. Such as the new rules allowing ASIO to hand over strictly classified material to employers to deal with "terrorist threats".

The Federal Government's terror legislation is sweeping in its scope and vindictive in its draconian state powers: action by organised labour will be considered a threat to national security.

Never mind that the criminal nature of the employing class is to be seen every day, every where. Like the King Brothers Bus Group on the NSW north coast whose owners have disappeared, leaving debts of \$220 million and owing their 450 drivers three week's wages.

The company is contracted to the NSW Transport Department to provide school bus services. The

Department has distanced itself from the debacle, saying it has no responsibility to question the financial viability of the companies it signs contracts with. The son of one of the owners capped it off with "I know absolutely nothing of where he is".

Meanwhile, King Brothers' drivers are fuming. "The workers in the yard have been trying to get a hold of them", said one, "but both their mobile phones are disconnected". The drivers' super hasn't been paid for more than three months by the company and as a result they have no insurance cover.

All this while the Australian Bankers' Association carries out a campaign to have draft legislation scrapped that would give maximum priority to the payment of workers' entitlements when a company goes bust.

Said the banks: "Our strong conclusion from examining the

maximum priority rule is that it will significantly impact on the lending and loan security arrangements of many businesses". Translation – "Stuff the workers who created the profits, we want the money".

Perhaps even more vicious and underhand is transnational James Hardie, whose criminal negligence saw thousands of its employees exposed to asbestos for decades. Now the company is blackmailing current and past employees by demanding they hand over their personal medical records in exchange for a medical program that monitors the effect of their exposure to the deadly asbestos fibres.

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union points out that James Hardie wants the medical records because it will give them more leverage to avoid paying compensation.

"James Hardie has a track record of opposing any attempt by employees to gain compensation for asbestos-related diseases", said the union's Victorian branch.

"They will do anything they can to minimise compo payments. For people to sign away their prior medical history is a bit like giving Dracula the keys to the blood bank." ❖

LABOUR NOTES

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has renewed its call for the Federal Government to invest in Australian shipping to safeguard the coast against drug shipments in the wake of the arrest of the *Pong Su* off Newcastle over the Easter weekend. The union has renewed its support for the development of an integrated coast guard to protect Australia. The Howard Government supports the use of cheap flag of convenience shipping (FOC). Apart from its abominable treatment of workers and low safety standards, FOC shipping is notorious for its use by criminals trading drugs and weapons.

The NSW Teachers Federation (NSWTF) has commenced a campaign to increase teachers' pay with a new round of radio and television advertisements. "In the lead-up to the State Election the Carr Government promised to begin salaries negotiations immediately after the election. The new Minister for Education, Dr Refshauge, has made statements recognising that teachers are 'low paid'. Teachers across the state want to do everything possible to avoid the bitter disputation during negotiations four years ago. Goodwill is needed on both sides including a budgetary provision from government to substantially increase teachers' salaries", said NSWTF President Marie O'Halloran.

When is it the right time for a wage rise? Never, as far as employers are concerned. There's always an excuse: fear of overheating the economy, inflation, recession... The latest excuse comes from Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry director Peter Anderson: global uncertainty, caused by the invasion of Iraq. The ACCI is opposed to the ACTU's \$24.60 minimum wage claim. Despite all the Treasurer's statements to the effect that Australia has the strongest economy in the Western world, the poor employers cannot afford a tiny pay for the workers they exploit on starvation wages.

Union calls for SARS compo

The Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union (LHMU) says workers affected by the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) should expect compensation from their employers.

"Some of our members are on the front-line of this public health crisis", Jeff Lawrence, the LHMU National Secretary, said.

"They are community heroes who deserve our praise and support – they should not at the same time have to worry about their economic well being."

"All workers who have lost income, or cannot go to work because of the possible exposure to SARS, should be compensated.

"We believe employers should just pay their employees if they are affected by this public health crisis."

Mr Lawrence said that if employers are not covering lost wages then the Federal and State Governments should actively support workers who file a workers' compensation claim over this issue.

The LHMU has also called on employers of all front-line workers to sit down with government officials and unions to co-operatively work out guidelines to protect these heroes from contracting the highly contagious and potentially fatal disease.

"Our members, working at airports, throughout the health sector and at major hospitality centres

– such as casinos and at restaurants – have begun to express their worries to union delegates and organisers about the real threat of SARS to themselves and their families", said Mr Lawrence.

"They have noted the latest reports show that SARS is being spread through workplaces.

"Our health care membership, and the LHMU airport workers, are at or near the front line of this public health emergency", he noted.

"Their employers and the government should be ensuring that these 'heroes' have enough money to feed their families. Our people, rightly, want assurances from their employers, from government and from the union that their health and their economic well-being will be protected." ❖

Court rejects callous government refugee policies

The Federal Court last week decided that people deemed not to be refugees, but unable to return home, could not legally be held in detention centres.

by Peter Mac

The unanimous decision means that up to 100 detainees should now be released, barring further government appeals. The decision may also provide grounds for the original subject of the case, 25-year old Palestinian Akram al Masri, to charge the government with unlawful imprisonment.

The issue is highly relevant for eight people recently detained in solitary confinement at Baxter Detention Centre. They'd committed no offence, but were imprisoned simply because the centre's management considered they might become involved in a disturbance over Easter.

In another significant event, Afghan asylum seeker Nohib Sarwari has finally been reunited with his family at Launceston after months of separation. The family was imprisoned at Baxter last year, although they'd lived and worked in Launceston for a year.

Mrs Sarwari and the four children were later released, but the government detained Mr Sarwari, alleging he was actually from Pakistan, not Afghanistan.

The people of Launceston, with whom the family was very popular, raised enough money to send an investigator to Afghanistan to prove Sarwari's nationality. The Refugee Review Tribunal subsequently agreed to release him, albeit with a \$30,000 surety, which the Launceston community immediately raised.

The issue of human rights was again highlighted by the possible arrival of more asylum seekers.

A boatload of 30 to 40 Vietnamese asylum seekers, including ten small children, went without food for three days before reaching Indonesia, where they were forced to pass.

Had they not run into trouble in Singapore waters, they most likely would now indeed be languishing indefinitely – in effect as prisoners

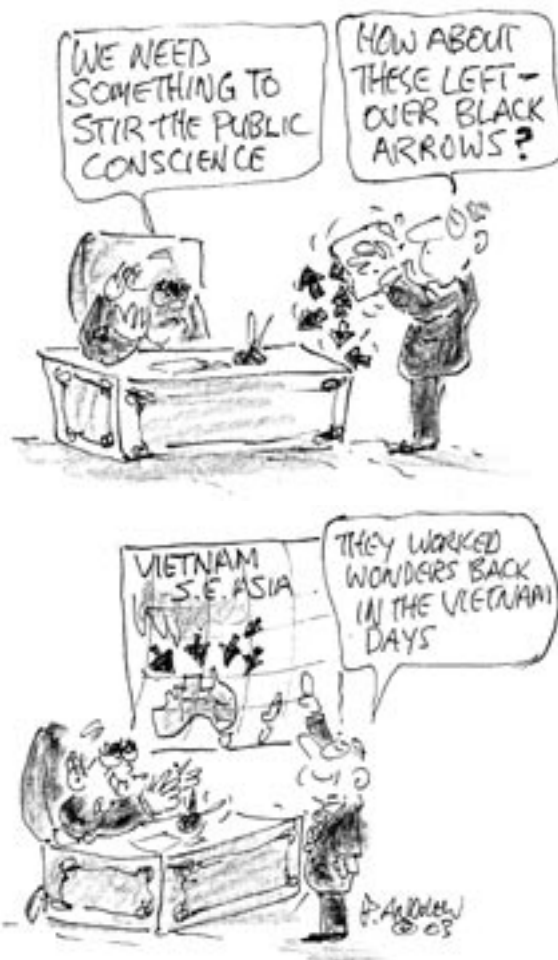
– at the behest of the Howard Government.

The plight of these people, whom Immigration Minister Ruddock contemptuously dismissed as on an "opportunistic venture", has once again brought into focus the callousness and racism of the government's human rights policy.

Federal Attorney-General Darryl Williams recently stormed out of a meeting with his state and territory counterparts after they raised the human rights aspects of three proposed pieces of Commonwealth legislation.

The first involves the government's intention to override UN stipulations concerning the banning of deemed terrorist organisations. The second concerns a requirement for legal aid lawyers to obtain security clearances before acting in cases involving national security.

The third, which finally caused Williams to lose his cool, involved a proposed requirement for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission to obtain the Attorney-General's permission to intervene in cases such as the Tampa affair. ❖



Govt softens edges of "breach" system

Two major wins and one kick in the teeth will result from the passing of the **Australians Working Together Bill in the Senate. One of the wins will bring enormous relief to unemployed people.**

by Andrew Jackson

After years of pressure by welfare advocate groups, charities and the public the Federal Government finally caved in and moved to reduce some of the severe financial penalties imposed on the unemployed under the "breach" system.

