

Asbestos Victims Dumped

Angry unions and asbestos support groups have denounced a new system that the NSW Carr Labor Government proposes to introduce for dealing with asbestos-related damages claims. The system would drastically restrict the number of claims for damages by people suffering from asbestos-related diseases, and would also savagely cut the amount of damages claimants could expect to receive.

by Peter Mac

The system would also significantly prolong the time taken to hear common law damages cases. In these circumstances most claimants would die before judgement could be made. Dependents would then be left with no compensation and the company involved would walk away scot free.

The new rules would also impose a cap on claims, similar to that operating in NSW for workers' compensation cases.

The system is said to have been drawn up by ALLIANZ, one of the major insurance companies acting for defendants in asbestos damages claims.

At the moment any Australian citizen suffering from an asbestos-related disease can lodge a claim with the NSW Dust Diseases Board for a weekly pension and hospital and medical expenses. They can also lodge a claim with the State's Dust Diseases Tribunal for common law damages against companies that have handled asbestos materials.

This is the fastest method of dealing with asbestos-related claims in any State of Australia. Speed is of crucial importance to most victims, because their life expectancy after diagnosis is very short, and damages claims fail that have not been heard by the time of death.

The Government proposes to

limit, if not eliminate, the right of people living interstate to make claims in the NSW courts, and to cut litigants' legal fees.

ALLIANZ, formerly MMI, was the major insurer for firms producing asbestos material until 1987. It now self-righteously claims that the new proposal would limit "unnecessarily high legal fees which eat up workers' settlements" on cases involving "people that have never set foot in NSW ... all at the expense of NSW taxpayers."

However, this statement is totally inaccurate.

Firstly, the new proposal would certainly reduce legal costs, but at the expense of claimants and their families. Under the Government's proposal common law damages would in effect be eliminated in favour of a toothless, financially capped "no-fault" scheme.

The Dust Diseases Board would make an assessment in lieu of damages, and the Tribunal would be left only as an avenue of appeal. Medical panels would determine payouts from a fund established by insurers and other companies with liabilities associated with asbestos.

The proposal would therefore definitely limit legal fees, but would also reduce the number of claimants (some would die before hearings were concluded, and others would be discouraged from making a claim). It would also weaken the

process for determining costs and would severely limit the amount claimable.

As for the number of interstate cases, these constitute about 28 percent of the total, and most are from people who formerly lived in NSW. The "extra" cost to the NSW taxpayer is therefore negligible and could be eliminated by other States establishing a system with equal or greater efficiency to that currently in use in NSW.

The new system would also offer bonuses to certain defendants against common law claims. The companies James Hardie and CSR are the major defendants against asbestos-related claims, and both have allocated major funds for product-related damages cases. Under the proposed new system, on the other hand, compensation would be funded by all potential defendants, leaving Hardies and CSR with a windfall profit reserve.

But why is the government making the new proposal at this point in time? Firstly, the rate of claims is likely to rise dramatically over the next few years.

Asbestos has been officially recognised in Australia as a health hazard for 40 years. (Indeed, the first scientific paper linking asbestos and lung disease was published in 1909.)

Diseases generated by asbestos take many years to appear. (Actor Steve McQueen developed asbestosis some 35 years after working for two weeks in a factory that handled asbestos.) The incidence of asbestos-related diseases is only now beginning to reach its peak, some 30 years after the widespread use of asbestos reached its zenith.

The incidence of such disease

in workers formerly employed in asbestos-related industries will therefore increase dramatically, as will claims against asbestos-related companies, over the next 15 years.

On the other hand, most of these workers are elderly, which means that once the disease develops their life expectancy is greatly reduced. Half the victims of asbestos-related illness now die within eight months of diagnosis.

Therefore, any system that prolongs the average time taken to hear asbestos damages claims will directly benefit the defendant companies, by increasing the chances that claimants will die before their claims can be heard.

The NSW Division of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) has written to the NSW Labor Council, expressing its deep concern about the proposal, and asking that the Council adopt a resolution opposing any change to the current system of dealing with claims for compensation for asbestos-related illness.

The AMWU notes: "We are extremely concerned at advice that the State Government may be drafting legislation that would give effect to the ALLIANZ proposal. We are also extremely concerned about current investigations being carried out through the offices of the Attorney-General, collecting and collating data on current dust diseases claims before the Dust Diseases Tribunal. We also believe that ALLIANZ have approached a

number of officials in unions that represent workers with significant exposure to asbestos and related products."

Many unions have also expressed their disgust at insurance companies that have received huge premiums from companies such as Hardies for decades, knowing the high risks involved, and are now attempting to shift the payout to the public purse.

The AMWU stated that the new proposal would adversely affect victims of other dust-related illnesses. They noted: "Dust diseases affect workers in all industries, represented by all unions. The manufacturers of these products deliberately and knowingly made profits from products that lead to agonising deaths or a living hell for their victims."

Barry Robson, an official of the Maritime Union of Australia said last week that he had recently attended the funerals of three friends who had died from asbestosis and mesothelioma, but that he had also been pestered by a representative of ALLIANZ to support the Government's proposal.

However, he was having nothing of the proposal, and he predicted major industrial upheaval if the Government goes ahead with plans to implement the new system. "If they think Patrick's [1998 waterfront dispute] was a bit of a go they haven't seen anything yet of the waterside workers, I can tell you", he declared. ☘

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Cool reception to Howard's sabre rattling in Asia

Howard's visits to the Philippines, Japan and South Korea last week were by no means a resounding success. His main objective was to pressure the Governments of these nations to support an aggressive, interventionist policy against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). Howard's junket was closely followed by British Prime Minister, Tony Blair who was on a similar mission, to line up Japan and South Korea. It is of interest that neither Howard nor Blair bothered to visit China or the Russian Federation which have land borders with North Korea.

Earlier a group of 11 nations had met in Brisbane under the baton of the United States which, together with the Howard Government, was attempting to knock together another "coalition of the willing" to "interdict" North Korean vessels that they "suspected" of carrying missiles, drugs or even counterfeit money. The nations that attended the Brisbane meeting were, in a number of cases, less than enthusiastic about becoming involved in such open piracy.

Howard's visit to the Philippines did win him a joint statement between the two governments to continue the "war against terrorism" but, according to media reports, a very chilly personal relationship between the Philippines President and John Howard was on display. It may well be that the arrogance of Howard and the Australian Government's clear intention of telling the Philippines Government how to run its business was not well received in what is after all, a far more important country in the Asian region than is Australia.

Commenting on the escape of a "terrorist" suspect from a Philippines jail at the time of his visit, Howard said that the incident underlined the "need for steady institution building in many of the countries in the region". Presumably there is no such need in Australia where Phillip Ruddock could show these "backward" countries how to run efficient concentration camps.

Similarly in Japan where the government might have been expected to enthusiastically sign up to a new war on the Korean Peninsula. The two sides did no more than back the US demand for multilateral talks between North Korea, South Korea, the US, Japan and other Asian nations. They talked vaguely about co-operating in the fight against terrorism. The proposal to interdict North Korean ships received a cool reception. There was no mention of a free trade agreement although Japan remains one of Australia's major trading partners. Rather, Japan intends to impose a 50 percent tariff on the import of Australian beef.

Trade issues also came up in the Philippines, where the Government accused Australia of using quarantine restrictions as a means to keep Philippine bananas off supermarket shelves.

In South Korea the Australian "man of steel" could ring no more out of the South Korean Government than a commitment to pursue dialogue with North Korea and the wish to have the problems which have, in fact, been cooked up by the United States, settled by negotiations. The people of both South and North Korea are opposed to war and are increasingly embracing the movement for the reunification of the two states. (See story page 8.) The fear of peaceful reunification and an independent Korea is one of the main factors behind the increased aggressiveness coming from the US and the Australian Governments. That would leave the US with no excuse to maintain its forces on the peninsula.

Meanwhile *The Weekend Australian* (July 19-20) has excelled itself in editorial vitriol. Under the heading "Only monkeys see no evil in N Korea", the editorial churns out lurid inventions such as "one in 10 of its citizens has died of starvation since 1995", "The regime holds 200,000 political prisoners and another 400,000 have died in prisons" and that "North Korea is literally undermining its neighbour with secret tunnels reportedly penetrating deep into South Korea".

All this is used to justify the "prescient" speeches of George Bush in which he branded North Korea as one of the three "axis of evil" countries. But then, Rupert Murdoch who owns *The Australian* is one of George Bush's most avid admirers and supporters.

PRESS FUND

Not all the news is bad. Malcolm Fraser, the man who engineered the sacking of the Whitlam Government in 1975 to become Prime Minister, is now attacking the Howard Government for its slavish attitude to the US. Well done, Malcolm! And well done all those who contributed to the Press Fund this week, as follows:

Don MacIntyre, in memory of Jim Healy \$20.

For Laurie Kiek's 85th Birthday CJ & PJ \$20.

Bert Appleton \$40, Ron Gray and Irene Gale \$100, Ron Reed \$12, Fred Rouady \$12, "Round Figure" \$16, CJ & PJ \$10, AP \$20.

This week's total \$250. Progressive total \$6550.

Regional disquiet over Solomons deployment

Nigging problems are emerging for the Australian Government and its plans for a "shock and awe" campaign to establish its sway over the Solomon Islands. Members of the Solomon Islands Parliament are now openly expressing their misgivings at the "shoot to kill" authority to be given to the Australian-led intervention force and its anticipated immunity from prosecution by Solomon Islands courts and tribunals.

by Bob Briton

The Solomons Minister for Peace, Unity and Reconciliation, Nathaniel Waena, told the media recently that, while he expected the Pacific nation's Parliament to approve the legislation in time for the first stage of the troop deployment next week, he considered the immunity issue, in particular, to be a "very, very sensitive matter".

"It is not so much a case of being worried as accepting that there is a need for due consideration by parliament because there are issues of national sovereignty involved."

Mr Waena is being very diplomatic in his choice of words. In fact, the push for the "enabling legislation" has heaped humiliation upon humiliation on the Solomon Islands. The drafting of the legislation in question is being "guided" by the Australian Attorney General's Department.

Attorney General Daryl Williams has warned the Solomons Islands that additional assistance would require a solid legal foundation for the operation of foreign forces – weasel words for "do as we say or we'll starve your country of aid".

Taking a leaf from the US book of military adventurism, Mr Williams maintains "... it is

normal practice for the members of a visiting contingent to be accorded immunity from local jurisdiction for actions related to official duties".

John Howard wants the legislation in place before his cabinet meets this week to finalise the details of the intervention. His Government has already prevailed in its demand that a 30-day amnesty for the surrender of illegal weapons in the Solomon Islands be shortened to 14 days.

Resentment at the approach of the Australian Government is spreading. The Foreign Minister of Papua New Guinea (PNG), Rabbie Namaliu, made the following warning in the media recently:

"There must not be a heavy-handed, over-the-top response which would have the potential to undermine community support in the Solomon Islands. Such a response would undermine regional support as well."

PNG was one of the 16 Pacific nations that originally backed an Australian-led intervention force at a meeting held in Sydney three weeks ago. Concern would be growing in the PNG Government that the fragile peace now established on Bougainville could be shattered by provocative actions on the part of the 2000-strong military force due to descend on the Solomons.

Mr Namaliu called on planners to revise the ratio of soldiers to police in the proposed force. At present, it is envisaged that 1500 Australian troops with 300 police will arrive in stages alongside 105 New Zealand troops, 35 NZ police and a further 123 Fijian troops. PNG's Foreign Minister fears that the high proportion of military in the force could send out a very negative message to the people of the region.

However, Australia is pressing on heedlessly and appears keen to try out its new, more aggressive posture in relations with its Pacific neighbours.

