

## Australian Govt signs up for Star Wars madness

**“We are appalled by the Howard Government’s decision to sign Australia up to the United States missile defence plans”, said Dr Hannah Middleton in a media statement on behalf of the Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition last week.**

The US program is estimated to cost a minimum of \$30 billion and Canberra is not giving any estimates of how much Australia will be expected to contribute. With a defence budget already running at over \$43 million a day and Medicare and education in desperate need of more funding, this is irresponsible, she said.

The Howard Government is dragging us into a massively expensive, controversial and still-experimental system that will make Australia complicit in US plans to turn space into an arena of war.

Furthermore, the US is not building a defensive system. It is planning to militarise and control space. The US Space Command report, *Vision for 2020*, speaks of “dominating the space dimension of military operations to protect US interests and investment”.

The US Air Force Space Command Strategic Master Plan says the United States intends to dominate the world by turning space into the crucial battlefield of the 21st Century.

“Air Force Space Command has the vision and the people to ensure the United States achieves space superiority today and in the future”, say the US planners adding that the US will not allow any other power, including its allies, to get a foothold in space.

***Prime Minister Howard is the most dangerous and warmongering Prime Minister that Australia has ever had.***

### Guardian dates

This is the last issue of *The Guardian* for 2003. The first issue for 2004 will be Wednesday January 21.

We wish all readers the very best over the holiday break and happiness, good health, peace and strength for the many struggles ahead in the New Year. We would like to thank all our readers for their support and encouragement during the past year.

### Denounced

Most competent authorities have already denounced the Star Wars project. A report by the General Accounting Office of the US Congress warned that Bush’s drive to erect an anti-missile system is hampered by immature technology and limited testing, raising the risk of failure.

In February 2002, Australia’s Office of National Assessments said that the US missile defence system could provoke a regional arms race and “would not be in Australia’s diplomatic or security interests”.

The announcement by the Australian Government that it is signing up to Star Wars has been followed by a report in *The Australian* (December 6-7) that the Government is to purchase long range missiles from the United States.

These missiles have a much longer range than any missiles presently available to the Australian Air Force and can be fitted with either conventional, nuclear, chemical or biological warheads.

No other country in the Southeast Asian region has such long range missiles in its arsenal and the Australian Government’s action will inevitably provoke an arms race in the region to pos-

sess similar or even more deadly weapons.

It is clear that the Australian Government and its US masters are rushing the militarisation of Australia and the Asian region. It involves US bases in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and on ships and aircraft in the region. These steps are all preparations for a large war in the future to contain and overwhelm the People’s Republic of China and impose US domination over the whole of Asia.

### Base for tanks and troops

Australia is being turned into a base for the stockpiling of weapons (by establishing a base at Darwin to house US tanks and troops), by renovating the naval facilities at Cockburn Sound in WA to take larger US warships, by using Lancelin (also in WA) as a bombing range and weapons testing area, by upgrading Pine Gap spy facilities and by building up the armed forces of Australia to



## Season's Greetings

**We convey season’s greetings and best wishes for the New Year to all members and supporters of the Communist Party of Australia and to all readers of *The Guardian*.**

This year saw millions upon millions rise up around the world to say no to the United States invasion of Iraq. What has come to be called the superpower of peace came to powerful life and hundreds of thousands of Australian men, women and children took part in those decisive events.

We end the year with the US still occupying Iraq and profiting from its oil, the Palestinian people still fighting for their rights, and US threats hanging over Syria, Iran, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Korea and other countries.

In our country, the reactionary Howard Government has signed up to US missile defence plans, creating profits for the aerospace industry at the cost of destabilisation in our region and a new arms race. This is one more step in an escalating process of making the Australian Defence Force little more than an arm of the US military.

The drive to war has an enormous human cost – not just lives lost but the billions of dollars wasted which are so desperately needed to fund essential services for the Australian people.