Penalties of \$890 could be reduced to \$275 for some unemployed people on Newstart Allowance.

The National Welfare Rights

Network (NWRN) estimates that two out of every three people breached over the next year, or up to 100,000 unemployed people, could see their penalties reduced as a result of the changes.

Unfortunately the Government has failed to take steps to reduce the harsh penalties facing people who are breached a second or third time, where they can lose up to all of their payment for eight weeks, or a quarter of their payment for six months.

The Democrats used their balance of power in the Senate to force the change in the breach system in return for passing other aspects of the Bill.

The one major step backward of the Bill was the extension of the "Activity Test" obligation to the older unemployed and single parents.

A Breaches Task Force has been established to monitor the extension of the penalty system and address the outstanding concerns of welfare groups that were not addressed in this legislation.

Surprisingly, some other aspects of the Bill were positive.

These include: \$433 million for Working Credits*; \$20 million in language, literacy and numeracy allowances; \$62 million for the Personal Support Program to assist vulnerable job seekers and \$251 million to assist sole parents into employment.

Unemployed people have been fined a staggering \$1 billion worth of Social Security payments between 1996-2002. This amounts to an average penalty of \$700 for every unemployed person.

Almost one million activity test breaches and 500,000 administrative breaches have been applied during that time.

Report after report – from the Commonwealth Ombudsman to the Independent Review into Social Security penalties and breaches (the Pearce Report) – found that breaches are counterproductive and are unfairly and arbitrarily applied.

It was also found that Centrelink often fails to contact a person prior to imposing a penalty – as they are required to do under the Legislation.

* When long-term unemployed resume work, they are entitled to receive an additional bonus from the government after they start work and unemployment benefits cut out. ❖

Hands off Medicare!

continued from page 1

Of course Howard would say, there is the safety net. But this kicks in at \$708.40. After that it is \$3.70 a time if your medication has not already been removed from the PBS list.

Two-tiered system

Mr Howard's "Fairer Medicare" plan will actually destroy Medicare and set up a two-tiered system.

First class health treatment will be available to the wealthy who can afford access to private health services and facilities, where the quality of treatment is based on your ability to pay.

A second-class health system will be available to the extremely low income, non-paying patients. Their services will be provided by the remnants of a run-down public health system or contracted out by the government to private operators.

Millions of middle and low-income workers and their families will be left hanging between the two systems, excluded from the public system because they are not

impoverished enough to qualify for public health treatment, but unable to afford the high-priced private services.

Medicare – fight for the future

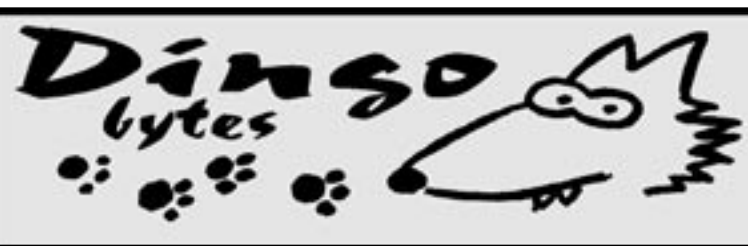
The only "universal" aspect of Mr Howard's Medicare plan is his condemnation of it.

Since its introduction in 1984 the Australian public have overwhelmingly supported the Medicare system. And before that they supported just as overwhelmingly its predecessor Medibank in the 1970s.

The Howard Government's plans can and must be defeated in the Senate.

While all opposition parties have declared they will block the changes, history has shown us how easily deals can be done.

A massive campaign and struggle is required outside Parliament, involving all forces who support the retention of universal access to bulk-billing, and our state-funded health care system. ❖



Under cover of the fog of war the Howard Government is carrying out a war of attrition against the working people of Australia. There's the "baby bonus" (\$10 a week to most women to keep them out of paid employment) and cuts to child care funding in such a way that centres in working class areas have been forced to close. There's the destruction by a thousand cuts of Medicare. There's the dismantling of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), with plans to cut its staff from 1300 to 20. There's the offensive aimed at destroying the trade union movement. There's the cuts across the board in welfare. There's the tens of millions of dollars meant for public education being diverted to the private system. There's the dismantling of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. The list is long.

The people of the NSW town of Broken Hill have been hit hard over the past decade. A mining town with the mines closed means unemployment and tough times for the local economy. Now the town's Buttercup bakery, owned by food giant Goodman Fielder, is slated for closure. Goodman Fielder was the subject of a hostile takeover by transnational Burns Philp a month back, and now Burns Philp is slashing 1600 jobs to recoup Goodman's \$2.7 billion debt. Bakeries in Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Mount Gambier will also be closed next month. Said Burns Philp managing director Tom Degnan, in a comforting corporate message to the people who are to be thrown out of work, "This is the first step in a program which will bring Goodman Fielder's Australian baking costs in line with their competition."

Meanwhile, at the privatised Sydney Airport, its owner, Southern Cross Airports Corporation Holdings, announced a March-quarter profit increase of 13.9 percent; \$98.5 million up on the same time last year. The Airport Corporation's chairman and chief executive, the former top public service bureaucrat for the Howard Government, Max Moore-Wilton, is compiling his hit list of the jobs that are to go at the end of May. SARS and the war on Iraq are being used as the excuse. A notorious slash and burn merchant who got his lucrative post at the airport through the Howard Government's network of corporate nods and winks, Moore-Wilton wasn't known in the public service as Max the Axe for nothing.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is former HIH director Rodney Adler. Found to be one of the parasites criminally responsible for the collapse of the insurance company, Adler stated, "I still have a lot to offer." And in this system, he's probably right.

Human shield tells of ongoing tragedy in Iraq

Last week Adelaide resident Ruth Russell returned from Iraq where she had been serving as a human shield. She spoke once again with Bob Briton from *The Guardian* about her decision to go, her assessment of the success of the human shield project and about the devastating effects of the war on the Iraqi people. (See *Guardian* No. 1124 (5-2-03) for interview with Ruth prior to her departure.)

Guardian: *What was your role as a human shield, where were you stationed, and what was the reaction of the Iraqis to your efforts?*

Ruth: The human shields originally organised five sites with the Iraqi Government and also they had them classified by the United Nations as bona fide humanitarian sites – that's a really important point.

Everyone could freely choose where they went so I chose to go to the Taji food silo because this is where the Australian wheat is stored. I wanted something that would symbolically resonate with the Australian people so I was either thinking of the food silo site or water storage. They are both important Australian symbols.

Everywhere we went we were totally overwhelmed with the Iraqis' response to us. It was simply over the top and ongoing all the time I was there because – you must remember that for 12 years they had been suffering under the sanctions – the world had not listened to the Iraqis.

No-one had come to Baghdad to see how they were suffering and, all of a sudden, all these foreigners were coming in to Baghdad to talk to them and to say, "Look, we're here to stay with you" because they did not want a war.

It was not in their best interests to have a war, and for us to come and stand beside them and say, "we are here, we are going to stay through this war" was just an amazing emotional, psychological boost to them.

It was embarrassing really, the extent of their gratitude. Some examples I will give is that, even when the war was on, and everybody was on emergency rations, (and no shops were open, so that once your rations went, that was it) they still insisted on having us in for a banquet in their homes. We didn't want to use their emergency food but it was so important to them. They really needed to thank us and have us in their homes. It was so important.

We got gifts of flowers and roses when the war was on! All the time, no matter where we went, people would come up and shake you hand and want to be with you. It was just over the top.

G: *Did you witness much destruction where you were? The impression that we were given through CNN, the BBC et al is that it was all fairly clinical and restricted to military and government targets – that destruction of civilian sites was quite rare.*

R: Well, there was both. There was precision bombing. When I moved into Taji food silo, I only found out a few days later that we were only five kilometres away from one of the major rocket bases

just outside Baghdad where they destroyed the rockets that were over range just a few days before the war started.

That particular rocket range was bombed continuously the whole three weeks we were there. So we saw massive mushroom clouds and huge firebombs. Every time they hit the site our whole building would shake and shudder and that was, I suppose, what you could call a neat, precise military targeting that they got right.

Having said that, we would go into the city from our site during the day and find out what sites had been bombed. We were free to go to the sites, we'd go to a market and we would see the shops and film where people had been sitting in a café – 16 people killed, 30 injured, where bombs had gone seriously astray.

We would go to schools and see everything totally shattered. We could film quite a lot. The only things we couldn't film were military places.

There was a lot of indiscriminate bombing, there's no doubt about that. We were allowed to go to hospitals and talk to the actual people who were casualties. Now what do you say to a man who's had his house bombed, he's lost his wife and six children. Those sorts of stories were repeated endlessly.

I have footage of a veterinarian who had his farm just near Taji – his whole house was flattened. You'd drive along and see new bomb damage every day. There was bombing and destruction all around Baghdad.