When Australia's Defence Minister Robert Hill and Defence Forces Chief General Peter Cosgrove attended a rain-sodden ceremony to mark the departure of the Australian-led Peace Monitoring Group (PMG) from Bougainville earlier this month, certain statements from Mr Hill had a decidedly "throw away" quality to them.

Commenting on the role the 3500 unarmed Australian troops and 300 civilian personnel had played in policing the 1998 truce and subsequent peace agreement, Mr Hill noted:

"The fact that it was an unarmed group – perhaps the first ever peace-keeping group to serve without access to weapons – is sometimes overlooked. But the absence of arms was fundamental to winning the trust of the local population."

Clearly the Government has moved on from this "softly-softly" approach and no longer feels the need to consider the views of local populations. ☘

"God instructed me to strike at Saddam"

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* was given transcripts of a negotiating session between US President George Bush, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and the Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas and faction leaders from Hamas and other groups.

Haaretz quoted him as saying: "God told me to strike at al-Qaida and I struck them, and then He instructed me to strike at Saddam, which I did, and now I am determined to solve the problem in the Middle East. If you help me, I will act, and if not, the [US 2004] elections will come and I will have to focus on them."

No votes, no inspections, no proof or lack of proof – in fact, no earthly reason whatsoever – could have stopped Bush's aggressive war on Iraq. It was God's unalterable will, a direct order for George W Bush to "strike at Saddam".

And strike he did, with an awesome fury that rained death and destruction. This is the mindset of the man at the helm of the greatest military power in the history of the world.

And while Bush might believe literally in the divine character of his mission, the powerbrokers who put him there are no fools. Their faith is not blind. Their decisions are made on earth.

They are politically and class conscious as they pursue the interests of the largest and most rapacious US corporations in their pursuit of new investments, new markets and global domination.

Correction

It was reported in last week's *Guardian* that the Blacktown Branch of the CPA collected 500 signatures for the Save Medicare campaign in Auburn.

It should have read the Blacktown Branch collected 500 signatures on a stall held at the Doonside Festival and subsequently the new Auburn Branch has held two stalls where 300 signatures were collected. – Tony Oldfield

League supporters take it up to Medicare

Rugby league fans were asked to blow the whistle on John Howard's plan to scrap Medicare by dozens of Save Medicare activists from PHHAMAQ, the Queensland umbrella group uniting consumers, unions, health care workers and community organisations who rallied outside the Brisbane's refurbished Lang Park, asking footy fans to sign petitions.

The move follows overwhelming support from Brisbane rugby league supporters for last year's nurses' wage claim.

Prior to 2002's first State of Origin encounter, more than 5000 people added their names to a nurses' petition with, at one point, the state Premier's car being held up by people queuing to sign.

PHHAMAQ has identified inadequate public hospital funding, the undermining of bulk billing, co-payments, and increasing out-of-pockets expenses as key planks in the Prime Minister's campaign to undermine Medicare.

There is also widespread concern amongst public health supporters about the billions of dollars being sucked out of the system each year by Federal Government's private healthcare rebates.

PHHAMAQ wants Australians to tell their stories to the Senate Inquiry which will be examining the issue in Brisbane next month.

Queenslanders interested in getting involved in this Save Medicare campaign and want more information should contact Katrina McGill on 1800 065 885.

The Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union's Katrina McGill called

on Queensland LHMU members opposed to US-style health care to contact her with personal accounts of how they have been disadvantaged by the drive towards user-pays.

"Unions and community groups are leading the fight to retain a decent health system in this country", says Ms McGill. "Raise your voice in defence of Medicare and universal health cover."

For more information about this campaign and how you can get involved go to the LHMU website www.lhmu.org.au and visit their Save Medicare page.

Sydney protest

The Senate Committee's Sydney hearings commenced on Tuesday this week. As the Committee was meeting in the Jubilee Room at the State Parliament House, protestors joined a rally outside in defence of Medicare.

The rally was organised by the Save Medicare Alliance.

It was supported by a range of trade unions, community organisations and political groups including the Communist Party of Australia ☘



Photo: Ana Pha

Privatisation: dangerous & criminal

The announcement by the management of the privatised Sydney Airport that it intends cutting almost half of its full-time equivalent employees was on the cards ever since its sale last year by the Howard Government to a Macquarie Bank consortium. The hatchet man is the Government's former top public servant, Max Moore-Wilton, now Sydney Airport's chief executive – another jobs-for-the-boys recipient.

by Tom Pearson

On July 9 the Community and Public Sector Union, one of a number of unions representing workers at the airport, warned that some of those sacked will be told to reapply for their jobs with the proviso that they sign the Howard Government's Australian Workplace Agreements – non-union individual contracts.

Unions are concerned not only at the loss of, but also at the implications this will have for airport safety and services. The cuts were announced with no consultation with the unions, even though there had been negotiations going on around enterprise bargaining agreements.

Safety is a major concern, raised by the Liquor, Hospitality and

Miscellaneous Union, which represents the airport's security staff. Recent security scares such as the attempted hijack of a Qantas flight from Melbourne to Launceston and the discovery of a box cutter knife on a Perth-Singapore flight, highlight the failure of the Federal Government to properly fund security measures.

"Our members will not be the scapegoats for security incidents", said the union. "Our members work under conditions not many others have to tolerate – low wages, inadequate training and abuse by consumers."

Privatisation means the opposite of service and security. As Moore-

Wilton put it, "This is about good housekeeping and sound business."

The job cuts will "save" \$11 million in the short term, and will lay the ground for an increasingly dangerous situation at Australia's largest airport.

The Howard Government removed price restrictions on Sydney Airport management after September 11, 2001. Such deregulation was always on the cards from the time the airport was privatised. Once in private for-profit hands the airport ceased to have as its main aim the running of an efficient and fundamentally important piece of infrastructure as an essential service.

It is now a cash cow for Macquarie Bank, which appropriated it for a bargain-basement price of \$5.6 billion. Those spinning the great benefits of this piece of thievery can't put enough shine on the ball.

For example, Adele Ferguson in the *Business Review Weekly* last week, pushed the idea of "competition" between the Melbourne and Sydney airports.

"... Melbourne Airport, with the help of the Victorian Government and Tourism Victoria, is constantly marketing to get more carriers into Melbourne", says Ferguson, sending down a fast ball.

"They offer airlines hard cash – six-figure sums – and help with joint marketing campaigns to attract new carriers, whereas Sydney Airport and the New South Wales Government give virtually no concessions, and certainly no cash."

Adele has outlined precisely the criminal nature of privatisation: corporate welfare propping up greedy monopolies that are robbing public assets for profit.

Sydney Airport was the last major Australian airport to be sold. As the big profit-maker it returned tens of millions of dollars to government revenue and cross subsidised the other airports. Now Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane and Melbourne sink or swim depending on taxpayer-funded handouts, increasing charges, cutting corners on safety and slashing jobs.

And what if the Macquarie Bank consortium becomes another HIH or Enron? Will public bail it out for billions, or will it come to a grinding halt, like Ansett? ☘

Defending the Styx Valley Giants

In 2002, in a late night sitting of the Federal Senate, the Liberal and Labor Parties combined to pass the Regional Forests Agreement Bill. The Bill handed Commonwealth control over forest logging back to the States.

At the time the two major parties also voted down an amendment by the Greens that would have provided for compulsory compensation for forestry and mining workers affected by any loss of access to state forests.

The legislation was always going to be a boon for big business and a disaster for workers and the environment. Fast forward to the Styx Valley, Tasmania.

On July 13, more than 2000 people braved the cold and the rain to protest against the planned logging of the giant trees in the old growth Styx Valley of the Giants, which contains Australia's

tallest tree, the 96-metre Mount Tree.

It and similar sized trees are threatened by logging, burning and poisoning with the chemical 1080. According to the state's timber agency, Forestry Tasmania, around 1770 hectares of Tasmania's old growth forests were logged in 2001-2002. More than half of Styx Valley has been logged.

A Regional Forest Agreement allows for logging in most of the area. Protestors noted that the loggers put away their chainsaws for the day of the action, "because they know that Tasmanians hate what they are doing".

A tent village was established in the Styx Valley in the lead-up to the protest, which was organised by the Wilderness Society. Within walking distance was the Mount Tree giant, "the world's tallest Christmas Tree", with a star at the top lit up each night by solar panel technology.

Down the road from that is the famous Chapel Tree, a giant more than 80 metres high which can accommodate 30 people inside its trunk. Without the Wilderness Society campaign, both these and many other trees in the Valley would now be woodchips in Japan.

Of course, the loggers haven't gone away and given up, the Forest Industries Association of Tasmania saying that there is \$724 million worth of timber crying out to be logged.

Greens Tasmanian Senator Bob Brown said that awareness is growing that Tasmania's old growth forests and their wildlife are being destroyed at the greatest rate in their history under the Federal Government's policies.

Referring to the landmark campaign against the damming of Tasmania's Franklin River, in which he played a leading role, Senator Brown said, "Most of all this campaign needs to go, as the Franklin did, to the hearts of 20 million Australians".

Writer Richard Flanagan stressed that "this isn't a Tasmanian problem. It's a national tragedy. We are here today to say it's not over and it's not going to be over until the last chainsaw has ceased to be heard in the old growth forests of Tasmania." ☘

Media bosses play "hard-ball"

The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) is locked in battle on two fronts as media bosses ratchet up their campaign to keep profits made in the industry away from their performers and staff.

by Bob Briton

In the first of the disputes, the Seven Network tried to impose non-union agreements on its 1,300 full-time and casual staff and shut the MEAA out of any negotiations. The lead-up to last week's vote on the question of who should represent the staff was packed with drama and high-handed provocation on the part of management. Seven management blocked email coming from the MEAA to staff in an effort to derail the case for union representation in negotiations with the employer.

The Australian Industrial Relations Commission ruled that it

could not oblige the Seven Network to allow the emails. At the same time, the Commission expressed its willingness to hear an argument from the bosses at a future date that the MEAA's use of the ACTU's call centre to survey staff opinion about the ballot was "coercion" and raised "privacy issues" – they were even prepared to call psychologists to give evidence on the matter!

Fortunately, the AIRC did not agree to the Network's application for an injunction against the union.

The company made the non-union offer under section 170LK of the Workplace Relations Act and sought a trade off: a three per-

cent wage rise for each year of the agreement in exchange for greater "flexibility" over rostering and shifts. Needless-to-say, it would also tie one hand behind workers back in any disputes by excluding their union.

Not surprisingly, workers at Seven voted against the non-union deal on offer. While Seven would not allow Alliance scrutineers to monitor the count conducted by KPMG, union polling during the campaign indicated that nearly 80 per cent of staff would have rejected the company's offer outright.

This result could be the most emphatic rejection of a section 170LK agreement since the introduction of the union-busting legislation.

Elsewhere, an eight-month-long struggle to arrive at new agreements for actors in feature films and television programs has reached an impasse. Actors have begun a series of stoppages in support of claims being pursued by the Equity section of the MEAA.

Everything in the old agreements had been up for discussion with the bosses – represented in the dispute by the Screen Producers Association of Australia (SPAA)

and various producers attached to networks like Seven.

Performers want long overdue changes in the industry, which is characterised by long stints of unemployment and intolerably insecure conditions. They want an end to the practice of compressing the work of "major role performers" into one day, so as to minimise costs and then requiring them to be on call unpaid for the entire period of the production.

They are also demanding more certainty about the duration of "options" so that producers won't be able to contract performers for "between 13 and 22 episodes", for example. Performers are seeking a reduction in the period that producers control repeats of programs from seven years to five years, so that actors can start receiving repeat fees sooner from broadcasters.