This year saw the battles to save Medicare and for public education begin and wide public support for them grow. The campaigns must continue and strengthen in 2004, which is likely to be a Federal election year.

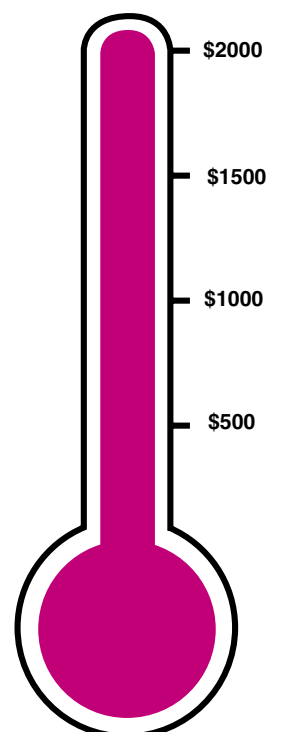
There will be a great deal to do, so we hope that everyone can have a brief time of rest and relaxation before getting back into the action.

***We wish you all a peaceful, secure and safe holiday period with family and friends.***

Hannah Middleton – President Communist Party of Australia  
Peter Symon – General Secretary Communist Party of Australia

### Baghdad Hospital Appeal

**Target Exceeded!  
Great result – see page 8**



**WA public servants’ strike**  
- p4

**Film Review – Good Bye, Lenin!**  
- p5

**Tightening the mortgage belt**  
- p6

**What happened in Samarra?**  
- p8

**Nicaragua in crisis**  
- p12

## Looking back over 2003

The outstanding event of 2003 was the international protest over the weekend of February 14-15 when 30 million people around the world took to the streets to demonstrate against war on Iraq. In Australia hundreds of thousands of people marched in cities and towns, country towns in unprecedented numbers. It not only showed the strength of support for the demand "NO WAR", but also that Australians saw through the barrage of lies used by the US, British and Australian leaders to try to justify this war.

It has become more and more difficult for conservative leaders like John Howard to get away with their warmongering. Yet they still prepare further attacks on other countries that they like to brand as "rogue" or "failed" states to condition the public for the aggression, invasion and occupation that lie ahead. The peace organisations can continue to rely on a huge army of supporters, including many young people, to oppose the new wars being prepared in Asia and the Middle East, in particular.

While this was a high point, Australian Governments, supported by both Liberal and Labor parties, have passed legislation giving sweeping powers to the so-called "security" organisations and in the case of ASIO, have turned it into an unaccountable, political police. Sooner or later it will be used against democratic organisations such as left political parties, trade unions and individuals who speak out against the policies of right-wing governments.

Similar oppressive legislation has been enacted in a number of other countries that are pushing the "war on terrorism". To keep the "war on terrorism" going there has to be a stream of alleged "terrorist" suspects and actual "terrorist" actions. There is now a justified suspicion that some of the acts of terrorism have been deliberately carried out by the authorities themselves. The bombing of the UN headquarters and the Red Cross in Baghdad directly served the interests of the US occupiers.

The Australian Government is speeding up its war preparations by upgrading military weapons and by a huge increase in expenditure on the armed forces. It is clear from the statements of government leaders that these preparations have little to do with the defence of Australia. They are for military interventions against other countries anywhere in the world. Australian forces are being increasingly integrated at all levels with American forces.

Opposition to the take-over of Australia militarily, politically and economically has also developed during the course of the year. Calls for Australia's independence made by artists and entertainers, writers and some business sections indicate that Australian independence is a major issue and has widespread support in the community. The proposed Free Trade Agreement with the US, if concluded, will open the Australian economy up even more to foreign investors and speculators.

A statement by the Government's White Paper on Trade and Foreign Affairs said that the FTA would "put our economic relationship on a parallel footing with that of our political relationship". Our military relationship with the US is also heading rapidly in the same direction. Our sovereignty and independence are being traded away.