G: *Could you get any feeling about the reaction of the Iraqi people to the end of Saddam and to the occupation by Coalition forces?*

R: We made a decision not to compromise the Iraqi people by asking if they supported Saddam or not because that would have put them in danger. We were clear that we only wanted to focus on the humanitarian side, but I was interested to watch what happened when the war was over, especially when they knew that America was in control.

To my surprise, initially there was no celebration. The Iraqi families that we knew were all in trauma and shock. What I did notice was that every house took down their compulsory picture of Saddam.

They disappeared very quickly, but I thought there probably might have been some celebration, not only that they'd now no longer have to live under a cruel dictator, but also that sanctions would be lifted and that maybe life would be better for them now. That is not the case, that's not how they see it.

They were totally in shock and I saw people who changed out of their Western clothes and went into



"There were the same burnt out cars right through the whole 20 kilometres to the city."

their traditional Arab clothes, and I wondered why they were doing this.

When I reflected, it's because they are actively saying we do not want Westernisation. We want to retain our own identity; our own culture and we want Iraq to be reconstructed by ourselves. They will not want foreigners coming in and telling them how to do it.

They're quite capable of reconstructing it themselves, but they won't be given the decision. I think that's another tragedy happening now.

G: *Did the Iraqis have any separate opinions about Australia's role in the war?*

R: It was interesting because when I was at the Taji food silo quite a few of the people there had actually visited Australia and the common question to me was "I thought Australia was our friend. We've got good trade relations. Why is Australia doing this?"

There really is no answer. That's what the Australian people have to answer. Why on earth were we involved in this at any stage?

To put Australia in perspective, when the war was on the only comment I heard in relation to Australia in the whole three weeks I was there came from the BBC and it was in the first week of the war. It said an Australian pilot had refused to fly a mission because it could be too close to civilians – that was it. There were no other comments about Australia, which shows what relevance we had in this coalition. I think that says it all, really. Why WAS Australia involved in all this?

G: *Did the Iraqis that you spoke to have any ideas about what might happen to their country?*

R: The day I left Baghdad was the very first day people could come safely out of their homes. Iraqis were meeting in the main square where the American tanks were with the toppled statue of Saddam. They were starting to demonstrate against the Americans saying, "we want an Iraqi government".

This is the tragedy that's going to unfold. They will not accept foreigners coming – they will resist it. I don't know to what extent it's going to happen, I don't know how it's going to be resolved or what role the United Nations is going to play.

There's going to be deep resentment because they want their culture. That land has thousands of years of history that the Iraqi people have such pride for and their culture is so different to the West. They will not want all their structures and their whole lifestyle completely changed. It will be actively resisted.

Something that isn't being recognised is that countless civilians would have died in this war. There is no record of them. They would have been buried without record. The journalists weren't there – they didn't even get to the hospitals to see the dead people brought in and collect them. Many burnt bodies were buried by the roadside because they weren't able to be identified.

When I say that there were so many civilians killed, an example of this is when we were on the outskirts of where a tank battle had been on the Sunday. Right up until the Thursday, it was known that anyone who went anywhere near the area would be shot on sight by Coalition forces.

If anyone tried to cross to get

to their family, for instance, the soldiers would aim at the vehicle's gas tank and the whole car would ignite and burn people to death. There were civilian bodies everywhere, far more than any soldiers.

This happened again at other sites. When we got to Jordan there were Australian human shields who were at the 7th of April water treatment plant. They told us the story of when they were asked by the local Iraqi people if they would negotiate with the American soldiers on their behalf because 17 of their people's bodies had been out on the bridge for four days. They wanted to bring them home to bury them.

Here were just two incidents to which we were eyewitnesses in completely different parts of Baghdad that were never reported.

We know there were at least seventeen dead just in this one section of the bridge and about 25 civilians in one section of the road outside our site.

When we went into Baghdad there were the same burnt out cars right through the whole 20 kilometres to the city. These weren't isolated instances.

There was a massive number of civilian casualties, and this is what we have to talk about – the morality of war. Why should innocent and defenceless people die? Surely this was not the way to solve what turned out to be a furphy anyhow.

The Iraqi scientist who was in charge of all the chemical weapons of mass destruction that we had to go to war for said they that didn't have any anyhow. There were no weapons of mass destruction, so this whole war was ostensibly for nothing. ☘

Baghdad streets scooped by Iraqi CP

The Iraqi Communist Party was the first to distribute a post-Saddam newspaper on the streets of Baghdad and other Iraqi cities, only 10 days after the occupation of Baghdad by US troops. Tens of thousands of copies of *Tareeq Al-Sha'ab* (People's Path) were distributed in Baghdad and other cities and towns throughout the country. The Party also immediately opened offices in Baghdad and other cities.

This is a remarkable achievement given the many decades of severe repression and illegality that the Party suffered at the hands of the regime. Thousands of its members lost their lives in the struggle against the Saddam Hussein dictatorship. Despite this, it was able to retain organisation throughout Iraq.

This development will not be to the liking of the US occupationists. They did not occupy Iraq only to see the emergence of an influential Communist Party and a progressive government that will demand the US oil corporations keep their dirty hands off Iraq's oil resources and that US troops get out.

The first edition of the Party's newspaper, *Tareeq Al-Sha'ab*, called for the establishment of a Federal Democratic Iraq.

The following is a slightly abridged version of the newspaper's front page article:

At last the bloody, barbaric and repressive regime of Saddam Hussein has fallen!

With the collapse of the tyrant and his regime, the hopes and will of the overwhelming majority of our Iraqi people have been fulfilled. They were the first and main victim of his injustice and oppression, and the continuous fodder for his internal and external wars and military invasions.

They were the ones who paid the price for his reckless and foolish policies that had no regard for the people and homeland.

It is difficult today to describe the joy of the masses of the people at the fall of the dictator and getting rid of his regime despite all the tragedies and pain that accompanied this collapse as a result of invasion and war which should have and could have been avoided.

A hated and isolated regime

But there is no doubt also that the war was not the only reason for its fall.

This regime crumbled and collapsed for other fundamental reasons – the weight of its crimes against the people, its abuse of the interests and sovereignty of the homeland, the exposure of both the people and the homeland to a succession of catastrophes with no end in sight, the latest of which is the catastrophes of this last war itself.

The hatred and resentment towards the tyrant and his rule gave rise to the tough and relentless struggle waged by the people's patriotic forces, with tremendous and immeasurable sacrifices, in order to overthrow the dictatorship and get rid of its woes and effects.

It was only natural, therefore, that the people would distance themselves from the dictator and would not rush, or even think of rushing, to his defence thus leaving

him and his clique to face their fate, which no-one had any doubt, would be defeated and would collapse.

Our people have punished the dictator and his clique for all the violations, excesses and crimes committed against them.

Incomplete joy

But our people's joy at the fall of the tyrant and his rule did not mean in any way that they are happy with the invasion and occupation.

From the beginning the people expressed, and continue to express in various ways, their condemnation of the war and the tragedies which it left behind, and the new calamities which they have suffered, especially as it ended, thereby spoiling the joy at getting rid of the dictator and his brutal regime.

They have also contributed, and continue to contribute day after day, to intensifying their rejection of what has been planned to be imposed on Iraq.

Yes, it was not possible for the joy at the fall of Saddam and his dictatorship to be complete, at a time when the suffering of millions of our people has been aggravated as a result of the loss of even the meagre essentials of living that had been available to them, such as clean water, electricity, medicine and food.

No attention was paid to ensure that these essentials were provided for the people, in clear violation of the obligations under international treaties, in particular the Geneva Convention, regarding the responsibility of occupying powers towards the population of occupied areas.

Total abandonment of this responsibility has led to a breakdown of security, widespread anarchy, the outbreak of looting of public property and setting fire to them, and the proliferation of acts of revenge and settling personal scores.



Heroes and martyrs of the Iraqi Communist Party

Looting and vandalism is not a sign of freedom

No action was taken against the gangs looting and vandalising. It seems that the cronies of the fallen dictator and agents of his secret services were not far from them. In addition professional criminals, which he himself had released from prisons about six months ago in accordance with the infamous "amnesty", also attacked hospitals, libraries, educational institutions and museums and removed their contents.

This irresponsible behaviour resulted in a grave deterioration in the conditions of hospitals and of water and electricity services. This in turn further deepened the suffering of millions of our people.

In the face of wide protests at taking no action to avert these serious criminal acts, American and British officials have considered what happened as being "a natural thing" which takes place in the aftermath of the collapse of every totalitarian regime.

The US Defence Secretary [Rumsfeld] went so far as to say that the Iraqis have become free, and that in acting as they did (looting and stealing) they were actually exercising their freedom – so why protest!

Seeking help from elements of the buried regime

Even worse is that the American and British authorities are trying to make use of the mounting public complaints of the breakdown of law and order, to justify seeking help from Saddam's police force and elements of the former regime's party,

after having switched allegiance and put themselves at their service.

It is not forbidden of course to use some of the members of the former police force at a time when it is urgently necessary to tackle the security situation.