Performers also want the cap removed on the amount paid to actors from residuals for sales to video distributors, in-flight, internet and other ancillary markets. At the moment, once a 30-minute TV program has made \$95,000 in overseas sales or a 60-minute program has made more than \$190,000, performers are no longer entitled to any

income from them. As the MEAA points out: why shouldn't the performers continue to share in the success of the programs they helped to create?

Equity is also challenging the cap that producers wanted to put on superannuation payments to actors. The producers would like this to be set at \$2610 per three-month period while Equity is pressing for a limit of \$18,000 per year or \$20,000 in view of an undertaking already made to increase employer contributions from nine per cent of total fee to 10 per cent.

Australian film and TV actors have given producers a July 23 deadline to meet their demands. Clearly they mean business – actors walked off the sets of TV programs *McLeod's Daughters*, *Blue Heelers*, *Stingers*, *All Saints*, *Home and Away*, *MDA* and *Neighbours* last week as well as the feature film *Strange Bedfellows*.

The US Screen Actors Guild has added its weight to the considerable support in the community for the striking Australian actors. Last week the Guild directed its members not to accept work on any Australian production without a green light from the MEAA. ☘

LABOUR NOTES

Workplace Relations Minister Tony Abbott told a Property Council lunch in Melbourne last week that the proposed Australian Building and Construction Commission would have a "roving, almost continual presence" on CBD building sites. Until it is in place, the interim building task force set up during the Cole Royal Commission will continue its policing of workers on building sites. The new industrial cop will have a national staff of 200 including about 40 inspectors based in Melbourne and – to use Abbott's own words – it will be given a "bigger truncheon" [to clobber unions and workers with] than the interim task force. Mr Abbott plans to link about \$4 billion in annual federal construction funding to compliance with a national code of practice for the industry. This code excludes "closed shops" and union enterprise agreements.

The ACTU has endorsed a campaign to encourage union members to oppose any tax cuts in the lead-up to the next federal election unless essential public services are funded adequately. ACTU President Sharan Burrow said quality public education and health services were the basis of a fair society and were being eroded by the Howard Governments policies. "Many working families cannot afford Medicare co-payments, higher university fees or increased childcare costs. Another lousy tax cut is not the answer. Public services need to be adequately funded and resourced", she said. An AC Nielsen Age Poll after the Federal Budget in May 2003 showed that 77 percent of people would prefer the government to spend more on services such as health and education instead of giving tax cuts; only 20 percent of people would prefer tax cuts.

Metro Shelf, who manufactures trolleys and other supplies for supermarkets, including for Woolworths and Coles, has gone into administration costing 70 Sydney production workers \$2.5 million in superannuation and other entitlements. The company had been in the process of negotiating a new Enterprise Agreement with the unions. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union Secretary Paul Bastian, said the time had come for Federal Government to "get serious" about protecting workers' money. "Metro Shelf is not a one-off case. It is happening all the time and our people are losing out." Between December, 2001, and December, 2002, 6000 Australian businesses failed, costing 55,000 workers their jobs and many of them their entitlements.

The Community and Public Sector Union has called on the Minister responsible for Centrelink, Amanda Vanstone, to urgently meet with the union to address the continual violence and aggression confronting Centrelink workers. Centrelink management refuses to take any action. CPSU National President Mark Gepp said that management was not taking the incidents seriously and just considers it to be part of the job. "It seems the police get called when furniture is damaged rather than when workers and clients are threatened or abused and that is just not good enough", Mr Gepp said. Centrelink members will be meeting in the next few weeks to develop an industrial campaign on the issue.



Famous faces amongst striking actors

Tas workers demand "smoke free" pubs

Tasmanian hospitality workers will raise a toast to their New York colleagues this week when strict new smokefree workplace laws come into action.

On July 24 the State of New York will join New York City and introduce the strict new smokefree workplace laws.

All workplaces, including restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and pubs must post highly visible NO SMOKING signs and remove all ashtrays. Violations can be reported to the local New York Department of Health.

"We're hoping that within the not too distant future our state will follow the precedent", said David O'Byrne, Tasmanian LHMU Hospitality Union Secretary.

Hospitality workers in Tasmania are backing a new state government report recommending a total ban on smoking in Tasmanian bars and gaming areas. The LHMU is campaigning hard and working with

the community to ensure that public comments on this State Government report will give the evidence to the Tasmanian Premier, Jim Bacon that he should act firmly on this key workplace health issue.

When any government, anywhere in the world implements smoke free laws, hospitality bosses and tobacco interests always feed bogus stories to the media about big losses.

"Nothing could be further from the truth", said Mr O'Byrne. "Studies show that smokefree workplace legislation is not only good for health, but great for business."

A recent report from the USA details how in California, which eliminated tobacco smoke in restaurants in 1995 and bars in 1998, business has continued to grow. Bar

and restaurant revenue in California rose by 30 percent between 1995 and 2001.

Over 140 new bars opened during that period.

The New York State laws mean that where tobacco smoke is concerned:

1. ALL workers' health (including bar, nightclub, pub, and tavern workers) will be treated EQUALLY.

2. ALL workers will have a safe, healthy, smokefree workplace.

3. NO workers will be discriminated against by having to breathe tobacco smoke at work.

"All workers – including office, restaurant, bar, bingo, bowling, casino, tavern, pub, and nightclub workers – deserve a safe, healthy, smokefree work environment", said Mr O'Byrne.

"Laws should treat the health of all workers squally. No one should have to breathe tobacco smoke pollution to hold a job." ☘

Liar, Liar – Your house is on fire

Last week saw a further unravelling of the lies and deceptions used as a pretext for war by the governments of the US, Britain and Australia. The death of British scientist David Kelly, a weapons advisor to the Blair Government, has seen more calls for Prime Minister Tony Blair to resign. Those defending the criminal war on Iraq had hounded Kelly because he had the audacity to refute his government's claims that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction that threatened the world.

by Tom Pearson

Kelly, found dead with a slashed wrist in woods near his home, was an Oxford-educated microbiologist and a member of the UN weapons inspection body UNSCOM since 1991. He had told the BBC the documents used by Blair to justify war had been "sexed up" i.e. falsified.

It is being taken as self-evident that his death was by his own hand: that he may have been driven to suicide for simply telling the truth is in itself enough for Blair and his war-mongering government to resign. But it is also not beyond a government willing to slaughter thousands of innocent people in Iraq to have one of its own public servants murdered. Whatever the case may be, others have now been put on notice to keep their mouths shut.

The latest developments came as the US was forced to admit that there is organised resistance against the army of occupation in Iraq and more revelations about the concocted "evidence" of weapons of mass destruction were emerging. The head of US Central Command, General John Abizaid, contradicted his predecessor Tommy Franks and the US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld by admitting US troops were facing "a classic guerrilla war".

In Washington last week it was revealed that a committee led by Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz told George W Bush to include a reference in his January State of the Union address that claimed Iraq had tried to purchase 500 tonnes of uranium from the African state of Niger.

Though the CIA had told Wolfowitz that this information was "unreliable" it was inserted in the statement anyhow because of Bush's desperate need to stampede the American people into accepting the necessity to go to war against Iraq.

Now, Bush is feeling the heat of public scrutiny and anger as the realisation grows that the war was based on lies.

According to a recent Newsweek poll, 45 per cent of Americans

say the Bush administration misinterpreted intelligence reports about Iraq, and 38 per cent think it deliberately miss-led the country.

Wolfowitz's rejection of their advice did not please the CIA advisers, a disquiet that was compounded by the CIA Director George Tenet last week becoming Bush's fall guy. Tenet took the blame for the false information about Niger in the Bush statement, a classic case of blaming the messenger.

Contradictions between the administration and the CIA began to fester before the attack on Iraq. In the months leading up to the war, Rumsfeld became increasingly frustrated that the CIA wasn't coming up with any evidence of Iraq's chemical, biological or nuclear weapons, evidence that the White House needed in order to spark the conflict. Instead, as the world is now seeing, Bush and his circle manufactured evidence.

Getting the "right" information

To ensure that Bush got the "right" information, Wolfowitz and Vice-President Cheney set up their own coterie of intelligence agents called the Office of Special Plans.

According to the New Yorker magazine this committee started picking out things that "supported their thesis, stringing them into arguments". The Office of Special Plans also provided "information on Iraq's hostile intentions or links to terrorists".

Former CIA officials describe the agency as being "demoralised", saying that "George Tenet knows he's been beaten up".

The rift between spy agency and government grew as the administration dismissed all intelligence on Iraq from the CIA because it failed to find any evidence of weapons of mass destruction.

Reactionary Republican Congressman, Pat Roberts, the chair of the Senate select committee on intelligence, is spitting chips: "What now concerns me most is what appears to be a campaign of press

leaks by the CIA in an effort to discredit the president".

As the heat is turned up on Bush, Blair and Howard, the pro-war spin doctors are racketing up their ballyhoo. The foreign editor of the *Australian* newspaper, Greg Sheridan, leapt into the fray last week. In his column Sheridan, a committed flag waver for US global ambitions along with his boss Rupert Murdoch, stated, "The US has discovered what it believes is decisive proof of Iraq's weapons of mass destructions programs".

Cooking the evidence

Not actual weapons, but programs. There is according to Sheridan "evidence", from unnamed "well-informed sources", in the form of "material not in a pristine or readily identifiable state when it was discovered" so, "it was decided to take it back to the US for comprehensive laboratory testing".

There are no prizes for guessing what the results of those tests will be. Sheridan, and his mates, Howard, Blair and Bush, are now desperately grasping at straws. The fact is that no evidence has been found of Iraqi chemical or biological weapons capable of "causing death and destruction on a mammoth scale", as Howard claimed, because there was none to be found.

The trio lied on a mammoth scale so as to commit forces to a war that caused more than 10,000 innocent civilian deaths. They continue to heap one lie on another. To admit their deceit and their guilt would be fatal to their cause and to their government.

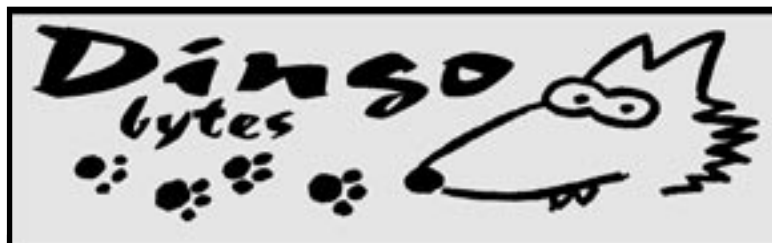
In Iraq, unrest is growing among the US soldiers who are facing increased resistance and have been told their deployment is now "indefinite". With some personnel openly criticising the Bush administration, General Abizaid has told them to shut up.

"None of us that wear this uniform are free to say anything disparaging about the Secretary of Defence or the President of the United States", he said, warning of disciplinary action.

Such developments are echoes of the dirty war on Vietnam. The US is calling up 10,000 US National Guard troops to reinforce the occupation and is attempting to find other countries willing to send troops to replace US forces as it prepares for new wars against other countries. ☛



Liars – the pressure is on Blair to resign



Q: What would happen if David Hicks, the Australian citizen who has been held by the US for 18 months, was a US serviceman held to answer questions by the International Criminal Court? A: They would storm the place and bust him out. Recently the US passed legislation known as The Hague Invasion Act which allows American military personnel to invade The Hague, where the International Criminal Court is, and retrieve US citizens who have been referred to the Court for crimes against humanity.

The Howard Government is aiding and abetting terrorists with its support of flag of convenience ships and the undermining of Australian shipping. The Government is following US instructions to "crack down on the trafficking of weapons by sea". It may also be recalled that in 1998 the Government was itself involved in the secret training of ex-military and police personnel in Dubai in order for them to take over key strategic Australian ports. Despite this elaborate terrorist action they failed because of the resistance of the working people.