There is a direct link between the war drive and the attacks on the living standards and social welfare system on which millions of low income earners rely. The Government continues its attempts to emasculate Medicare and turn the health system into a two-class system – one for the rich and the other for the poor. Despite massive opposition, the Howard Government introduced legislation that aimed to undermine bulk billing even further and to destroy the universality of Medicare that was central to its success. University education is being turned more and more into a preserve of the wealthy. Students are being saddled with huge debts by way of HECS or upfront fees which universities are now authorised to increase by as much as 25 percent. The unemployed, the sick, pensioners, families and others on benefits are all suffering from cutbacks and the Government's failure to provide adequate benefits.

War and peace, national independence, health care and public education are major issues for the Australian people during the coming 2004 election year. The development of people's movements for peace and independence, public health care and public education will grow strongly.

## PRESS FUND

Another year is slipping by! In this, the last issue of *The Guardian* for 2003, we acknowledge with gratitude all those who've contributed to the Press Fund during the year. We have reached our target of \$12,000 which is great. But please do not forget us over the summer break. The bills and wages still have to be paid. For today we offer our sincere thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

Ron Reed in memory of brother Bob \$100, Elke & Mike Ainsworth \$25, Bert Appleton \$40, T Bartlett \$100, D Elliot \$30, Phillip Emanuel \$55, H Ewer \$50, O G Hackett \$20, Ray Scott \$10, Donna \$100, R G \$100, J Innes \$25, M H \$60, Bruce Maybury \$650.

This week's total \$1365. Progressive total: \$12,715.

## Howard, Vaile in all-out push for "free trade" agreement with US

The Howard Government is redoubling its efforts to get an Australia US Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed, sealed and delivered as quickly as possible. Negotiations between the two governments resumed last week with Trade Minister Mark Vaile doing his best to promote a pact during his lengthy US visit.

by Bob Britton

The PM and his Cabinet hope to present a secretly negotiated deal as a fait accompli to parliament and use it to steamroller the necessary legislation through both Houses.

The numerous eloquent contributions to the debate over local content at the Australian Film Industry (AFI) awards landed heavy blows against the government's sell-out position.

The Prime Minister responded using ambiguous language. He said that Australia would not undo longstanding policies such as the local rules on existing media. He would, however, be prepared to be "fairly flexible" about new media forms. In other words, local content rules may lapse when digital TV services take over.

Howard knows there is little support for the abolition of media ownership rules, the import of genetically modified food without labelling, or for water privatisation, just to take a few examples of likely outcomes.

The Government feels vuln-

erable over the weakness of its commitment to the highly popular Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme – a target of the powerful US pharmaceuticals industry.

Ron Pollack, Executive Director of Families USA; a pro-regulation lobby group in the US, told the ABC that we should hold on to our wallets if the PBS is watered down as a result of negotiations. "This is going to be a slippery slope and if the drug industry gets some concessions this year, they'll come back next year for the next set of concessions."

Howard chooses his words carefully. "I want to make it clear that we are not going to trade that wonderful facility away in the free-trade negotiations, we're not. The PBS in its essential character is just not on the list and is not up for grabs or not up for negotiation." [Emphasis added]

The PM makes much of the need to offer concessions in return for permission for Australian agricultural produce to compete on US markets. We should take note of

what happens when smaller nations negotiate "free trade" agreements with what the Howard Government delights in calling the biggest and most dynamic economy in the world.

Chile signed an FTA with the US that takes effect in January. To get the US to set aside 15 barriers to trade, Chile had to drop 52. Among other impacts, cheap US wheat is set to wipe out local production. Chilean Christian Democrat Senator Jorge Lavandero now protests, "this is not free trade, this is a political imposition. We are practically giving up our sovereignty."

The sacrifices made in the name of agriculture could prove worthless. NSW Greens Senator Kerry Nettle pointed out the flaw in the government's line to *The Guardian* in a recent interview: "Travelling in rural communities I've heard farmers say that what stops them being able to export their produce into the US are the agricultural subsidies that the US Government pays to its farmers. Agricultural subsidies cannot be on the table in a bilateral trade negotiation. They can only be negotiated on in multi-lateral negotiations."