But care must be taken to ensure that there are not among them, those who have been involved in committing crimes against the people or had indulged in corruption and bribery. The police must be selected from among those who respect human rights and the law.

On the other hand, as the daily suffering of millions of Iraqis increases UN agencies and international humanitarian organisations, especially the US and Britain as the two occupying powers, must take urgent steps to provide drinking water and food for the people in addition to security and stability.

Under such conditions, efforts are being made to push to the forefront the process of setting up "an Iraqi administration" which is intended to operate as part of the military rule. The US is going ahead to establish such an administration in Iraq in accordance with its already prepared plan.

The people reject military rule

It is evident that military rule and occupation in general will not receive approval and support from our people, as a lot of evidence already indicates.

Our people have fought to get rid of Saddam's oppressive dictatorial regime so that they can build on its remains a democratic rule which expresses their independent will and fulfils their legitimate demands and not a new oppressive military rule.

It is clear that the democratic regime, to which our people aspire,

in an independent and unified federal Iraq, will not be achieved at the hands of any military rule, whether foreign or Iraqi.

It has to be achieved by setting up an interim patriotic and democratic coalition government, broadly based in its representation of the forces of our people and their political parties that have fought for so long against the dictatorship and for the democratic alternative.

Occupation must end

In order to set up the transition democratic coalition government the occupation of our country must first end with power being handed to an interim UN administration.

Its task would be, first and foremost, to call for a conference of representatives of the forces of our Iraqi people, their political parties and other constituents, and to supervise convening this conference in which agreement would be reached on setting up the coalition government and its makeup.

Only such a government, which represents the interests and aspirations of our people, including all their political and national components, social classes and strata is really capable of ensuring the transfer of our country in peace, security and respect for people's freedoms and rights, to the desired stable and federal democratic era.

And only such a government can be trusted to prepare a new constitution for a democratic Iraq, and provide the prerequisites for conducting free and fair elections in which the people choose the government they want.

Congratulations and expressions of support may be emailed to the Iraqi CP: iraq@iraqcp.org
 Webpage: <http://www.iraqcp.org>

Puma dumps workers

MARK OSBORN writing for the British socialist daily *Morning Star* reports on the shameful treatment of Mexican workers by sportswear firm Puma.

On January 13, workers at the Matamoros garment factory in Puebla, central Mexico, staged a one-day strike. The workers had had enough.

They were protesting about non-payment of wages, forced overtime, verbal abuse from management, being locked in the factory and the denial of their right to form an independent trade union.

The US-owned subcontracting factory was paying illegally low wages. One worker commented: "We are forced to work mandatory overtime and the guard has orders to lock the doors to keep us in the factory."

"Wages are less than the legal minimum for the region. For example, the lowest wage is 39 pesos a day. When the customers do audits of the factory, the company forces us to lie."

These workers were taking action in an area of Mexico where battles for dignity and union rights are becoming increasingly common.

Puebla is characterised a special zone under the Free Trades Area of the Americas.

Mexico is the largest garment exporter to the United States and the majority of workers in the industry – over 100,000 people – are located in this one state.

In what is a common arrangement in Mexico, the workers had been "represented" by fake bosses' union Sindicato Francisco Villa de la Industria Textil y Conexas via a deal made between the "union" and management.

Because of direct links established during previous

battles between Mexican workers' organisations and anti-sweatshop campaigners and unions in north America and Europe, a massive international solidarity campaign quickly began to exert massive pressure on those transnational clothing giants which used the factory and exploited the ultra-low paid workforce.

Key customers at Matamoros included US company Angelica and well-known German-based sportswear brand Puma.

In the weeks ahead, Puma came under massive pressure from many hundreds of organisations and individuals as it tried to cut and run from the factory.

Protestors were demanding that Puma – caught using cheap labour in contravention of its own code of conduct – back the workers' right to decent pay and a union organisation of their choice.

Practically, this meant Puma renewing orders at Matamoros.

Companies like Puma are intensely image conscious and this makes them vulnerable to high-profile worker-support campaigns.

Unlike Nike, which has a richly deserved bad name for sweatshop abuse of workers, Puma has never been in the campaigners' spotlight before.

And Puma managers ran scared as their shops were picketed by US students and campaigns were established across Britain and other European countries.

Puma's head of environmental and social affairs Reiner Hengstmann received thousands of e-mails at the start of February as the inter-

net website LabourStart ran a cyber campaign in support of the Matamoros workers.

Trade unionists from around the world expressed their outrage at Puma's use of sweated labour, many threatened local boycotts of Puma goods and a 14-year-old Steve from Kent wrote to tell Mr Hengstmann he was "an idiot", and that he and his friends were never wearing Puma clothes again.

Puma was forced to meet with representatives of the Mexican workers' resource centre, CAT, which is co-ordinating the unionisation drive in the region and German anti-sweatshop activists.

Despite the threats of John Whittinghill, the factory's manager, to close the plant, the Mexican workers had declared their own democratic independent union, Sitemag, and filed for its formal legal recognition.

Matamoros workers filed papers for legal recognition of their union on January 20. The next day, Puma tags were removed from the factory.

At this point in the battle it became a central demand of the workers that Puma and the other users be forced to renew orders at the factory.

Withdrawal of orders from sub-contracting factories is, in fact, a form of union busting – a factory without orders is likely to close before the union can be properly established.

By the end of February, Puma had backed down and agreed to place new orders.

CAT welcomed Puma's move, but urged caution – it has been betrayed by the multinationals before. It called for the pressure and protests to continue.

In Britain, NO Sweat organ-



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"I'm buying a Third World country! Not only is labor cheap, but we'll qualify for World Bank loans!"

ised a series of protests across the country to celebrate international Women's Day on March 8.

The London actions ended up in a samba-band led demonstration outside Puma's trendy new store in Carnaby Street. Even the security guards danced along.

And the CAT was right to warn us. The factory has now closed its doors.

The local labour board has refused to grant Sitemag legal recognition – proving yet again the links between local employers and the Mexican state.

The battle goes on, however. In the US, massive campus campaign United Students Against Sweatshops is lobbying to get the union recognised.

In Britain, No Sweat has called a second protest outside Puma's London shop.

Ad the CAT battle to spread independent trade unionism across the Puebla region continues.

PS: In January, Puma announced record profits of 84.9 million euros – up 114 per cent on the previous year. (1 euro is approx. A\$1.35.)

Licensed to Kill, Inc.

There is a new tobacco company in town, and it aims to teach a lesson or two.

The company: Licensed to Kill, Inc, is incorporated in the state of Virginia, for the explicit purpose of engaging "in any business permitted by the Commonwealth of Virginia and not required to be stated herein including, but not limited to, the manufacture and marketing of tobacco products in a way that each year kills over 400,000 Americans and 4.5 million other persons worldwide".

by Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman

"We're not like other tobacco companies that try to obscure what their business is about", says the company's short introduction, published on its website (www.licensedtokill.biz).

"If you market cigarettes, you market death. It's that simple. In a country which effectively allows corporations to be formed without regard to their purpose, corporations

are allowed to kill people to make money. Addiction to cigarettes may be lethal, but profiting from spreading death is perfectly legal."

Describing its unique identity, the company states, "The name 'Licensed to Kill' is truly a tobacco name – a name associated with leadership in corporate killing in that industry in the United States and around the world. We do not own any companies that are not tobacco-based, and we do not

feel a need to purchase any food subsidiaries to obscure the fact that our prime source of profit is indeed cigarettes."

By taking such a name, Licensed to Kill Inc clearly identifies what it is: a company that has been given the explicit permission by the state to manufacture and market tobacco products in a way that each year kills millions the world over.

"Some have speculated that the choice of the name 'Licensed to Kill' is perhaps a tad bit too truthful. It isn't. Licensed to Kill Inc takes pride in owning what we believe to be the premier tobacco company in the world. Going forward, our identity will give stakeholders clarity about the purpose of our company."

Taking a jab at Philip Morris, which has renamed its holding company Altria, Licensed to Kill Inc says, "We don't hide what our business is really about behind an altruistic-sounding name."

Why was such a company created?

Licensed to Kill Inc is the inspiration of Robert Hinkley, a former corporate lawyer now turned activist, and is a project of Essential Action. It was formed to make a point both about corporations generally, and the tobacco industry in particular.

States once exercised a modicum of control – and retain the power to exercise real control – over the incorporation, or corporate chartering process. Corporations

Have states made the incorporation process so pro forma that they would grant a charter to a company that set out as its purpose the killing of millions of people a year? Now we know the answer: Yes.

are creatures of the state. States have the authority, through their chartering process and through corporations law, to establish rules setting boundaries on corporate conduct and requiring certain kinds of corporate activity.

Over the years, however, states have effectively forfeited these powers, though they remain dormant and could be reasserted.

Underlying the creation of Licensed to Kill Inc was this question: Have states made the incorporation process so pro forma that they would grant a charter to a company that set out as its purpose the killing of millions of people a year?

Now we know the answer: Yes.