The number of long long-term jobless has doubled since the Howard Government came to office in 1996. This disgraceful state of affairs was brought to ludicrous heights last week when it was revealed that a Tasmanian man was encouraged to apply for a job as a female prostitute under the Job Network program. "Ladies needed for a busy city escort service" ran the job description and the man, who was registered with the Job Network, was matched with it.

Consumer magazine *Choice* has found that there is "little price competition" between the major supermarket chains. During the past three years food prices have risen 16 per cent almost twice the rate of other goods and services. And remember how the Federal Government claimed its deregulation of the dairy industry was going to slash the price of milk? Well, milk had the biggest price hike of all, a whopping 10.4 per cent increase in the last two years.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: An Australian delegation will this week offer to the US what Trade Minister Mark Vaile called a "head-turning offer" for the signing of a free trade agreement. "We are going in with a very ambitious proposal", said Vaile. "We are going into this to genuinely liberalise markets." Vaile wouldn't say exactly what was on the table, but you can be certain it will involve opening the nation to the rape and plunder of US corporate interests.

HIROSHIMA NEVER AGAIN

SYDNEY

Sat 9 Aug 12 noon
Assemble Town Hall Sq March to Belmore Park

ADELAIDE

2003 Hiroshima/Nagasaki Commemoration
Public Forum: A world free of nuclear weapons
Sun 3 Aug 2-4pm
The Bishop Auditorium, Trades Hall,
11 South Terrace, Adelaide
Music by Wobbly Boot / stalls / afternoon tea

VICTORIA

More info from Vicpeace office 03 9659 3582

Moonee Ponds

Hiroshima Day Vigil: Wed 6 Aug from 6-7.30 pm
at The Point (main road intersection)

Belgrave

Hiroshima Day: Wed 6 Aug at 6.30pm
Belgrave Library, Reynolds Lane
Info: 03 9754 8463.

Melbourne

Saturday 9 Aug – Nagasaki Day
Rally at 12 noon, State Library

Geelong

Sun 10 Jul: Hiroshima Day stall
at the Belmont Market (near K-Mart)
Fold paper cranes for Japan's Peace Memorial

BRISBANE

Hiroshima Day Candlelight Procession
Wed 6 Aug 5pm, King George Square

The gang of five behind the tax cuts

In a brief period of two years, the right-wing ideologues who control the US Federal Government have been able to ram trillion-dollar tax cuts through Congress in 2001 and again in 2003, reduce a budget surplus to a deficit, and increase military spending while cutting spending for social programs. By their standards, quite an accomplishment. And the question becomes: How were they able to get away with it?

by Fred Gaboury

In the first place, they've been at it for a long time. Second, they've had a lot of help from a collection of deep-pocketed right-wing groups that are out to drastically limit the role of government. For these organisations, tax cuts are a matter of uncompromising dogma to which the White House is both ideologically and politically committed.

Featured prominently in the coalition are figures like Grover Norquist, who believes it is "never a bad time to have a tax cut" and dreams of getting our government "down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub".

A briefing paper published by People for the American Way (PFAW) provides an overview of five influential groups Americans for Tax Reform, the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, Citizens for a Sound Economy, and the Club for Growth and the role they play in the current campaign and how they add an essential dimension to the push for massive, regressive tax cuts.

All five groups share an agenda that is not only anti-tax, but also anti-government and pro-privatisation of public services. However, each group plays to different strengths.

Americans for Tax Reform is an inside-the-beltway operation that excels at building and maintaining political coalitions among politicians, industry groups and other right-wing interest groups.

The Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute are ideological think tanks, churning out policy papers and providing the marketing might for right-wing policymakers. Citizens for a Sound Economy drives the field operation and finally, the Club for Growth is the uncompromising enforcer which targets wavering politicians, including Republicans deemed insufficiently committed to tax-cut dogma.

Americans for Tax Reform

In the battle to win approval for President Bush's proposed tax cuts, Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform (ATR), is the general leading the charge.

ATR was founded in 1986 when Norquist was tapped to head the group as an in-house opera-

"We've in effect become Congress's unofficial research arm ... We truly have become an extension of the congressional staff, but on our own terms and according to our own agenda."

tion to build support for the 1986 tax reform bill. In 1999, it spent US\$4.2 million on a television ad campaign touting the GOP tax plan. In the weeks before the 1996 elections, ATR flooded 150 congressional districts with mail and phone calls. This impressive display was made possible by a last-minute US\$4.6 million donation from the Republican National Committee.

Launched in 1993 to battle President Clinton's health care plan, Norquist's weekly Wednesday meetings pull together a wide range of groups right-wing think tanks, the National Rifle Association, the Christian Coalition, property rights groups and others to strategise on issues that have included supporting conservative ballot initiatives, abolishing affirmative action and killing the National Endowment for the Arts.

For Norquist, cutting taxes is closely tied to his real goal of cutting government.

As he said in an interview with *Human Events* magazine: "Every time you cut programs, you take away a person who has a vested interest in high taxes and ... make him a taxpayer. A farmer on subsidies is part welfare bum, whereas a free-market farmer is a small businessman with a gun."

Heritage Foundation

Kim Holmes, vice president of the Heritage Foundation, claims – and rightly so – to have set the standard for ideological think tanks over the past two decades. As she puts it: "We've in effect become Congress's unofficial research arm... We truly have become an extension of the congressional staff, but on our own terms and according to our own agenda".

The group claims to have "improved" Bush's 2003 tax-cut plan and helped inspire several of Bush's initiatives, including faith-based welfare initiatives, personal savings options for Social Security, ballistic missile defence, and education reform.

Its influence on the budget started even before Bush's inauguration when it delivered a "Budget for America", aimed at limiting "the overall growth of government while providing for needed increases in defence spending".

In early 2003, Heritage's Dan Mitchell said he was "absolutely delighted" with the Bush economic plan. As its contribution to the public debate on the plan, the Heritage economics team created an online "briefing room" to provide a point-by-point counter to the arguments made by tax cut opponents.

Heritage gave an especially telling example of the Center's influence in its 2001 annual report. "When President Bush asked the Treasury Department to analyse the impact of his tax plan ... he was told it would take Treasury's analysts weeks to produce the data." The White House staff turned to Heritage's Center for Data Analysis for assistance and it was able to produce the needed information in a matter of days.

Cato Institute

Where the Heritage Foundation is solidly grounded in the ideology of the modern right-wing political movement, the Cato Institute brings a different, but equally radical, view of government to the table. Although the institute, a libertarian think tank, works with right-wing groups on a wide range of issues, it diverges on social issues like censorship, gay rights, and drug prohibition.

Cato has criticised the Bush administration far more than the others; it praised Bush's move to make the tax code less progressive, saying he was proposing meaningful tax reform that "will... move us closer to a simple and fair flat tax". Yet Cato has also strongly criticised Bush's 2004 budget plans, calling the president's spending "out of control" and pointing out that he is outpacing President Clinton.

Two lesser groups round out the gang of five discussed in the PFAW report.

Citizens for a Sound Economy

Citizens for a Sound Economy (CSE) coordinates the ground troops for the tax cut movement. From deregulation to Social Security, CSE pushes an agenda that subscribes to a doctrine of free enterprise, less government, and lower taxes. CSE President Paul Beckner makes clear the niche his group has carved: "We are not a 'think-tank,' content to study the issues and publish papers and reports. There are many groups doing important work in this area. CSE's mission is to turn those ideas and policies into action."

On tax issues, CSE focuses on short, snappy pieces it can funnel to right-wing activists, rather than the policy papers produced by Heritage and Cato. CSE brings local activism to the tax-cut table via e-mail campaigns and local chapters and activists who organise anti-tax events.

Immediately following President Bush's 2003 State of the Union Address, CSE said, "the heart of [President Bush's] domestic plan is the agenda that CSE... [has] been working on for a long time".



Club for Growth

The Club for Growth (CFG) touts itself as the inheritor of Ronald Reagan's "vision of limited government and lower taxes" and advances this vision through support of political candidates who hew to its right-wing economic orthodoxy. As Stephen Moore, CFG president, sees it, tax cutting is a core Republican value, and any GOP candidate who opposes such measures is a "Republican In Name Only" (RINO).

Moore has made it clear that RINOs are a breed of animal that he wants to drive to extinction: "We're trying to ... get the word out to even the lowest grass-roots level that if you're a Republican you aren't allowed to vote for taxes".

Despite feuds with other GOP groups, CFG has garnered an impressive electoral track record. With each new election cycle, CFG has put forward a somewhat larger slate of candidates, many of whom end up in the win column. In 2000, ten of 16 CFG-backed candidates won in the general election. Their 2002 performance was even better – 17 of CFG's 19 candidates went on to victory.

Many credit CFG arm-twisting for the unanimous support the President's 2001 US\$1.6 trillion tax received from Republicans in Congress. According to Rep. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), who CFG supported in 2000, "[W]hen you have 100 percent of Republicans voting for the Bush tax cut, you know that they're looking over their shoulder and not wanting to have Steve Moore recruiting candidates in their district".

While CFG has made a name for itself as the GOP's "tax-cut enforcer", the group has a larger agenda. It is an advocate of school vouchers, free trade, and Social Security privatisation. Moore is vitriolic in his attack on senior citizens who are, he says, "the most selfish group in America today".

Conclusion

In summarising the role played by conservative think tanks in formulating and implementing the Bush tax cuts, PFAW says the right-wing advocacy groups are among the least visible of the various interests behind the current push for large and reckless tax cuts. "It is fairly easy to see what benefit a business or trade group could gain from the recent White House proposals, but the often-radical political ideology behind the advocacy groups that help provide political firepower is far less obvious."

While the five groups reviewed in this paper are influential, they are just part of the overall tax cut effort. When the White House started pushing its tax cut package in early 2003, *The Washington Post* noted that one of the most important political forces behind it was the Tax Relief Coalition, "an umbrella group that pushed the 10-year, US\$1.35 trillion tax cut to passage in 2001".

The coalition was actually formed in 2001 with help from the Bush administration and features some of the largest business trade groups, as well as Americans for Tax Reform and Citizens for a Sound Economy.

Giving a helping hand to the

Bush's Vietnam

America's two "great victories" since September 11, 2001 are unravelling. In Afghanistan, the regime of Hamid Karzai has virtually no authority and no money, and would collapse without American guns. Al-Qaida has not been defeated, and the Taliban are re-emerging.

by John Pilger

Regardless of showcase improvements, the situation of women and children remains desperate. The token woman in Karzai's cabinet, the courageous physician Sima Samar, has been forced out of government and is now in constant fear of her life, with an armed guard outside her office door and another at her gate. Murder, rape and child abuse are committed with impunity by the private armies of America's "friends", the warlords whom Washington has bribed with millions of dollars, cash in hand, to give the pretence of stability.

"We are in a combat zone the moment we leave this base", an American colonel told me at Bagram airbase, near Kabul. "We are shot at every day, several times a day." When I said that surely he had come to liberate and protect the people, he belly-laughed.

American troops are rarely seen in Afghanistan's towns. They escort US officials at high speed in armoured vans with blackened windows and military vehicles, mounted with machine-guns, in front and behind. Even the vast Bagram base was considered too insecure for the Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, during his recent, fleeting visit.

So nervous are the Americans that a few weeks ago they "accidentally" shot dead four government soldiers in the centre of Kabul, igniting the second major street protest against their presence in a week.

On the day I left Kabul, a car bomb exploded on the road to the airport, killing four German soldiers, members of the international security force Isaf. The Germans' bus was lifted into the air; human flesh lay on the roadside.

When British soldiers arrived to "seal off" the area, they were watched by a silent crowd, squinting into the heat and dust, across a divide as wide as that which separated British troops from Afghans in the 19th century, and the French from Algerians and Americans from Vietnamese. In Iraq, scene of the second "great victory", there are two open secrets.