The US is in no mood for such multi-lateral talks and has already rejected requests for an end to the subsidies in its negotiations for an FTA with Brazil. This did not stop the US demanding changes affecting investment, intellectual property rights, government procurement guidelines and other aspects of Brazil's independence.

The movement opposed to the changes being floated to local media content, the PBS, our quarantine regulations and a host of other vital safeguards must keep up their resistance to the FTA threat to our national sovereignty. We must not let the government trade significant gains made by the people over decades in a few weeks of this final round of "free trade" negotiations.

Write now to PM Howard, Mark Vaile and your Senators calling for a halt to negotiations and the public release of Australia's and the US's negotiating stances. ✪



## Star Wars Madness

be used whenever and wherever the US command decides.

continued page 2

# SBS target of campaign over Vietnamese news broadcast

A shrill but highly organised campaign has succeeded in forcing multicultural broadcaster SBS to suspend the airing of the Vietnamese news program *Thoi Su*. The program was introduced to the *World Watch* line-up in October alongside new Tagalog and Arabic programs. The channel carries 22 news bulletins from 19 countries. SBS originally decided to take the VTV4 program from Vietnam to provide a service for the 200,000 Australians of Vietnamese background.

by Bob Briton

*Thoi Su* will remain off air until another round of community consultations has been completed. SBS had previously decided to keep airing the program after a series of discussions with community leaders and consideration by its community advisory committee had found that the program complied with the broadcaster's charter and codes of practice.

However, it appears that an unrelenting campaign against SBS by organisations like the Vietnamese Community Association of Australia has caused the regrettable back down.

Prior to the decision, station manager Nigel Milan said that his organisation had been subjected to "an organised campaign against freedom of speech and expression" that he had found "deeply troubling".

He told a Senate estimates committee that SBS has policies that prevent the showing of programs that incite violence or racial hatred but that programmers are not meant to make political judgements about content or to edit the *World Watch* bulletins. He also explained that it is SBS's practice to source news programs from national broadcasters.

None of these explanations were acceptable to Dr Tien Nguyen or the other organisers of two large demonstrations outside SBS Sydney studios in Artarmon. Thousands of protestors were bussed to the location and, at the demonstration held on December 2, forced the

closure of Herbert St for three hours.

The organisers object to the fact that *Thoi Su* provides news of progress being made in education and the economy, for example, and that members of the Vietnamese Government and Party figures are referred to "reverentially". They dismissed the suggestion that they simply not watch the 6.30am broadcast; saying that it is disturbing that it is "there".

The Vietnamese Community Association has demanded that SBS take (and in that case, pay for) a news program from outside Vietnam without the "bias" contained in the VTV4 program. The question of bias against the government of Vietnam in the suggested programs would be, of course, irrelevant.

The Vietnamese Community Association has received encouragement from the usual reactionary quarters. Queensland Liberal Senator Santo Santoro accused SBS in parliament of broadcasting "communist propaganda". *Herald Sun* columnist and Liberal Party luminary Andrew Bolt used his column to attack SBS manager Nigel Milan.

Greg Sheridan claimed in a recent piece in *The Australian* that the program was offensive in the same way that holocaust denial program would be to the Jewish community. He added that its presence on our airwaves was an insult to the Australian servicemen that died in the Vietnam War.

The issue appears to have stirred a number of amateur revisionist his-



torians like Mr Sheridan into action to absolve our Government of its guilt over the loss of those lives and to portray the invasion and destruction of Vietnam by the US and its allies as a noble undertaking in the name of "freedom".

It has also given them another platform to vilify those forces that finally achieved reunification and national independence.