The idea of highlighting such an extreme example – that a literal parody could gain a charter – is to suggest how out of control the chartering process has become, and to suggest that it is time to reimpose controls.

Of course, although it is a parody, Licensed to Kill Inc's business plan differs from the actual business plans of existing tobacco

companies in only one notable respect: its willingness to acknowledge the deadly, devastating impacts of the industry's marketing practices, product manipulation, manipulation and misrepresentation of science, political influence buying, and fundamental way of doing business.

Nearly five million people a year worldwide are now dying from tobacco-related disease, thanks in considerable part to the way the industry chooses to do business.

A choice the companies have, because the states fail to impose basic controls on the companies they authorise to do business.

The bottom line message conveyed by Licence to Kill Inc: no one – and certainly no corporation – should have a licence to kill. And any system that is willing to grant one is fundamentally flawed, and should be scrapped.

Russell Mokhiber is editor of the Washington DC-based *Corporate Crime Reporter*. Robert Weissman is editor of the Washington DC-based *Multinational Monitor*.

Sydney

Walk against the war coalition
No war on Iraq
No Australian involvement

Iraq Peace Vigil
Every Friday 5.30 – 7.30 pm
Sydney Town Hall

Contact:

Hannah Middleton 0418 668 098
Bruce Childs 9386 1240
Nick Everett 0409 762 081
John Hallam 02 9567 7533

Sydney

May Day Function

Delicious food plus singing
of "The Internationale".

Starts 5pm after the March
Sunday 4th May
Greek Community Club,
206 Lakemba St, Lakemba

Donation: \$20 (\$10 child/pen)
Presented by CPA; CP Iraq; CP
Lebanon; Friends of CP Greece;
ADPJ of Chile; Community in
Solidarity with Cuba (W.Suburbs)
Enquiries phone 9212 6855

Iraqi war fuels increased Israeli brutality

The US war in Iraq is fueling even more brutality towards the Palestinians by the far-right Israeli Government. On April 13, the Israeli army stepped up its attacks on Palestinians when F-16 fighter jets and helicopter gunships killed four children and two pregnant women.

by Hans Lebrecht

Israelis and Palestinians, with flags waving and chanting, "USA get out from Iraq – Israel out from Palestine", marched on April 12 through Haifa to the main gate of the city's port, where the US Navy is anchored.

The vast majority of the demonstration was Arab and Jewish working-class youth, students, academics and others.

It was called by the Haifa Peace Forum, a coalition of all major peace movements, including the Communist Party-led Israel Hadash Front. The demonstration ended with a rally blocking the port's main gate.

The day before, thousands demonstrated in solidarity with officers and soldiers who, for reasons of conscience, refuse to serve in the occupied territories. These soldiers and officers object to taking part in the brutal oppression of the Palestinian people. Some are pacifists who refuse army service altogether.

The government is prosecuting some of these objectors in military tribunals. Five out of more than 200 former 12th grade pupils, who signed a letter to the Prime Minister and army chief-of-staff stating that they are not willing to serve in the occupation army, are standing trial now before such tribunals.

This is after they have already served many months in military prisons. The five asked to do civil service instead of army conscription duties.

During the last 12 months, about 200 conscientious objectors have been detained. Twenty-one young men and two women have been incarcerated for refusing to serve in the occupied territories.

At the moment, 12 are behind bars in military prisons. In most of the other cases, commanders respect the "refuseniks" objections and do not send them to occupied Palestine.

In other developments, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has sent

some of his closest advisors to Washington DC. Their task is to encourage the White House not only to let Israel amend the so-called "road-map" peace plan according to its "security needs", but to influence President Bush to continue the war against Syria and Iran.

But in a PR ploy, Sharon told the *Ha'aretz* daily newspaper that he was prepared "to carry out very painful steps", such as dismantling some of the settlements and to consider Israeli recognition of a limited Palestinian state.

"I do not think that we have to rule over another people and run their lives forever," Sharon stated. His said rule over the Palestinians was taking a toll on the Israeli public, raising ethical and economic problems, as well as growing criticism in the international arena.

He added, however, his regular pre-condition for any change: "I made no concessions in the past, and I will make no concession now, or in the future, with regard to anything which is related to the security of Israel ..."

People's Weekly World, paper of Communist Party USA



Prisoners in their own home – Palestinians in their home in Nablus

Cyprus

A crack in the dividing wall

Cyprus has been divided ever since July 1974, with 37 per cent of its territory under Turkish occupation, and with the two communities living virtually divided by an artificial wall. Contact has been limited and at the arbitrary control of the occupation authorities.

The scrupulous and long work of AKEL has made rapprochement between the two communities a policy accepted by all Greek Cypriot political parties and by the opposition Turkish Cypriot forces, as well as – and this is very important – by the people of Cyprus.

Finding himself in a corner and under pressure from the part of the Turkish Cypriots following the Copenhagen decision on Cyprus and the signing of the Accession Treaty of Cyprus to the EU on April 16, the Turkish Cypriot leader in a somehow unexpected move announced that movement between the two sides would be allowed as of April 23.

On that day alone over 2000 Turkish Cypriots visited the free areas having to produce only an ID or other information proving they are Cypriots.

Around 1500 Greek Cypriots went to the occupied North.

The same picture, only on a larger scale was seen on the next

day, with people waiting to cross at three different check-points.

People could see the rest of their country after almost 30 years or even for the first time in their lives in the case of the youth.

People talking to journalists make it very clear that they want a solution, they want to live together, they want peace.

In a press release issued on April 24, AKEL (the communist party) welcomed the meeting up of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots.

"We consider that yesterday was a day that justified the struggles of AKEL and of all those who have struggled and continue struggling for rapprochement considering it a cornerstone in the efforts to achieve a solution as well as in making it viable", the AKEL statement said.

"We hope that Denktash's (the Turkish Cypriot leader) move will not prove a tactical one, of a temporary character and aiming at serving expediencies.

"AKEL considers that the Government's support measures that are going to serve a broad spectrum of needs of our Turkish Cypriot compatriots, should be announced the soonest possible.

"AKEL welcomes the Government's readiness to undertake all the advisable measures that will facilitate the movement of our Turkish Cypriot compatriots in the free areas.

"At the same time it calls on Rauf Denktash to withdraw the control measures which he has announced, i.e. the presentation of passports (from the part of Greek Cypriots) and the granting of entrance permit, in order to facilitate Greek Cypriots to go to their ancestral homes."

AKEL said that the meeting up of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots has made a crack in the dividing wall.

"We, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, have to intensify our efforts in order to fully demolish the dividing wall and achieve a just, functional and viable solution that will reunify our people and country", the AKEL statement concluded. ☼



Global briefs

GUATEMALA: Guatemalan human rights activist Diego Xon, who was kidnapped after receiving death threats from far-right paramilitaries, has been found shot to death. Mr Xon had worked with a war victims' association called the Mutual Support Group. MSG spokesperson said that Mr Xon had received death threats from paramilitaries who fought left-wing forces at the height of Guatemala's 36-year civil war. The war ended with peace accords in 1996. Guatemalan President Alfonso Portillo recently agreed to compensate ex-paramilitaries for their role in the war after months of protests by former militiamen. Human rights groups oppose the compensation and accuse the paramilitaries of massacring Mayans during the war in which 200,000 people died. This latest death is part of a resurgence in politically linked violence directed against human rights activists.

KOREA: South Korea's two umbrella union groups announced that they had agreed with North Korea jointly to commemorate May Day for the first time since the 1950-53 Korean War. Trade union groups from the two Koreas have held a series of joint discussions and sport events on both sides of the demilitarised zone, but they have never previously marked May Day together. About 300 trade union representatives will fly to Pyongyang on April 30.

CUBA: The Cuban Foreign Minister said that the 75 dissidents sentenced to up to 28 years in jail were US-paid mercenaries. He accused the USA of using its diplomats to start opposition groups in Cuba. He pointed out that Cuba had resorted to legitimate defence against stepped-up aggression by the Bush Administration. "What has been presented as the emergence of internal opposition is no more than an attempt at opposition made in the US", said Felipe Perez Roque. "The United States is trying to create a fifth column here." The Bush administration had turned the US Interest Section in Havana into the headquarters of Cuba's dissidents, providing them with funding, meeting rooms and passes to enter the diplomatic mission at any time, the Minister said.

ISRAEL: Some 150 Israeli commandoes are currently inside Iraq on a mission to assassinate 500 Iraqi scientists, a retired French general claimed on a French TV Channel. He said that Israel was seeking to kill 500 Iraqi scientists who were involved in the country's biological, chemical and nuclear weapons. The scientists hunted by Israel are the same ones who were listed by UN inspectors for interviews during their mandate in Iraq which was terminated two days before the unleashing of the US-led war on March 20. Appealing to the world community to protect them from the US aggression, a number of Iraqi scientists and university professors sent an SOS e-mail complaining American occupation forces were threatening their lives.