The first is that the "terrorists" now besieging the American occupation force represent an armed resistance that is almost certainly supported by the majority of Iraqis who, contrary to pre-war propaganda, opposed their enforced "liberation" (see Jonathan Steele's investigation, 19 March 2003, www.guardian.co.uk).

The second secret is that there is emerging evidence of the true scale of the Anglo-American killing, pointing to the bloodbath Bush and Blair have always denied.

Comparisons with Vietnam have been made so often over the years that I hesitate to draw another. However, the similarities are striking: for example, the return of expressions such as "sucked into a quagmire". This suggests, once again, that the Americans are victims, not invaders: the approved Hollywood version when a rapacious adventure goes wrong.

Since Saddam Hussein's statue was toppled almost three months

ago, more Americans have been killed than during the war. Ten have been killed and 25 wounded in classic guerrilla attacks on roadblocks and checkpoints which may number as many as a dozen a day.

The Americans call the guerrillas "Saddam loyalists" and "Ba'athist fighters", in the same way they used to dismiss the Vietnamese as "communists". Recently, in Falluja, in the Sunni heartland of Iraq, it was clearly not the presence of Ba'athists or Saddamists, but the brutal behaviour of the occupiers, who fired point-blank at a crowd, that inspired the resistance.

The American tanks gunning down a family of shepherds is reminiscent of the gunning down of a shepherd, his family and sheep by "coalition" aircraft in a "no-fly zone" four years ago, whose aftermath I filmed and which evoked, for me, the murderous games American aircraft used to play in Vietnam, gunning down farmers in their fields, children on their buffaloes.

On 12 June, a large American force attacked a "terrorist base" north of Baghdad and left more than 100 dead, according to a US spokesman. The term "terrorist" is important, because it implies that the likes of al-Qaida are attacking the liberators, and so the connection between Iraq and September 11 is made, which in pre-war propaganda was never made.

More than 400 prisoners were taken in this operation. The majority have reportedly joined thousands of Iraqis in a "holding facility" at Baghdad airport: a concentration camp along the lines of Bagram, from where people are shipped to Guantanamo Bay.

In Afghanistan, the Americans pick up taxi drivers and send them into oblivion, via Bagram. Like Pinochet's boys in Chile, they are making their perceived enemies "disappear".

"Search and destroy", the scorched-earth tactic from Vietnam, is back. In the arid south-eastern plains of Afghanistan, the village of Niazi Qala no longer stands. American airborne troops swept down before dawn on December 30, 2001 and slaughtered, among others, a wedding party.

Villagers said that women and children ran towards a dried pond, seeking protection from the gunfire, and were shot as they ran. After two hours, the aircraft and the attackers left. According to a United Nations investigation, 52 people were killed, including 25 children.

"We identified it as a military target", says the Pentagon, echoing its initial response to the My Lai massacre 35 years ago.

The targeting of civilians has long been a journalistic taboo in the West. Accredited monsters did that, never "us".

The civilian death toll of the 1991 Gulf war was wildly underestimated. Almost a year later, a comprehensive study by the Medical Education Trust in London estimated that more than 200,000 Iraqis had died during and immediately after the war, as a direct or indirect consequence of attacks on



civilian infrastructure. The report was all but ignored.

This month, Iraq Body Count, a group of American and British academics and researchers, estimated that up to 10,000 civilians may have been killed in Iraq, including 2356 civilians in the attack on Baghdad alone. And this is likely to be an extremely conservative figure.

In Afghanistan, there has been similar carnage. In May last year, Jonathan Steele extrapolated all the available field evidence of the human cost of the US bombing and concluded that as many as 20,000 Afghans may have lost their lives as an indirect consequence of the bombing, many of them drought victims denied relief.

This "hidden" effect is hardly new. A recent study at Columbia University in New York has found that the spraying of Agent Orange and other herbicides on Vietnam was up to four times as great as previously estimated. Agent Orange contained dioxin, one of the deadliest poisons known.

In what they first called Operation Hades, then changed to the friendlier Operation Ranch Hand, the Americans in Vietnam destroyed, in some 10,000 "missions" to spray Agent Orange, almost half the forests of southern Vietnam, and countless human lives. It was the most insidious and perhaps the most devastating use of a chemical weapon of mass destruction ever.

Today, Vietnamese children continue to be born with a range of deformities, or they are stillborn, or the fetuses are aborted. The use of uranium-tipped munitions evokes the catastrophe of Agent Orange.

In the first Gulf war in 1991, the Americans and British used 350 tonnes of depleted uranium. According to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, quoting an international study, 50 tonnes of DU, if inhaled or ingested, would cause 500,000 deaths. Most of the victims are civilians in southern Iraq. It is estimated that 2000 tonnes were used during the latest attack.

In a remarkable series of reports for the Christian Science Monitor, the investigative reporter Scott Peterson has described radiated bullets in the streets of Baghdad and radiation-contaminated tanks, where children play without warning.

Belatedly, a few signs in Arabic have appeared: "Danger - Get away from this area". At the same time, in

Afghanistan, the Uranium Medical Research Centre, based in Canada, has made two field studies, with the results described as "shocking".

"Without exception", it reported, "at every bomb site investigated, people are ill. A significant portion of the civilian population presents symptoms consistent with internal contamination by uranium."

An official map distributed to non-government agencies in Iraq shows that the American and British military have plastered urban areas with cluster bombs, many of which will have failed to detonate on impact. These usually lie unnoticed until children pick them up, then they explode.

In the centre of Kabul, I found two ragged notices warning people that the rubble of their homes, and streets, contained unexploded cluster bombs "made in USA". Who reads them? Small children?

The day I watched children skipping through what might have been an urban minefield, I saw Tony Blair on CNN in the lobby of my hotel. He was in Iraq, in Basra, lifting a child into his arms, in a school that had been painted for his visit, and where lunch had been prepared in his honour, in a city where basic services such as education, food and water remain a shambles under the British occupation.

It was in Basra three years ago that I filmed hundreds of children ill and dying because they had been denied cancer treatment equipment and drugs under an embargo enforced with enthusiasm by Tony Blair. Now here he was - shirt open, with that fixed grin, a man of the troops if not of the people - lifting a toddler into his arms for the cameras.

When I returned to London, I read "After Lunch", by Harold Pinter, from a new collection of his called *War* (Faber & Faber).

And after noon the well-dressed creatures come

To sniff among the dead

And have their lunch

And all the many well-dressed creatures pluck

The swollen avocados from the dust

And stir the minestrone with stray bones

And after lunch

They loll and lounge about

Decanting claret in convenient skulls.

John Pilger is a renowned journalist, war correspondent and documentary film-maker. ☪

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troika of business, the economic Right, and the Bush administration are Religious Right groups - who have long pushed the tax-cutting agenda to their followers and right-wing media outlets, such as *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page, the *Weekly Standard* and the *National Review*.

The powers behind the throne

One thing is certain: None of the five think tanks discussed in these pages is going to have to run a bake sale in order to pay the rent. According to People for the American Way (PFAW), they rake in more than US\$60 million per year, with the Heritage Foundation raising US\$38 million in 2000. Together they employ more than 300 staff members.

And they are, in a very real sense, farm teams for the Bush administration. Nina Shokrii Rees, a key member of Vice President Cheney's staff, is a graduate of Americans for Tax Reform.

The Heritage Foundation sent Labor Secretary Elaine Chao and eight others to the White House.

Five alumni of the Cato Institute have been appointed to the Commission to Strengthen Social Security; while Citizens for a Sound Economy has contributed a half-dozen of its staff to various government agencies.

Although these groups get money from the giants of U.S. industry, all of them depend on right-wing foundations for much of their financial backing.

People's Weekly World ☪

Korean reunification making good progress

The US continued its threats against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK – North Korea) last week with US Secretary of State Colin Powell declaring that North Korea's "bad behaviour" would not be rewarded.

Powell said that the call of the US for "North Korea's scrapping of its nuclear program first" and for "multilateral talks" enjoys the broad-based "support" of the international community.

North Korea's news agency (KCNA) replied that the possession of a nuclear deterrent force is a very just, self-defensive measure and is not intended to get any reward from the US but to cope with its hostile policy.

"The strengthening of military power is the only way to protect national sovereignty and dignity in the face of the imperialists' strong-arm policy and high-handedness. Only when we have a military deterrent powerful enough to restrain the imperialists from invading our country, can the nation defend [its] right to live and sovereignty", *Rodong Simmun*, the official organ of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, noted in June.

The DPRK has made flexible and innovative new proposals to hold bilateral talks first and then the multilateral talks proposed by the US. The proposals took into consideration the origin of the nuclear issue between the two countries, the present situation, and provide a solution to the issue and even the "concerns" of the US.

The US has turned down the bilateral talks, insisting on the "scrapping of the nuclear program first" and talks about the "effective-

ness" of multilateral talks. "This behaviour is of no help to the solution of the issue but will complicate it", says KCNA.

A key to settling the nuclear issue is for the US to respond to the bilateral talks with the will to make a switch in its hostile policy towards the DPRK. "Without such a change, any form of talks would be fruitless and meaningless."

KCNA reiterated the necessity for the independence of the two Korea's as the "guarantee for reunification".

The reunification of Korea is an issue for the Korean nation itself KCNA says.

The division of Korea into North and South was brought about by outside forces following the Korean war of the early 1950s. US forces have remained in occupation of South Korea since 1953.

The Pyongyang Times reports steady progress in the reunification process between North and South. "Confrontation, distrust and misunderstanding have begun to move away and our fellow countrymen in the north and the south are turning to reconciliation, trust and unity. More and more people are coming together under the banner of national independence, transcending differences in ideology, political view and creed".

A grand reunification festival was held to mark the anniversary of the Joint Declaration between the



Dividing a people – the DMZ between North and South

governments of the north and south to work towards reunification.

In this Declaration, signed on June 15, 2000, the two governments agreed to "solve the reunification problem independently, through joint efforts of the entire nation".

The Declaration was warmly welcomed by the Korean people who want to determine their own affairs in a peaceful manner.

Several rounds of inter-Korean ministerial talks have been held by government representatives.

The east and west coastal roads have been relinked. A wide variety of cooperative activities including the building of an industrial zone in North Korea are making good progress.

Cultural exchanges are taking place. South Korean senior media officials visited Pyongyang. Hundred of thousands of southerners visited the north as tourists.

A children's art troupe and

the Pyongyang Circus gave performances in the South Korean capital Seoul.

"Southerners realise that the fuss being made by the US over the nuclear issue is intended to fan confrontation between the north and south", writes *The Pyongyang Times*.

The newspaper says, "The current trend towards reunification is moving forward despite continued acts of aggression and provocations perpetrated by foreign forces".

Communists express solidarity

Forty-six Communist and Worker's Parties (including the Communist Party of Australia), meeting in Athens in June endorsed a statement expressing their solidarity with North Korea in its struggle to fend off the aggressive policies directed against the Republic by

the United States and the Howard Government.

The statement said, "Tension is rising on the Korean peninsula creating an imminent danger to peace in the region. This is due to the aggressive designs and provocative actions of US imperialism that has divided the country since 1945".

"We condemn imperialism's recent actions intended to sabotage the dialogue and reunification process between the DPRK and the South Korean authorities."

The statement said that "the threats of US imperialism against other countries are deepening imperialism's [drive for its] new world order".

The Parties committed themselves "to fight alongside the global peace movement against all imperialist aggression and in support of independence, sovereignty and the right of any state to defend its way of life and social system". ✪

Soldier doesn't like Iraq War either

Before he was sent to the Middle East, a young soldier from Texas began corresponding by e-mail with Jim Lane and others in Dallas. His view of the war and army life was considerably different from what the "embedded" US journalists were reporting. Jim notes that "Even though we were thousands of miles apart and only connected by mail, we North Texans became extremely fond and protective toward 'Soldier Sal'". The following are excerpts from their correspondence published in the US communist paper, *People's Weekly World*.