Commenting on the protests at the SBS studios Federal Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs Gary Hardgrave - representing a government not noted for heeding even historically large protests - had the following to say: "This is the Australian way - in Australia, we talk it out in a constructive way. This was a meaningful protest held in an orderly and peaceful fashion, and the protestors left the site exactly as they found it."

The Minister may well have been relieved that the protests did not cause more disruption than they did. At the October 28 rally, Dr Nguyen warned listeners of other actions to follow: "It could be a hunger strike...it could be more protests. But I can tell you, if SBS does not suspend the program and listen to the crowd and come to their senses, they will see more protests in different forms."

The campaign against the Vietnamese news program comes on top of another by the Australia-Israel and Jewish Affairs Council against SBS. It has made 57 claims of bias, editorialising, selectivity and factual errors in news coverage over a one-year period that favoured the position of the Palestinians over that of the Israeli Government.

Elsewhere, there was the

pursuit of the ABC by former Communications Minister Richard Alston. He kept pressure on the Corporation's appeals mechanisms until they upheld 15 of his 68 allegations of bias in comment about the war in Iraq. Most were levelled at the *AM* radio program. The broadcaster's defence that it sought to represent the range of opinion about the war did not satisfy the Minister.

Last year the ABC had 44,000 complaints. Of these 291 were to do with bias about the war in Iraq with 144 alleging bias against the US and 147 claiming bias in favour of the US. There were more complaints about bias in sports reporting than in the treatment of the Iraqi events. It is a measure of the former Minister's well-resourced fanaticism that he pursued his perception of "bias" as far as he did. ☼

# Carr Govt passes Auburn rubbish dump law

Despite widespread public opposition the NSW Government has passed special legislation to overrule a Court decision and enforce construction of a huge new garbage facility at Clyde, in Sydney's Auburn local government area.

by Peter Mac

The new law overturns a "thumbs-down" ruling from the NSW Land and Environment Court, which found that the new facility would have major adverse impacts on local residents.

As reported in last week's *Guardian*, the openly-ventilated facility would eventually accept garbage from the entire Sydney region, creating enormous health and traffic problems in the Auburn area.

The contracting firm Collex, which proposes to build the facility, has become a major contributor to Labor Party coffers. Its French parent company Vivendi has been convicted of bribery and corruption in three countries and is currently facing allegations of similar practices in another three.

In his pursuit of the "Auburn solution", NSW Premier Carr has exhibited astonishing determination, and an arrogant contempt for residents of a predominantly working-class area.

When the Court ruling was handed down, in a speech reminiscent of a "dyed in the wool" Liberal Party politician, he denounced opponents of the project as blocking the efficient disposal of Sydney's waste, and depriving local people of employment in the new facility.

He also claimed the decision would adversely affect those formerly employed at the old Woodlawn open cut mine, just outside Goulburn, which the government proposes be used as a landfill site for Sydney's waste.

Under a deal worked out with Collex to use the mine, the retrenched miners' unpaid entitlements would be met by Collex once landfill operations commenced.

It is obvious this can not happen until the collection and transport problems are sorted out.

It now appears that the contract with the Government obliges Collex to "seek access to the existing (waste) transfer stations" in order

to process the waste there before loading it in sealed containers for transport by rail to Woodlawn.

## Privatisation

The real problem is not the totally understandable and justifiable reaction of local residents, but rather the government's commitment to privatisation of public services, and the secret terms of its contract with Collex.

There are two major problems here. Firstly, this is not a binding requirement under the contract, and Collex can seek other means of processing the waste. Secondly, although still government-owned, the existing waste stations would require extensive upgrading.

It would also require the agreement of their existing managers, Waste Services NSW, who as a partially-privatised company are now interested in gaining the maximum return for use of their facilities by competitors such as Collex.

The end result is that Collex simply decided that all this was too expensive, and opted for alternative means of processing the waste - hence the Auburn project.

Carr's despicable attempt to

blame the local residents for the terrible problems of the Woodlawn miners is highly reminiscent of Liberal Party "divide and rule" tactics.