Sydney

PUBLIC EDUCATION MATTERS
The Tertiary Education Alliance
Public Forum on Tertiary Education
Thursday, 8th May, 5.30 pm
Sydney Town Hall

The Tertiary Education Alliance calls on students, staff and community members to stand up for public funding and accessible universities and TAFEs

- * the deregulation of university fees
 - * HECs-style fees on TAFE
 - * HECs increases in universities
 - * the extension of the up-front full-fee paying scheme
 - * attacks on staff and student unionism
- NUS NSW: 042 025 703 NSW NTEU: 9212 5433
NSW Teachers Federation: 9217 2100
Community and Public Sector Union: 9290 1555

Sydney

May Day 2003
Stop the
corporate
looting of Iraq
Thursday 1 May at noon
Martin Place
March on Halliburton

Halliburton corporation, formerly headed by US Vice-President Dick Cheney, has profited from US invasions and stands to make billions more out of the occupation of Iraq. It has an office in Sydney.

So, where are the weapons?

There is the collapse of the Iraqi Government, the mass bombings of the country, including the capital Baghdad, the looting of historical treasures, the death, the destruction. Yet after more than a month of war and occupation the stated reason for it all – the weapons of mass destruction – are nowhere to be found.

I suggest they are not there at all. That they were a pretext for the US to implement its new approach to international relations – the pre-emptive strike.

As Susan Wright, a disarmament expert at the University of Michigan, put it, "This could be the first war in history that was justified largely by an illusion."

And surely, if the regime did have weapons of mass destruction they would have used them against the invading troops.

Before the war US intelligence officers said they had a list of 14,000 sites where they suspected chemical or biological agents had been harboured, as well as the delivery systems to deploy them. So far, nothing.

In fact, much of what *has* been unearthed is what we knew all along, that Iraq had a weapons program before George W's daddy conducted the first war in 1991. In February Bush announced that the Iraqi regime was hiding 25,000 litres of anthrax, 38,000 litres of botulinum toxin and 500 tonnes of sarin, mustard and nerve gas.

Now, Bush and his cronies in the administration avoid mentioning weapons of mass destruction at all. In fact, Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld has stated that finding and destroying weapons of mass destruction is actually number two on the list of priorities, with

"regime change" as number one on the hit parade.

Weapons of mass destruction then got pushed further down the list by the Pentagon behind capturing and evicting "terrorists sheltered in Iraq" and "collecting intelligence on terrorist networks".

Chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix, who spent four months trying in vain to get the US and Britain to give him tangible intelligence information about the whereabouts of weapons, has been forced to conclude that the war was based on other criteria, well before his inspection teams went back into Iraq in December.

"You ask yourself a lot of questions when you see the things they did to try to show the Iraqis had nuclear weapons, like the fake contract with Niger", he said.

The latest piece of deception being peddled by the usual unnamed administration sources in Washington is that the Iraqis have moved their weapons out of the country. To Iran? Or maybe they shipped them to North Korea.

**Nathan Barnes
Brisbane, Qld**

Bush and Hitler

The anti-war slogans equating Bush with Hitler were fully justified. A Czech-Canadian correspondent has sent me some remarks made by the Nazi leader on April 14, 1939, asking me if they sounded familiar.

Speaking a few weeks after he ordered troops to invade Czechoslovakia, Hitler said:

"We have no interest in oppressing other people. We are not moved by hatred against any other nation. We bear no grudge. I know how grave a thing war is. I wanted to spare our people such an evil.

"It is not so much the country

of Czechoslovakia; it is rather its leader, Edward Benes. He has led a reign of terror. He has hurled countless people into the profoundest misery.

"Through his continuous terrorism, he has succeeded in reducing millions of his people to silence. The Czech maintenance of a tremendous military arsenal can only be regarded as a focus of danger.

"We have displayed truly exemplary patience, but I am no longer willing to remain inactive while this madman mistreats millions of human beings."

**Ken Biggs
(former editor of
Postmark Prague)
Prague, Czech Republic**

Iraq's Elusive WMD

Bush, Blair and Howard "justified" their illegal war on Iraq by saying that its WMD were a threat to global peace and security and to Australia. Not only did UN weapons inspectors find nothing but Saddam did not use them when Coalition forces crossed the "red line" around Baghdad.

If Saddam had WMD one wonders when he would have used them if not in defence of Baghdad and his home city, Tikrit.

Now, when Coalition forces have the run of Iraq and Iraqis are no longer terrified of divulging information, we have former UN weapons inspector, Ray Zilinskas telling Rafael Epstein that: "We're talking about a potential (sic), not actual weapons" (ABC Radio National AM, April 23).

What a tragedy and a crime that the collateral damage and the vast areas of depleted uranium contamination were not also "potential".

**Gareth W R Smith,
Byron Bay, NSW**

Familiar ring

The Kuwaiti National Archives disappeared during the US occupation of Kuwait; the Iraqi Museum of the origins of human civilisation has been vandalised and looted after the US invasion of Iraq; and the small presentations of Palestinian Art, Culture and History are regularly desecrated and destroyed by the Armed Forces of Greater Israel.

Notice a trend?

**Denis Kevans
Wentworth Falls, NSW**

UTLC plan for SA

Bob Briton's article "UTLC proposes alternative in SA" (Guardian 9/4/2003) unjustifiably paints a totally negative picture of the UTLC contribution to the state's economic summit.

There is no doubt that the thinking behind sections of it are "a reminder of the Accord", but we shouldn't shut our eyes to its positive aspects.

Bob claims that the UTLC's contribution "doesn't see any significant expanded role for the public sector". It isn't clear what is meant by "significant", but there is an expanded role which comes from the growth of the public asset base in the form of several major infrastructure projects.

To carry out these projects the government is counselled not to adopt PPPs [public private partnerships], but to "foot the bill" and undertake the projects itself.

In the present economic climate it is impossible to ignore the tremendous pressure from Capital that will be exerted on Premier Rann to adopt PPPs exclusively to fund infrastructure needs. The UTLC rejects this option.

The UTLC also proposes that one of the ways the State Govern-

ment can make its contribution in helping businesses to grow is by purchasing locally. This is a practical proposal which would put the Labour Government into direct conflict with the rules emanating from the WTO and imposed on the states by the Federal Government.

Both these UTLC proposals are positive aspects that reflect militant thinking since they are directed against Capital. The submission is also critical of the Howard Government.

It must be said that the source of finance proposed for growing the SA economy – so-called strategic borrowing and venture capital mainly from super funds – to be acquired through issuing State development bonds – are totally realistic given the current thinking of the trade union movement.

The UTLC proposals are sure to be opposed by big business and the Rann Government is more than likely to bow before the pressure. The struggle to have them adopted will result in a sharpening of the class awareness of workers and should have the support of *The Guardian*, the Communist Party and its supporters.

It will also provide the opportunity for Communists to present their concrete proposals on how the SA economy can be run to create jobs and to protect living standards. Such a contribution will help forge closer links with the trade union movement.

**Bob Saltis
Adelaide, SA**

Got something to say?

Then write it down and send it to us.

Culture & Life

Anzac Day

Anzac Day has come and gone once again, amid the usual staggeringly puerile platitudes about how "our nation was born on that day". I once had to try to explain to a frankly incredulous American visitor how it was that Australia solemnly celebrated a defeat with a public holiday.

by Rob Gowland

For of course it was a defeat. Thousands died but not a single objective was achieved.

It was noticeable that the only *achievement* of the campaign to be written up in school textbooks or other reference works was the withdrawal (e.g. "The evacuation was probably the most skilful exploit in the Gallipoli operations" — Jose and Carter, *The Illustrated Australian Encyclopaedia*, 1925).

General Sir Ian Hamilton, then British commander of the Gallipoli operation, had earlier told the British War Office that withdrawal would result in the loss of 50 per cent his troops. Perhaps fortunately, by the time evacuation had become essential, Hamilton had been replaced by Monro.

At the end of 1915, 80,000 men, 5000 horses and 200 guns were

evacuated from Suvla and Anzac without any casualties. Three weeks later, in the first week of 1916, the troops at Hells were withdrawn with similar success and immunity from casualties.

Most Australians will have at some time, probably at school, been regaled with accounts of the various ingenious stratagems designed to convince the Turks that the Anzacs and the British were still in their trenches, when actually they had already done a flit down to the beach and were in fact climbing into their boats.

The praise lavished on the evacuation tends to obscure the fact that the invaders had been forced to run away with their tail between their legs. The grand Churchillian scheme to force the Dardanelles had been a total failure.

It had been initially conceived as something the British Navy could carry through unaided. Its aims were of the sort a fervent imperialist like Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, would ardently support.

By seizing the Dardanelles, the British would sever Asiatic Turkey from Europe and establish their dominance over the Middle East from Egypt to India. It would also secure the Suez Canal, their vital sea route to India (the "Jewel in the Crown" of the British Empire).

Finally, it would also open permanent and safe sea communication with Russia, enabling British influence to be extended to the coal and iron region of the Donbas (a region rich too in the increasingly valuable and strategically valuable product fuel oil).