Dear Jim,

Thank you for writing back. It means a lot, especially considering how busy you are. I am not very busy out here. It is so hot so I go into the building we work at out here like six hours before my shift starts. It means I am susceptible to more details, but at least I can be in some air conditioning.

I don't get much contact with the Iraqi locals because there have been a lot of attacks lately. They say that the Iraqis are shooting at us because they want us to go home, which is ironic because that is basically the only thing I want right now! I guess it is just lost in translation.

On the convoy down here, we had a lot of exposure with locals and it was really sad. The convoy commander told us we couldn't give anything to the locals, and if we did, we would be disciplined.

I didn't understand why he would say something like that until we got into the situation where we had to stop and a bunch of Iraqis came up to us. They looked absolutely decimated. And the sad thing

was that every Humvee was filled with an abundance of food and water. And these people were offering to sell beautiful knives and old currency and other things just for a bottle of water or an MRE [meals ready to eat].

While the guy in my Humvee wasn't looking, I handed one guy a single peppermint, but I got caught and yelled at. Then the guy started begging for one for his baby and I couldn't. It was very sad and I was very mad that I couldn't share my food and water with them.

I will be getting out of the army soon enough. I will be very relieved when I get out. I have felt so restricted for so long that I almost forgot what it was like to be a free person.

Have you ever read Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*? It is a very wonderful book. I get a lot of reading time out here. At first I wanted to just read a lot of theory and stuff, but then that got boring so I split it up. Half theory and half regular fiction.

**In solidarity,
Sal of the Sand**

Cuban and US youth to exchange views

On July 23 over 250 young people participating in the 3rd US-Cuba Youth Exchange are due to begin a nine-day trip to Cuba, where they are to meet Cuban youth and students and discuss many of the pressing issues of the day – issues like peace, education, health, culture, unemployment, racism and sexism.

by Tony Pecinovsky

The US-Cuba Youth Exchange will bring together youth delegates from across the US. For many in the Youth United Delegation (YUD), one of the delegations going, this will be their first experience in Cuba.

While travel to the socialist island nation is becoming more difficult in the face of the US Government's increasing hostility, the Youth Exchange delegates will learn first hand what Cuban society is really like.

In a clear attempt to intimidate would-be travellers, the Bush administration, in March, ended the "people to people" educational licences that allowed Americans to legally explore Cuba.

Further, since Bush took office, over 1200 Americans have received letters from the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, threatening fines of up to US\$55,000 for violating the travel ban to the island. Last year 160,000 Americans had approval to visit Cuba, while 60,000 others went without government approval.

While the Bush administration pursues a policy of war rather

than diplomatic and peaceful co-existence, the YUD, like its predecessors, is pursuing a policy dedicated to "people to people" diplomacy, exemplified by the multiracial, working class delegation of US youth and students.

For YUD delegates like Julie Rodriguez from Los Angeles, "it is important that we continue to maintain relationships on a personal level despite the restrictions that the administration tries to impose".

YUD co-ordinator Jessica Marshall said, "Many of the delegates want to go to Cuba because they don't believe what Bush has said". "It is important for people to get first-hand impressions

of Cuba, rather than the corporate media's impression."

"US policy towards Cuba is out-of-date. It is hurting the Cuban people", said Molly Kelley, a delegate from Iowa and a leader of the Young Communist League. "The Cuban and American people should know a lot more about each other. It is a twenty-minute flight. Unfortunately most people only know what the media tells them."

Noting the diversity of the delegation Alcy Montas, an activist from Uptown Youth for Peace and Justice, NYC said "we come from so many different backgrounds – dealing with police brutality, budget cuts, attacks on affirmative action, war and attacks on working people ... that's what makes us the most effective ambassadors for peace, and that's why we're going to Cuba".

People's Weekly World, paper of Communist Party USA ✪

Sydney
Dr Drew Cottle
Speaking on
the Brisbane Line
Sunday 27th July, 2-5pm
PSU House Level 7, 191 Thomas St, City
All welcome No charge
Afternoon tea provided
 Organised by
 the Sydney Branch of the Labour History Society

Dr Cottle has carried out extensive research on this question, the subject of his recent book **THE BRISBANE LINE: A REAPPRAISAL** (Upfront Publishing, Leicestershire) The book is available from www.amazon.co.uk

Parents fight Jeb's biased test

At least 43,000 third-graders and 12,000 high school seniors failed the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) this past May, triggering an angry protest movement by parents, students, and their supporters demanding that Governor Jeb Bush suspend the high stakes exam.

by Tim Wheeler

The crisis brought home that Florida is once again a testing ground for Bush-led Republican attacks on the democratic rights of the people. FCAT is Florida's version of a punitive test that will be forced on every public school student in every state under George W Bush's "No Child Left Behind" scam.

More than 2,500 parents, students, religious, civil rights and community leaders staged a protest rally outside Governor Bush's Miami office May 22. Miami is home to one third of those who failed the FCAT, many of them not fluent in English. Thousands of students stayed away from their classes that day. The protestors travelled in a motorcade of 500 cars to a larger meeting at Florida International University.

State Senator Frederica Wilson (D-Miami) told the crowd, "I'm hoping that the governor will realise that it's hard enough being Black in America today. For children without a diploma, it will be triply hard."

Bishop Victor T. Curry of the New Birth Baptist Church said the only thing Bush understands is "M-O-N-E-Y". He urged a boycott of Florida's US\$52 billion tourism industry to force Bush to suspend the FCAT. He announced that thousands across Florida have signed petitions demanding suspension of FCAT.

State Senator Gary Siplin (D-Orlando) convened a news conference in his district July 7 to decry the disaster, charging that the FCAT is biased against African American, Haitian, Latino, and poor children of all races. He too said a boycott is in order if Jeb Bush refuses to suspend FCAT.

Bush has called for a special

session of the Florida legislature to enact limits on jury awards in medical malpractice lawsuits. "I am asking the Governor to expand that special session to include help for the students who failed the FCAT", Siplin told the *People's Weekly World* in a telephone interview.

In his district, he said, 12,000 incoming third graders next year will be joined by 13,000 repeaters. "That is 25,000 third graders next year with no extra money provided by the state to hire more teachers or buy more textbooks."

He charged that Bush's hidden agenda is privatisation of the state's public schools. "This is the most logical explanation", Siplin said. "Vouchers are given to children to attend private schools where children are not required to take the FCAT for either advancement or graduation", he said. "Governor Bush's brother, Neil, markets a program to help students prepare to take the FCAT."

He was referring to a Texas-based software firm, Ignite! Inc, of which Neil Bush is the founder and CEO. The company has raked in US\$20 million selling software to prepare students to take comprehensive tests required under "No Child Left Behind". Schools that fail the tests will face termination of federal assistance.

Neil Bush's firm is running a pilot program at the Ocoee Middle School in Orlando and hopes to sell the software throughout Florida at US\$30 per pupil per year. Neil Bush is notorious for his role in the Silverado Savings scam that cost depositors US\$1 billion in the savings and loan scandal back in the mid-1980s.

Siplin pointed out that Governor Bush could find no money to implement the ballot measure over-

whelmingly approved by voters last November mandating a reduction in class size to 18 pupils or for a pay raise for hard-pressed Florida teachers. "But he found the money to pay for prisons to house another 4,000 inmates", he said.

Mark Pudlow, a spokesman for the Florida Education Association, an affiliate of the National Education Association (NEA) said, "We have many concerns about FCAT and standardised testing in general. It encompasses entirely too much of what students, teachers and schools are judged on in one high stakes test."

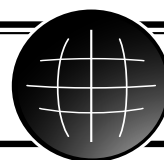
NEA is preparing a lawsuit asking the courts to declare that "No Child Left Behind" is an "unfunded mandate" imposed on states contrary to the intent of Congress. NEA General Counsel Robert Chanin cited a study by the non-partisan General Accounting Office that just the testing provisions of the law alone will cost states between US\$1.9 billion and US\$5.3 billion.

State Senator Tony Hill (D-Jacksonville), told the *People's Weekly World*, "We've put on a series of town hall meetings across the state. You have to realise how devastating it is when so many thousands of third graders and high school seniors fail the test. Jeb Bush is the king-maker in these attacks on public education."

Hill, a former union longshoreman and organiser for the Service Employees International Union, said the crisis in public education looms in the 2004 presidential and congressional elections. "They are spending billions in Iraq but they have no funds to educate our children here at home", he said.

"We still have our 'Arrive with Five' project, urging every voter to bring five family, friends and neighbors to the polling place on election day 2004. We will mobilise and organise to safeguard against a repeat of the nightmare of 2000."

People's Weekly World, paper of Communist Party USA



Global briefs

PAKISTAN: The newly founded Pakistan Sugar Mill Workers' Federation has won an important victory against union busting in the Federation's first challenge. The Federation was founded in May with the support of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association. After a tough struggle the Federation now has unrestricted access and the right to hold meetings and general assemblies at the Army Welfare Sugar Mill, in the Badin Sindh province.

KENYA: Hundreds of Kenyan women are preparing a multi-million dollar compensation claim against Britain's Ministry of Defence after being raped by British soldiers stationed in the country. The women have managed to secure legal aid in Britain to pursue their claims that they were gang raped over a period spanning three decades in what their lawyer described as "open season" for British soldiers in Kenya. None of the rapes have previously been investigated or prosecuted.

IRAQ: The new Governing Council which was set up last week by Iraqi political parties, including the Iraqi Communist Party, has postponed selecting a leader but did decide to send three of its members to the UN to seek the backing of the Security Council. At a three-hour meeting the Council voted to send the delegation to the UN to "assert and emphasise the role of the Governing Council as a legitimate Iraqi body during this transition period".

VENEZUELA: The Chavez Government has accused the group Human Rights Watch of meddling in the country's internal affairs after the group criticised proposed new broadcasting rules as "a threat to media freedom". The legislation would ban programs containing explicit sex and violence during the day and would forbid the broadcasting of events and statements that "incite disruption of public order". Venezuela's Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel told the New York-based group, "You have misinterpreted our generosity and abused it to meddle in affairs which are strictly the business of Venezuela's institutions and its citizens".

BRITAIN: Human rights campaigners have attacked the US administration following the announcement that two British men held prisoner at Guantanamo Bay could face the death penalty for alleged involvement with al-Qaida. Activists warned that the trials would be fixed by the US military in its desperation to secure convictions. The men are to face trial in a secretive military tribunal. Many prisoners have been held at Guantanamo, including two Australian citizens, without charge for more than a year and a half.

JAPAN: Resentment of the huge US military presence on Japanese soil is growing after another American soldier was accused of rape in Okinawa. The anger is as much against the Japanese Government as against the US for its failure to end laws giving US military personnel immunity to prosecution.

Iraqi CP hopes for the new "Governing Council"

Last week *The Guardian* reported that the General Secretary of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was among the 25 persons brought together to form a "Governing Council" for Iraq. It is made up of a wide range of Iraqi political parties and personalities.

An editorial in the Party's newspaper *Tareeq Al-Shaab* explains the approach of the ICP in joining this Council.

Their editorial explains that "the issue of the formation of the 'Governing Council' has been a focus for dialogue and discussion" and that it is a "refining of the idea of the Political Council (put forward by the ICP) and is a compromise between the general desire of Iraqis for the establishment of

"an Iraqi provisional patriotic coalition government and the governing system endorsed by the UN Security Council in its Resolution 1483". This UN resolution gave recognition to the US and British occupation "authority".