The NSW Government has continued to alienate ever-increasing sections of the public by selling off or leasing government-owned land (including historic sites) and supporting development at all costs, and then vilifying those who object.

For example, in recent years they have either tried, or are still attempting, to lease off the historic North Head Quarantine Station to a private hotel chain, sell off a huge chunk of the old Callan Park site, and sell off large parts of redundant industrial harbour sites.

And now in the Collex case they

have even shown their willingness to over-ride the court system and introduce special legislation to enforce a multinational development proposal.

However, as the recent struggle over the Callan Park site showed, the government can be beaten. After massive protests the government withdrew plans to sell off ten percent of that site.

Battles are continuing over other sites. The Green Party has in the past called for the banning of donations from developers to political parties. An ever-increasing segment of the community, including local action groups such as the Auburn Community Alliance and the No Dump Residents Association, will be echoing this demand. ☼

**In his pursuit of the "Auburn solution", NSW Premier Carr has exhibited astonishing determination, and an arrogant contempt for residents of a predominantly working-class area.**

# Public servants strike in WA

Late last month Western Australia's Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association (CPSU/CSA) conducted its first sector-wide strike in over 10 years as part of its industrial campaign to achieve better wages and conditions. Despite the CPSU/CSA having moved from its original claim of 30 percent over three years, to 18.9 percent over the same period, the Gallop Government, represented by Industrial Relations Minister John Kobelke, steadfastly resisted meeting the union's demands.

by Richard Titellius\*

The Government insulted the union's legitimate claims further when it offered three percent – or \$25.00 per week, whichever was greater – on the eve of the strike.

CPSU/CSA Branch Secretary, Toni Walkington, rejected the offer outright and declared that the strike would go ahead.

At the Perth Magistrates Courts, the resolve of members, and even some non-members, to strike on the day became increasingly evident as the day of the strike loomed closer.

For ten years prior to Gallop's Government coming into power in 2001, public servants were subjected to agency-based enterprise bargaining agreements and workplace agreements (individual contracts). The strike action of November 27 was the litmus test for the resolve of union members to act as a collective.

The day started well with *The West Australian* newspaper,

renowned for its unsympathetic views towards unions, running a full front-page story on industrial unrest in the State. The public servants' strike featured prominently in the paper.

A picket line of union members and officials was organised for a 7am start at Parliament House. Unfortunately due to the presence of a very small number of union officials and members, it was not very effective and most Members of parliament chose to ignore it.

Meanwhile, around the Central Business District a number of picket lines were organised to "publicise the reasons for the strike and to encourage workers to join the action". The pickets were well attended. I participated in a robust picket line outside the Perth Magistrates Courts, where about 50 vocal and enthusiastic workers handed out leaflets, talked to passers-by and the occasional supportive solicitor or judicial

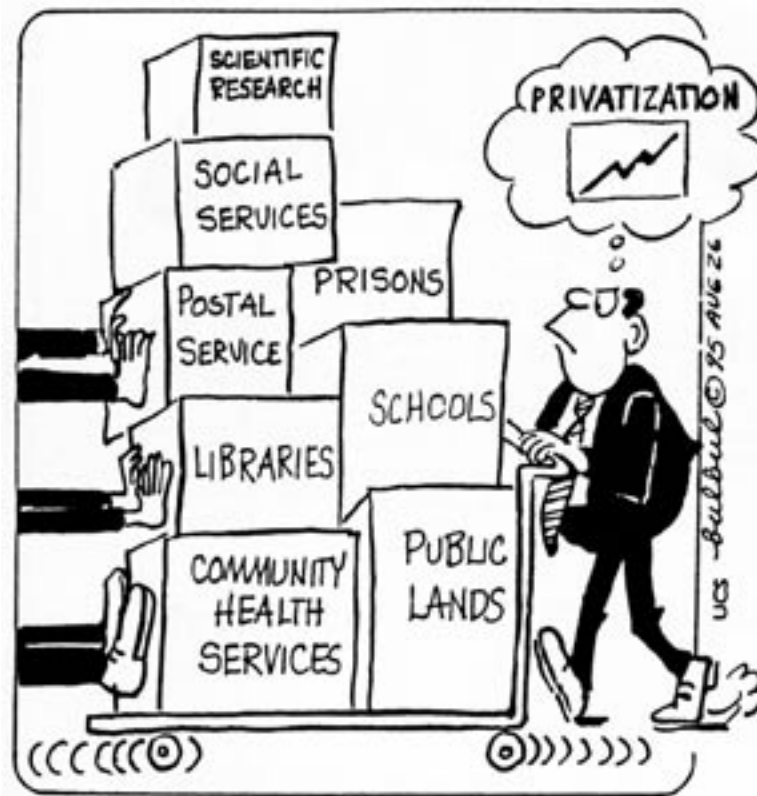
officer, and generally made their presence felt.