Alas, although the British Navy lost a couple of battleships in the

attempt, the Dardanelles proved impossible to capture by naval assault. Having thoroughly alerted the Turkish forces to what was being attempted, the Brits sailed away and did not return for two months!

During this lull, the Turkish defenders reinforced their positions. By the time the invasion finally came, the beaches were well covered by machine guns and artillery.

Listening to our xenophobic and jingoistic media, you could readily be forgiven for thinking that the only participants in the Gallipoli landings were Australians and New Zealanders, and perhaps the British. In fact, French troops also took part in the landings and later Ghurka and Indian troops were used.

The General

by Siegfried Sassoon

"Good morning, good morning!" the General said
When we met him last week on the way to the line.
Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead,
And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.
"He's a cheery old card", grunted Harry to Jack,
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.

...

But he did for them both with his plans of attack.

The Australians were there because on August 3, that is as war broke out between Britain and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey), the Australian Government did a John Howard and enthusiastically offered Australians for the war.

They sent a cable to the British Government offering (a) to place the Australian Navy under the orders of the British Admiralty, and (b) to send "an expeditionary force of 20,000 men of any suggested composition to any destination desired by the Home Government". Talk about a blank cheque!

Remember, even if guest speakers at Anzac Day functions rarely

do, the First World War was not a war about assassinated Arch Dukes or even to save the French from the beastly Hun. It was, as Lenin pointed out at the time, essentially a war for trade and markets, including colonies.

It was truly the Great (Imperialist) War. Gallipoli was just one small part of this imperialist war.

Yet, by the end of the whole abortive campaign, total allied Gallipoli casualties (including naval personnel) were 33,532 killed, 78,516 wounded and 7,689 missing in action (and presumably killed). Australian casualties were 8,587 killed and 19,367 wounded.

None of the objectives of the campaign were achieved. ☹

Rob Gowland previews

ABC & SBS public television programs

Sun May 4 ~
~ may 10 26

With the Astaire-Rogers films running every Saturday at present, it is timely that the ABC has revived *Fascinatin' Rhythm: The Story Of Tap* (ABC 11.45pm Sunday), a fascinating documentary that looks at the origins and history of tap dancing, with such great exponents as Fred and Ginger (of course), but also Anne Miller, Gene Kelly, Shirley Temple and Bill Robinson going up and down stairs and the incomparable Nicholas Brothers.

One of the responses to US aggression in Iraq and elsewhere has been increased activity by Russian hackers (among the world's best) to interfere with the US Defence, State Department and CIA computer systems.

This cyberspace warfare is not new for the US, of course. They have been carrying out a new cyberspace Cold War for some time.

Wrecking computer-controlled infrastructure systems such as railways, electricity grids or air traffic control systems by long distance manipulation holds obvious appeal for outfits like the Pentagon.

The Pentagon, of course, wants lots more money to increase its cyberspace capabilities, and the White House, with its links to the high fliers in the IT industry seems intent on promoting the "threat" to the US posed by "enemy hackers".

In *The Cutting Edge: Cyber War!* (SBS 8.30pm Tuesday) the

PBS *Frontline* program continues its policy of promoting whatever propaganda line the White House is pushing at the moment: this episode "investigates just how real the threat of war in cyberspace is and reveals what the White House knows that the rest of us don't".

Horse racing is called "the sport of kings", as though this were some form of praise. All it means, really, is that it is expensive and rich people indulge themselves with it (using money other people sweated to create, but that's another story).

For the working class person who wants to train a racing animal, there are basically only two options: greyhounds or pigeons.

Pigeon racing, as exemplified by the Leichhardt Flying Club in Sydney's inner-west is examined in *Leichhardt 2040: Flight Club*, Sally Eccleston's affectionate and proud contribution to the series *Australia By Numbers* (SBS 7.30pm Wednesday).

Australia By Numbers, now in its third series, is made by new filmmakers from across the country and commissioned by SBS Independent (SBSi). Sally Eccleston has been a Leichhardt local for 17 years.

Leichhardt 2040: Flight Club explores the relationship between three generations of people who race homing pigeons and the suburb they've called home. Leichhardt has undergone rapid gentrification, but these people have held on to a tradition of competitive pigeon racing, despite interference from mobile phones, jumbo jets and the local Council.

Sally Eccleston captures the drama of the last and most important race of the season from Wonthaggi in Victoria to Leichhardt in Sydney, where the pigeons fly over 750 kilometres in one day.

Says Sally Eccleston: "Like most people I thought pigeons were rats of the sky and had never given

much thought to how racing/homing pigeons are trained and different from the wild pigeons that pigeons fanciers call 'road peckers'.

"I now look up into the sky daily and see a group of pigeons in formation on their training run and if I'm in Leichhardt I can usually work out whose loft they've come from."

Throughout WW2 Britain and the USA sought to develop a weapon that would allow them to destroy or terrorise their imperialist rivals (chiefly Germany and Japan) and, of course, their socialist competitor and temporary ally, the Soviet Union.

The development of the atomic bomb was but one route to this end. Another approach was the creation of city-destroying fire-storms through mass incendiary bombing. This was the particular aim of Britain's Bomber Command.

Like Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a number of towns in Germany of little military significance were spared from being bombed for most of the war, because they were needed intact for the testing of the new weapons (or weapons tactics in the case of mass incendiary bombing).

With the Soviet Union proving daily that it was capable of defeating Germany single handed if necessary, the Anglo-US drive to develop a horror weapon was urgent. If they didn't hurry, the War might end and they would lose the chance to develop, test and above all demonstrate their new super weapons.

Dresden, Plauen, Pforzheim, Heilbronn, Hildesheim, Worms, Würzburg were spared the horrors of mass bombing until the spring of 1945: then, just as the war was nearly over, bombers came to wreak havoc on them. Most of the German civilians killed by allied bombs during World War II were killed in the very last months of the war.

As late as March 1945, Bomber



Dresden - As It Happened: Bombing Germany

Command dropped 67,000 tons on Germany, more than in any other month of the war. Of these, nearly 50% were targeted not at military or industrial objects, but at cities, killing mostly civilians.

The *As It Happened* documentary *Bombing Germany*, (SBS 7.30pm Saturday) examines the story behind the indiscriminate killing of hundreds of thousands of civilians. It is not as blunt as I am, but reaches much the same conclusion.

As SBS puts it: "*Bombing Germany* contends that once the major industrial centres had been destroyed, towns were targeted for their very destructibility. That is, towns of minor military importance such as Würzburg were selected as targets because their dense, medieval centres were expected to burn easily.

"Precision bombing, although far from accurate at the beginning of the war, had improved greatly during the course of the war. But nonetheless, area bombing was carried out as a means of demoralising the population, as a deterrent from starting any future wars, and as a way of impressing Stalin with Anglo-American power and resolve."

The first Astaire-Rogers film did not star Astaire and Rogers. Oh, they were in it, of course, but they were strictly the supporting cast (billed fourth and fifth!). The film was *Flying Down To Rio* (ABC 10.25pm Saturday) and its stars were ostensibly Dolores Del Rio and Gene Raymond, with singer Raul Roulien billed third.

The chief appeal of this movie today is watching how Fred and

Ginger shamelessly and easily steal the picture from the three leads. The duo had a real flair for comedy, as well as their obvious capabilities in the song and dance department.

Variety noted at the time that "the main point of *Flying Down To Rio* is the screen promise of Fred Astaire. He's distinctly likeable on the screen, the mike is kind to his voice and as a dancer he remains in a class by himself".

Ginger's characters could be delightfully hard-boiled when required and her way with a wise-crack was a joy to behold: to the delight of Depression audiences, her working class characters could cut a snob down to size with a single crack.

Not yet considered a team except in the dance numbers, Fred and Ginger appear singly more than together in this first effort, even if they do tend to monopolise the delightful Vincent Youmans numbers.

Flying Down To Rio was RKO's attempt to emulate the success of Busby Berkeley's extravagant, imaginative musical numbers over at Warner Bros, and the title tune (sans Astaire and Rogers) bizarrely features chorus girls strapped to the wings of biplanes. Berkeley, however, had nothing to fear here.

RKO instead (and wisely) chose to respond to the audience's appreciation of the Astaire-Rogers duo and went for a radically different, more intimate, type of musical built around their obvious talent and appeal.

As some feminist would caustically remark years later, "Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, only she did it backwards and in high heels!"