The editorial goes on: "While the new idea attempts to get closer to the objective of enabling Iraqis to play a bigger role in deciding their destiny and running their affairs, the significance and value of this idea will depend mainly on how close it gets to achieving a patriotic government, and speeding up the formation of this government which will prepare for free and fair elections under UN supervision. It would "also prepare a draft constitution to be put to a public referendum".

"The idea of setting up the 'Governing Council' will only acquire significance if it becomes an effective institution, with clear and concrete powers at legislative and executive levels, [is able] to monitor

the affairs of the administration and have a concrete working mechanism. This will also depend on the 'Council' being representative of the principal forces in Iraqi society and of those parties that made precious sacrifices in the struggle against the dictatorship and for the democratic alternative.

"Only a 'Council' with such a description can win the trust of Iraqis and raise their hopes and be qualified to win the support of the broadest masses and mobilise their backing.

"The fundamental test and main criterion by which to measure the success of this 'Council' will lie in the speedy restoration of security, stability and normality, rebuilding government institutions, (necessary to eliminate the remnants of the dictatorial regime), rebuilding the system of health and municipal services, reactivating the production cycle, embarking on the process of reconstruction to repair the destruction caused by wars and economic blockade, and advancing towards restoring the country's sovereignty and independence", said the Party's editorial statement.

Pass it on! Pass it on! Pass it on! Pass it on! Pass it on!

When you've finished this issue share it with someone else.

Help *The Guardian* get around.

Use of death penalty questioned

Recently *The Guardian* published a resolution passed by the Sydney District Conference supporting the Cuban Government against the counter-revolutionary actions of the United States. Upon first reading I too enthusiastically endorsed this stand.

However on second reading I was disturbed by what appeared to be the Conference's endorsement of capital punishment.

The resolution read: "...the Cuban Government took decisive action to stop the hijackings and to defend Cuba's sovereignty. Thwarted in their aggressive schemes by the summary execution of a number of convicted hijackers in Cuba, the Bush administration has launched instead a campaign of 'disinformation' (deliberate misinformation) about the executions as 'breaches of human rights'".

The next paragraph: "This Sydney District Conference of the Communist Party of Australia declares its support for the actions of the Cuban Government".

Does the Communist Party of Australia support the death penalty?

Compare this resolution to a statement by the Communist Party of the USA, also published in a recent edition of *The Guardian*: "In this context, 75 Cubans were arrested for actively violating Cuban law, and three ferry hijackers were executed. With Cuba fighting for its very life, these executions

were carried out against hijackers who threatened to drown innocent passengers."

"Nevertheless, the Communist Party USA ... opposes the death penalty, and joins in the call for its universal abolition."

Crime is a symptom of a capitalist society. Not all crime, but the vast majority of it.

It is the unequal distribution of wealth in our society, the emphasis placed on consumerism, the learned greed of those who have capital and will stop at nothing to accumulate more, and the desperation of those who have nothing, and therefore have nothing to lose.

Murder is considered the "ultimate crime", and the crime for which the death penalty is most often applied in those societies which legislate for capital punishment.

Yet even murders are often committed for those reasons outlined above - particularly in relation to gang or mafia activity, or people wishing to gain financial benefit from the death of a relative.

This is all related to capitalism, yet capitalism abrogates all responsibility for murders. Instead we are led to believe that some people are "inherently evil"; the word "evil" is splashed regularly in bold headlines across the front pages of the bourgeois media.

As Marxists we must reject this ideology of Good versus Evil.

As Marxists we must also acknowledge that society has a collective responsibility for the welfare of all its members.

We must then, in that spirit, put full effort into the reform, re-

education and rehabilitation of criminals, and reject the detention of criminals as purely a punitive measure.

Therefore I reject the death penalty as punishment for crime under any circumstances, and, in agreement with the CPUSA, will continue to campaign for its universal abolition.

Julie Messenger
Sydney, NSW

Classes still crowded

With school having resumed after the mid-year holidays, the sad fact is more than 50,000 Queensland students still find themselves in oversized classes.

The Beattie Government's refusal to lower class sizes is perplexing, especially given progress on the issue that's being made in other States.

Despite the indifference of politicians, the many benefits of smaller classes, including more individual attention for children and improved student behaviour, are clear.

This issue won't go away. Class Size Counts.

Steve Ryan
Vice-President
Queensland Teachers' Union

Can you help?

There is a song by Eisler (and Brecht?) called "L'appel du Komintern" or "Call of the Comintern". I would like to have the English text of this. Can anyone help please?

Reply to 0418 668 098.

Hannah Middleton

Got something to say?

Then write it down and send it to us.

Letters of up to 400 words in length are preferred.



Lunch for Cuba

At the
Australia Greek Welfare Society
7 Union Street, Brunswick
(near Sydney Road)

Date: Sunday 27 July Time: 1.00-4.00 pm

Cost: \$15/\$12

Lunch served: BYO drinks

Latin American Music

Come join us for a great day

Commemorate the Moncada uprising

Support Cuba

Bookings and Enquiries:

Joan (9857 9249)

Maree (9478 9473)

Organised by the Australia-Cuba Friendship Society
Proceeds to fund our micro-hydro electric scheme "Almendral"

Culture & Life

Royals galore

Have you noticed just how many television programs have recently been on or are coming on about the British Royal family, past and present? Victoria's boring marriage to Albert was only just laid to rest when we were bombarded by a veritable barrage of Royals.

by Rob Gowland

At the end of this month is a series on *Edward And Mary: The Unknown Tudors*. Edward came to the throne in 1547 and was only 16 when he died.

His reign was marked by a "victory over the Scots at Pinkie in 1547", but considering he was only ten at the time I doubt he had much to do with it.

His reign was also noted for "risings" by Catholics and peasants protesting the enclosure of common land by wealthy nobles. While his "advisers" doubtless had much to do with causing these events, Edward himself could hardly have had less influence on English history.

The other part of the series deals with his sister, who became Mary I after his death. She was a devout, even bigoted, Catholic and the persecution and killing of Protestant leaders that she authorised led to her being known as "Bloody Mary".

But Mary's piety could not stop the English Reformation, because essentially it was not about religion but about commerce. English trade and incipient English capitalism

required the wealth of the Church of Rome to be appropriated and its power to be crushed.

Abroad, it meant hostility (sometimes piratical actions, sometimes open warfare) with Europe's leading Catholic power and main exploiter of the gold of the New World, Spain.

But developing economic formations do not figure prominently in this account by Dr David Starkey. The series is from the makers of the similarly defective *Elizabeth* and *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (more British Royals on television).

We are currently enjoying (if that's the right word) a short series about Prince John, the younger son of George V, another Royal child who died young. His short life was undeniably a sad one, but no more so than that of countless of his father's subjects whose early deaths could have been prevented by the application of a small fraction of the wealth that was lavished on Johnnie and the Sandringham estate where he was confined.

The current crop of celebrity profiles lumped into the *Famous Faces* slot includes no less than two Royal programs: *Charles and Camilla* and one about Charlie's eldest son, *Edward* (incredibly subtitled in best tabloid journalism style *The Reluctant Royal*).

Coming up on August 3 is still more Royal history, this time about one of Henry VIII's mistresses, Mary Boleyn, sister of the more famous Anne. And you can be sure that this trolling through the more esoteric annals of British royalty will not stop with this program.

For these programs all have certain traits in common. Not one of them could be accused of questioning the right of "Royal Families" to enjoy their privileged position.

They certainly could not be accused of advocating the abolition of the monarchy, of appropriating the wealth and ending the extrava-



Two proper Charlies : Howard with the Duke of Cornwall

gance of these parasites on the public purse. Dear me, no.

These programs might pick up on the odd Royal nutter or random act of cruelty, but they would never dream of biting the hand that feeds them: for they are part of what might be called "Establishment Culture".

They depict the ruling class in the position it wants to be in: ruling. If they show some unsavoury acts in ages past, the ruling class can live with that. It does not affect the way the public today views the monarchy.

But try presenting a program exposing the monarchy as an anachronistic holdover from feudalism, retained to give a gloss of glamour and tradition to rapacious, industrial capitalism.

Under capitalism, the mass media are instruments of capitalist

class rule, and the capitalist class wants the monarchy to remain. It is useful to capitalism (that's why the Yanks are always trying to create a "royal family" around their President).

There are interesting and useful programs that could be made about the British Royals. Charles, for instance, as well as being Prince of Wales is Duke of Cornwall.

This position brings him, like all Royal positions, a good income. So good in fact that Diana's lawyers wanted it included in Charlie's income for the purposes of her divorce settlement.

Charles wouldn't have it, however, pointing out with some pomposity that his income as Duke of Cornwall is not really his, it is held in trust for the miners of Cornwall. Charles is duty bound to use this income to protect and

maintain the metal mining industry of Cornwall.

It might have thwarted Diana's lawyers, but this argument cuts no ice with the unemployed tin miners of Cornwall today. Since Charles became Duke, the mining of metals in Cornwall has gone phut and Charles is doing next to nothing about it.

In fact, he treats his Ducal income as though it was his after all. As for the Cornish miners, if they doff their caps on the rare occasions when he comes visiting, he will doubtless tell them an amusing story or make even make strong noises about preserving some heritage building.

But spend his money on improving the lot of the common folk of Cornwall? You must be joking.

Let's have a Royal program about that. ☺

Rob Gowland
previews
ABC & SBS
public television
programs
Sun July 27 ~
~ Sat August 2

The vast Amazon rain forest constitutes the lungs of our planet. In 1992, the World Environmental Summit was held in Brazil, largely because of international concern about the burning of the Amazon forest.

But as *Cutting Edge: Fires Of The Amazon* (SBS 8.30pm Tuesday) shows, the fires may have been stopped (or at any rate reduced) but now an even greater threat looms.

The Brazilian Government's planned "Avanca Brasil" development program will fund the paving of half a dozen highways through the Amazon rainforest. A recent report in the American journal *Science* estimates that this will leave Amazonia 28 - 42 percent deforested by 2020, with vast additional areas of forest degraded.

At the same time selective logging of reserves, while leaving most of the trees standing, thins out the density of the forest and punches holes in the canopy, making the forest vulnerable to fire.

In the past, standing Amazonian forest was too damp to be flammable. But now, Dan Nepstad of the Institute for Amazonian Environmental Research estimates that in periods of drought induced by the regular weather event *El Nino*, 30 percent of the forest is vulnerable to a "really mega fire event".

The British Meteorological Office's Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction predicts that thanks to global warming, drought alone will have killed off most of the forest before the end of the century. What

is President Bush doing about this threat to the American way of life? Greg Peck died the other day and the ABC is re-running a tribute program, *Famous Faces: A Conversation With Gregory Peck* (ABC 9.30pm Saturday). It is an interesting program, based around his live shows, in which they ran clips from his films and then Peck would come out and answer questions from the audience. All very relaxed and friendly.

But the ABC also has some of Peck's feature films. Instead of giving these an airing at a reasonable hour, however, they are running two of them in the wee small hours. Setting your video recorders is clearly expected.

The better of the two is on late Tuesday night *The Purple Plain* (ABC 12.45am Wednesday). Made in Britain in 1954, it is a very Peck sort of film, in which the hero has to come to grips with his own racial prejudices before he can accept being in love with a Burmese girl.

He does this while struggling through the jungle to safety after crashing his plane during WW2. The girl is the beautiful Win Min Than, and there is capable support from Bernard Lee and Maurice Denham.

The second Peck film, screening late Thursday night, was also made in Britain in 1954. An adaptation of the story by Mark Twain, *The Million Pound Note* (ABC 1:05am Friday) sees Peck miscast: he is stiff and ill at ease, although to some extent this actually suits his bemused character.

Peck plays an out of work seaman given a million pounds in the form of a single banknote, which is his to keep provided he can contrive to live for a month without actually spending any of it.