Between 9.30am and 10am members, supporters and union officials marched to the picket line outside the Premier's office, where Toni Walkington addressed the large, colourful and noisy crowd. (It was also a good day for selling *The Guardian*!) Ms Walkington declared the pickets and demonstrations a success in as far as they conveyed to a mostly receptive public the difficulties and problems associated with public sector restructuring, cut backs, etc.

The police recently received a wage increase of 15 percent over three years, whilst the State's teachers are still pursuing their wage claim through the Industrial Relations Commission. Is it not time that the Government recognised the commitment, skills, workload and work value of the State's 30,000 public servants?

Minister Kobelke declared the strike "an ineffectual one" and has still not moved to improve the Government's offer. He was quoted as having said only 750 workers participated in the strike when in reality more than 7000 workers did not show up for work on the day.

Several services were significantly affected by the strike.



The Registrar General's Office and most Traffic Licensing Centres, for example, were closed on the day.

The union has indicated that it will step up industrial action with a

series of rolling stoppages, further work bans, picket lines and other unspecified actions.

\* Richard Titellius is a CPSU/CSA delegate. ✪

## LABOUR NOTES

NSW community workers rallied outside the office of Employers First, the State's employer umbrella body, to protest against the bosses' push to have them trade off working conditions in return for wage increases. The Australian Services Union, which represents the workers, has been involved in a legal battle with Employers First to ensure that these workers receive the \$17 weekly increase handed down by the Full Bench of the NSW Industrial Relations Commission, without trade-offs. The employees include youth workers, women's refuge workers, drug and alcohol counsellors, disability support workers, migrant support, and Aboriginal community and neighbourhood centre employees.

A Cairns-based Customs Officer has been given an ultimatum: move 1800 kilometres away from your children or lose your job. The Level 3 Customs Officer Ashley Webb has 23 years experience. He has been directed by Customs to leave his position in Cairns and return to Brisbane or be sacked. Mr Webb, who is divorced and has a 50/50 custody arrangement of his children, said it would be impossible to meet his custodial duties with his children living in Cairns while he was working in Brisbane. His union, the Community and Public Sector Union, has been negotiating with Customs for several months over the situation to no avail. Mr Webb offered to take a pay cut to stay in Cairns. Customs rejected this and a range of other compromises.

NSW teachers voted overwhelmingly last week to undertake a 48-hour stoppage on February 11 and 12 if the Carr Government refuses to deliver a fair deal on teachers' salaries and other claims. The stoppage will affect public schools, TAFE Colleges, the Adult Migrant English Service and Corrective Services. The teachers also voted to support bans on the writing of school reports and the government's teaching agenda which includes the year 3 and year 6 Basic Skills Test and the marking of HSC examinations.