May Day Actions

ADELAIDE:

"Workers of the World, Unite"
Thursday 1 May, 6.30pm
May Day Dinner,
Hilton Hotel, Hilton
Saturday 3 May, 10am
Gather at Victoria Square
March to Rymill Park
Sunday 4 May, 10am
Dedication Service
at Workers' Memorial
Port Adelaide
Followed by BBQ
at Semaphore Workers' Club
(08) 8212 3155

MELBOURNE:

"Stop Howard's war on workers"
"Demand a people's budget"
Thursday 1 May, 10am
Trades Hall Council
Sunday 4 May, 2pm
Gather at Trades Hall Council
(03) 9662 3511

PERTH:

"Peace and Humanity"
Sunday 4 May, 11.30am
The Esplanade, Fremantle
March at 12 through Fremantle
Family concert from 1pm
(08) 9328 7877

DARWIN:

Saturday 3 May, 6.30pm
Dinner at Stella Maris
Monday 5 May, 5.30pm
Trades and Labor Council
Wood Street
March to Esplanade for a concert
(08) 8941 0001

SYDNEY:

"Struggle for peace
and workers' rights"
Sunday 4 May, 12 midday
Rally Hyde Park North
March to Town Hall Square
(02) 9264 1691

BRISBANE:

"Unions for working families"
Monday 5 May, 10am
Assemble Mary Street
March to Musgrave, South Brisbane
11.20am to 4pm, speakers,
entertainment, stalls, kids' rides
(07) 3846 2468

ACT:

Thursday 1 May,
Peace Rally, 12 midday
Garema Place, Civic
1 May, 7pm
Dinner "Jimmy's Place"
Tickets available from
ACT Trades and Labor Council
(02) 6247 7844

Wollongong:

Saturday 3rd May 10.30am
Fred Moore House, Lowden Square
(east side Wollongong station)
Contact Mark Paloff 0419 602 313

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Sydney Politics in the Pub

Every Friday night 6pm – 7.45pm

Gaelic Club, 64 Devonshire St, Surry Hills

(across from the Chalmers St exit and Devonshire St tunnel at Central Station)

Dinner afterwards in the Royal Exhibition Hotel across the road

May 2

INDONESIA UPDATE

Max Lane, National Chairperson ASIET

George Aditjondro, Lecturer Sociology & Anthropology, Newcastle Uni

May 9

WELFARE FOR THE RICH: HOW DO WE STOP THE UPWRDS REDISTRIBUTION?

Michael Raper, President National Welfare Rights Network & Treasure International Council of Social Welfare

Peter Saunders, Director Social Policy Research Centre, Uni NSW

The Gaelic Club, like all clubs, is required to have non members sign in.

To avoid queues you may wish to become a social member for \$5.

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Government attempts coup d'état at ATSIC

ATSIC hits back

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) is under the most concerted attack in its history with the Howard Government setting up an agency with a brief to strip ATSIC of its funding. This agency has been put in place ahead of the conclusion of a Government-commissioned review of ATSIC and will essentially make any findings of that review redundant.

ATSIC's staff is to be cut from 1300 to 20, with those remaining to be moved on to a new board run by the agency, to be known as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services.

The new board and all monies will be under the control of Government appointee Wayne Gibbons as chief executive officer. Gibbons is to replace the 18 elected board members and 400 elected regional councillors as the organisation's ultimate authority. In the lead up to the coup, which has been brewing since the Howard Government first took office, ATSIC Chairman Geoff Clark and ATSIC Deputy Chairman Ray Robinson released the following statement:

It's time the mainstream media and the Federal Government stopped using the (ATSIC) as the 'whipping post' for every problem in Aboriginal Australia.

It's time they got their collective foot off our neck and came clean on who is responsible for the Third World conditions in our communities.

ATSIC is not responsible for the provision of essential services in health, housing, education and employment.

The media know this but do not report it.

Why?

Minister Ruddock knows but rarely says a word in defence of this organisation.

All Indigenous people ought to ask themselves why the mainstream media and mainstream politicians want to white-ant ATSIC?

We have issued this statement because it is time our people stood up and got some real facts on the table.

We need to let it be known that mainstream State and Territory governments are happy to sit back and let us take all the public blame for their failures but privately let us shoulder more and more of their responsibility in delivering essential services to our people.

We ought to be asking why it is that the minister for ATSIC is happy to move, as he has done so often in recent months, against this organisation and its leaders, based entirely on "perceptions".

What about facts, Minister?

We wonder why he had never moved to close down a detention centre, given the widespread perception among large sections of the Australian community that asylum seekers are treated inhumanly in those centres?

Despite 12 short years of existence,

ATSIC has delivered more to the Indigenous people than any government, Federal, State or Territory, in 200 years of colonial rule.

The current ATSIC model is the best we have. We need to unite to protect and build on it. Has one ATSIC critic ever put up a better model, which delivers more power to our people?

We urge all members of the ATSIC elected arm to categorically reject any move by Minister Ruddock or those working for him, to take any powers off the duly elected ATSIC Board ahead of his own review into the organisation.

We are happy to work with that review. We have stated so publicly.

For the Minister to now suggest he will move on separation of powers on the basis of "perceptions" before the review has even had time to canvass such a threshold issue is an insult to both the consultation process now under way with our people and to the review team itself.

We are heartily sick and tired of media reports suggesting a bitter feud between us is making ATSIC dysfunctional. This is rubbish.

ATSIC is not dysfunctional.

We have a number of political differences, as do most mainstream political leaders.

We are able to put them aside and work together to deliver better outcomes for our people.

Anyone with more than a passing interest in ATSIC knows that the first fully-elected Board of ATSIC got more work done at the coalface than any other before it.

We are honoured to have been elected as chairman and deputy chairman to that board and to have been re-elected to the current Board of Commissioners.

The first elected board recognised that we needed to make the States and Territories accountable



Photo: Koori Mail

Mainstream government programs have failed to meet the needs of Indigenous Australians

for their failure in delivering basic services to our people.

The Commonwealth cannot. We can.

That's why we put aside our political differences with them and signed essential-service agreements with every State and Territory government during the last term of the board. We will focus during this term on their implementation.

Aboriginal people are not concerned about what they read in *The Australian* or the *Brisbane Courier Mail*. Both newspapers sell few copies in our communities.

Our constituents are more interested in the fact that ATSIC has, time and again, been forced to step in and provide the services to their constituents because the Commonwealth, States and Territories have not accepted their responsibilities.

This is the real debate in Indigenous affairs.

The fact is the Commonwealth cannot make the funders of first resort – the States and Territories – accountable for their expenditure in providing basic services to their Indigenous citizens.

No one has to take our word for it.

They need look no further than the latest report from the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) on ATSIC's management of the \$860 million in grants it provides to Indigenous organisations around Australia to provide such services.

These funds are contained within the Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP) and CDEP, the two programs the main-

stream media repeatedly suggest should be taken from ATSIC.

The report blows a huge hole in the central core of their logic.

The ANAO said ATSIC's financial management of more than \$860 million in grants was sound.

It clearly stated the real problem for ATSIC was the fact that it was being forced into providing supplementary funding because the State and Territories would not accept their responsibilities in this regard.

The recent Commonwealth Grants Commission report into Indigenous funding made it clear that ATSIC's major program – CHIP – was the best-targeted Indigenous assistance program in Australia.

That program is now delivering housing and essential services to more than 40,000 people in 600 communities around the country.

The Grants Commission also reinforced the fact that it was mainstream government programs that failed to meet the needs of Indigenous Australians.

The Australian National Audit Office has recently given ATSIC its ninth unqualified audit, yet our critics say millions of dollars are being squandered.

"Misinformed bile"

Why, then, are they not calling for the abolition of the Australian National Audit Office, or the abolition of the Commonwealth Grants Commission?

From our viewpoint all of their misinformed bile is reserved for ATSIC.

One only has to take a moment to realise those who lobby for ATSIC to lose its programs want less accountability, not more.

They want those programs taken from the most scrutinised agency in the country and handed over to the States and Territories, the least scrutinised in the country in terms of delivering outcomes for our people.

ATSIC is not perfect. Show us a Commonwealth, State or Territory agency that is.

But we are not dysfunctional.

There are due processes in place for dealing with the personal problems we both face.

Those processes should be allowed to run their course, or are we also to accept that the presumption of innocence is not something blackfellas can expect from the white justice system?

The media is free to attack ATSIC. But freedom of the press is a two-edged sword.

The media have a responsibility to report the facts, not lies and prejudices.

They can continue to white-ant ATSIC as much as they like but we call on all our fellow members of the elected arm to fight for more power for our people against those who wish to take it away.

The best way to start is to bring the real accountability debate in Indigenous affairs out into the open and to call on the Commonwealth Government to let the review and legal processes run their proper course.

ATSIC's programs provide it with the leverage it requires to get the Commonwealth, State and Territories to the negotiating table.

We repeat that leverage has, and is being, well used by ATSIC to forge agreements with State and Territory governments across the country.

Take those away and ATSIC loses its power as the only Commonwealth agency able to hold the States and Territories to account.

Now that would be a tragedy.

No one should ever forget that despite what the politicians and the mainstream media say, the recent ATSIC election resulted in a record turnout of more than 50,000 voters, record nominations and a substantial increase in new voters (7600 enrolled in 10 weeks).

ATSIC is clearly increasing its relevance to Aboriginal Australia.

Those are 50,000 solid reasons why we need to defend our record against those who, for their own reasons, continually seek to diminish a proud record of achievement on the ground for our people. ♣

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