Twain made it the opportunity for much satire about greed and snobbery, but the film aspires to be a simple romantic comedy. Mild would best describe it.

On Tuesday night, while you've got your video recorder on, you could do worse than copy Anthony Pelissier's film



A vigorous comedy thriller (*The Big Steal*)

of H G Wells' novel *The History Of Mr Polly* (ABC 4:30am Wednesday).

Made in 1949, it has John Mills in a characteristic "northern" portrayal as Mr Polly, the draper's assistant who dreams of romance and poetry. He marries a shrew (Betty Ann Davies) and burns his shop down when attempting suicide.

He finally escapes and finds a safe haven in a rural inn run by a widow (Megs Jenkins) but must survive the onslaught of her brutish brother in law (Finlay Currie: "I'll do things to yer - 'orrible things") before happiness will be his.

It's a clever adaptation (by the director) that captures the book's spirit rather well. Mills is excellent, as is the photography of Desmond Dickinson.

And while in the mood to use the video recorder, don't overlook the 1939 film of *The Mikado* (ABC 4:30am Thursday). Made with some of the D'Oyly

Carte opera company's most celebrated members in excellent form, this is classic Gilbert & Sullivan.

It's an excellent antidote to the poisonous versions of G&S the Australian Opera dishes up these days.

For a witty, observant and pungent critique of the values of George Bush's USA you can't do much better than *Daria* (ABC 5:30pm Thursdays). Amongst a host of targets, it pillories the culture of "dumbing down", exposes the intellectual pretensions of advertising and sales executives, and revels in the evils of commercial sponsorship of education.

Daria, whose refusal to be stereotyped as an airhead, like the kids around her, makes her a "weirdo", is a delightful heroine, and the series is often very funny indeed.

The Big Steal (ABC 11.10pm Saturday) is a vigorous comedy thriller from 1949. Crisply directed by Don Siegel, from the story *The Road to Carmichael's* by Richard Wormser, it is basically a chase movie, in and around Mexico City.

The film was shot on location in Mexico City which gives it, as *Variety* so characteristically says, "added sight interest as well as strengthened melodramatics".

Unusually for the time, the script, by Gerald Drayson Adams and Geoffrey Homes, dives straight into the action, leaving the audience in the modern manner to sort out what is happening (and why) as best they can.

A relaxed and rather playful Robert Mitchum is the US Army officer accused of stealing an army payroll, Patric Knowles is the man he's chasing in order to clear himself and William Bendix is the relentless Army cop on Mitchum's trail.

Silent movie idol Raymond Novarro, star of the original *Ben Hur* and second only to Valentino as a screen lover, plays the astute Mexican cop.

Caught up and taken along for the ride is Jane Greer. A minor star at RKO at this time, Greer saw her career come to a dead stop when she refused to give studio boss Howard Hughes a tumble.

Multi-millionaire and notorious womaniser Hughes owned RKO so when Greer refused to come across he simply ordered that she be given no more work. Greer was under contract so she could work for no one else.

By the time her RKO contract expired she had been off-screen for so long her career was effectively over. More like feudalism in action than "capitalist free enterprise"! ☼

Coming Perth events

Commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Moncada Barracks uprising.

A failure that became a success leading to the triumph of the Cuban revolution on January 1, 1959.

Venue: **The Resistance Centre, 5/15 Short Street, East Perth.**

Date and Time: **Saturday July 26, at 6.30 pm**

Entry by gold donation Food and drinks available on sale. Local musicians and speakers.

A joint ACFS and CISLAC event.

More info from 0419 812 872 or 08 9328 6091

Celebrate with Cuban friends at the Santiago de Cuba Carnival

Venue: **Kulcha Multicultural Arts centre of WA, 1/15 South Terrace, Fremantle (above Dome café)**

Date and Time: **Saturday, August 9, at 7 pm until late.**

Featuring Latin band SABROSON. Free dancing lessons by Dessie Kovan plus a good dose of politics.

\$15 at the door or by phoning Vinnie 0419 812 872 or 0419 942 045

Hiroshima Day

Rally and march organised by the No War Alliance

Venue: **Perth Concert Hall then down St Georges Terrace to Forrest place.**

Date and Time: **Saturday August 9, Assemble at 1 pm**

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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

July 25

THE IRAQ WAR - DESTABILISING THE WORLD?
Prof Ahmead Shboul, Semitic Studies Uni Sydney;
Dr Michael Humphreys, School of Sociology Uni NSW

August 8

COURAGE AND COWARDICE IN PUBLIC LIFE
Linda Burney, ALP MP, former Director General NSW Dept of
Aboriginal Affairs;
Rick Farley, Managing Director Farley Consulting
and Environment Use and Native Title

August 15

NON-VIOLENT AGENDAS - THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE
Jason McLeod, Co-ordinator Peace Brigades International;
Stuart Rees, Director Peace and Conflict Studies Sydney Uni

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A just and peaceful world is possible

Representatives of communist and workers parties from 59 countries across the globe participated in a conference hosted by the Communist Party of Greece in Athens last month. The theme of the conference was the "Anti-Globalisation and Anti-War Movements and the Communists". Dr Hannah Middleton, President of the Communist Party of Australia, attended the conference. The following is an abridged text of the paper she presented to the conference.

The world-wide struggle between the people and the transnational corporations is intensifying. The situation in Australia and internationally is marked by this struggle at the centre of which is the struggle between the capitalist class and the working class.

Never has the division of society into two great hostile camps, into two great classes, directly facing each other, been sharper or clearer.

Following World War II, US imperialism's drive for hegemony was subject to constraints imposed by the presence on the world stage of the USSR and other socialist countries. The US was forced to operate with policies of containment and the balance of power.

In the 1990s the victory of counter-revolution in the Soviet Union and the majority of the world's socialist states removed the one force on the international stage able to confront and deter imperialism.

Today, US imperialism's overwhelming military strength provides it with an historically unprecedented weapon with which to dominate the world in the interests of US transnational corporations.

At the same time, the most aggressive and reactionary segment of US imperialism, represented by the administration of George W Bush, moved into the White House.

As a result, policy makers in Washington began to implement a qualitatively new approach to achieving the long-term goal of US domination of every region of the globe, employing its overwhelming global military presence.

The situation in Australia reflects the global picture.

Anti-globalisation movement

A small anti-globalisation movement in Australia was galvanised by the events in Seattle and then by a massive protest action at the time of the World Economic Forum meeting in Melbourne in September 2000. The Melbourne street battles and debates were accompanied by a dramatic expansion in the political understanding of many activists.

One weakness at the time, which remains a problem for our work, was the low level of trade union involvement.

Since that time, anti-globalisation work has taken two forms: an activist wing, composed mainly of students and the radical left, and an NGO-dominated wing which is doing excellent research, public education and lobbying.

Many members from both these wings became active in the broad anti-war coalitions which were quickly built in late 2002 in every Australian State.

Anti-war movement

A wide range of social forces are involved in the anti-war movement. Participation by the organised working class through the trade union movement is good in some, but not all States.

The Australian Labor Party leadership took the position of supporting action against Saddam Hussein if it was endorsed by the United Nations. Despite this, hundreds of thousands of ALP members and supporters are active in the anti-war movement and opposed the war even with UN endorsement. When the United Nations refused support for the invasion, many ALP members of Parliament began marching at the front of the demonstrations.

In all States the Greens are particularly active in the anti-war coalitions.

The Communist Party of Australia plays a leading role in some, but not all of the anti-war coalitions. I am co-convenor of the Walk Against the War Coalition in Sydney, for example. It is interesting that there are two other convenors, one a member of the ALP and the other a member of the Trotskyist-oriented Democratic Socialist Party.

One important development in the anti-war movement was the initiatives to establish local groups which are independent but closely linked to and often resourced by the State-based coalitions. These flourish and some reach deep into their communities, drawing new sections of people into activism.

At the height of the movement's mobilisation, just before the invasion of Iraq, over 75 per cent of the Australian people were opposed to the war and to Australia's involvement in it.

The refusal by the Australian Government to listen to the majority voice outraged the people and raised their participation to a higher



level. The largest demonstrations ever seen in Australia on any issue took place.

Ultra-left (Trotskyist) political parties are active in the anti-war coalitions in all States. Despite contributing many good activists to the campaign, in some areas they cause considerable political conflict, distractions and divisions.

Conflict between the ultra-left forces and the social democratic forces (which constitute the majority of the activists in the anti-war coalitions) threatened and continues to threaten the unity of the coalitions and tends to drive the social democrats into more conservative positions.

There are concerns that difficulties with ultra left forces are about to sharpen with moves to consolidate their forces in Australia and with adoption of the Jakarta Peace Consensus.

The Consensus talks of "... the creation of a worldwide Solidarity Network for Global Peace at a future time, particularly during the meetings in Evian (G-8 summit), Cancun (WTO Conference), the regional Social Forums and the next World Social Forum in Bombay".

It is clear that in some countries the need to expose and combat the ultra-left has become more pressing.

The Communist Party of Australia is working to encourage the development of humanitarian aid projects as a means of keeping the coalitions and local groups active.

Our Party is discussing with members of the Iraqi Communist Party in Sydney the development of a people to people solidarity campaign. Our Party will be supporting a hospital in Baghdad.

Work is also underway towards major demonstrations associated with the Hiroshima and Nagasaki commemorations.

Priority areas

The CPA has identified the following priority areas of struggle:

a) Of immediate importance is the struggle against the US occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan.

b) An important task is to organise against the mounting costs of war and their negative impact on the people's needs and on the economy. In the recent Budget, the Federal Government significantly increased military spending while cutting funding to public health and public education.

c) A third important task is the abolition of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. This is an issue which has always commanded wide support in Australia.

d) The fourth task is to develop the campaign against United States military bases in Australia, particularly Pine Gap. This is associated with the demand for Australia's sovereignty and independence which became a big issue as Australia's Prime Minister and conservative government were seen to be playing the role of US deputy sheriff in the world.

The campaign against Pine Gap exposes US plans for global domination through the militarisation of space. It creates opportunities to link the anti-war and anti-globalisation movements under the theme of "Star Wars: the armed wing of globalisation".

e) Finally, it is vital to keep the peace movement aware of US aggressive acts and plans beyond Iraq, most urgently via the campaign in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

It is clear that communists must do even more to play a major role politically, ideologically and organisationally in the unprecedented levels of popular mobilisation around the world.

We have a major task to expand and deepen the level of working class involvement in the anti-globalisation and anti-war

movements and to help unite these two movements.

A major responsibility is to inform and organise people in our own countries, to bring more people into activity, to raise their political consciousness and, above all, to build our own Parties.

High price of war

Today, as never before, imperialism commands military resources capable of wiping out humanity and has adopted radically new policies exposing its intent to develop, expand and use weapons of mass destruction.

The US military budget is now over US \$437 billion every year. This is larger than the whole Australian economy. Yet global poverty and inequality are getting worse.

The drive towards war is being paid for by the peoples of the world. Struggles against poverty, for food, jobs, clean water, for democratic rights are all negatively affected by the political, social and economic costs of US imperialism's drive to war.

The price of failure will be not just global dictatorship, human misery, and environmental destruction but also the possibility of human and planetary annihilation, the ruin of the contending classes.

Everything depends on the extent to which popular, progressive, democratic and socialist forces can be mobilised. The attack on Afghanistan and the invasion and occupation of Iraq have awakened awareness of the new level of threat from aggressive imperialism with its aim of recolonising the whole world.

The struggle against the military, political and economic forms of corporate globalisation are the dominant and defining political issues for the foreseeable future.

These movements are what is new, what is coming into being and what will be the fundamental determinant of this new century.

A just and peaceful world is possible. The peoples of the world can and must impose it on US imperialism. ☸

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