The ACT Government passed ground-breaking Industrial Manslaughter legislation on November 27. The Crimes (Industrial Manslaughter) Bill 2002 was passed with the support of crossbenchers Kerrie Tucker MLA (Green), Roslyn Dundas MLA (Democrat) and Helen Cross MLA (Independent). ACT Industrial Relations Minister Katy Gallagher said, "The challenge for those who oppose this legislation is to convince me that any employer who significantly contributes to the death of a worker through a reckless or negligent act should not be charged with a criminal offence". Ms Gallagher said the legislation was necessary to deal with the legal loophole available to corporate entities in the event of workplace deaths.

## A warning for activists

**Bill Andersen is President of the National Distribution Union in Aotearoa (New Zealand) and has been travelling freely in and out of Australia for many years. He always filled in the Australian immigration authorities' card with a "yes" where it asked if there were any court convictions. They were mainly associated with picket line activities – that is, doing his job as a trade union official.**

On a visit earlier this year, he was told that in future he would need a visa prior to travelling – not normally a requirement for New Zealanders.

So, more than a month before his next visit he started the necessary procedures. He was due to fly out on Monday November 24. On the Thursday before (with only two working days to go), the Australian consulate informed him that to get a visa takes two months!

Mr Andersen contacted his local MP Phil Goff, who immediately wrote to the Australian High Commissioner in Wellington.

"Mr Andersen is required to apply for a visa because over the years he has incurred a number of convictions arising predominantly from picket line incidents in his

role as union organiser", wrote Mr Goff.

"Mr Andersen, who is in his late 70s, is due to appear in the Auckland District Court on 10 December 2003 on an obstruction charge.

"Mr Andersen's convictions have arisen in an industrial relations context and despite the length of the list, I am happy to write in support of his application for a short-term visa."

Following that letter the Australian authorities managed to grant the visa in time for his trip.

At Sydney airport the immigration authorities told him, "sit over there", where they left him for five minutes, without explanation, and then let him through.

According to the Department

of Immigration's website, there is no requirement for New Zealand citizens to apply for a visa before visiting Australia. Their passports are verified electronically as they enter Australia.

And even for people who are required to obtain a visa, Mr Andersen should not have any difficulties – unless in the assessment of the Director-General of ASIO, his visit to Australia would "place the national security of Australia at risk".

Is Bill Andersen such a security risk?

His experience should serve as a warning to all trade unionists, communists, environmentalists, peace and other activists who dare to question or challenge the political direction of developments in Australia. It is these activists, the people who in some way or other challenge the system or status quo, who are the real target of the ASIO and the draconian laws introduced under cover of "anti-terrorist" measures. ✪

## Blackout hangs over Sydney

**A \$200 million project to back-up central Sydney's power supply is being threatened by the project's company, Transgrid, which intends to relocate to a site on the city's western outskirts. A key engineer on the project, who lives on the northern beaches, is questioning whether or not he can make the move to Wallgrove, near Eastern Creek, which lacks public transport and is hours away from most workers – some of whom commute from the Central Coast and Wollongong.**

Transgrid has refused a request for a risk assessment on its new headquarters, with management adopting a "take it or leave it" approach to hundreds of head office employees.

"They said 'we're going to Wallgrove, come if you want'", said Public Service Association (PSA) member Ho Yam Yeow.

Another worker, Paul Barrett, from Transgrid's Elizabeth Street headquarters in the city said: "The move makes no sense unless there

is a hidden agenda to downsize. The proposal has caused a lot of hardship. People's fears and anxieties have been heightened.

"For some people they just cannot go to Eastern Creek."

### Impact on families

Ho Yam Yeow is concerned about the impact of the move as he has a sick wife and two children under seven. "How am I supposed to get home in an emergency?" asks

Yeow. "This is having a big impact on my family.

"Unless you've got a helicopter there's no way I could do it."

Another worker is looking at his family having to sacrifice one income to sustain the move.

"My wife will have to quit her job", he said. "Given the impact I would expect some consultation.

"It's unacceptable and upsetting."

The decision by Transgrid is likely to see a "brain drain" from the organisation – especially from specialised and qualified engineers who are in demand.

"They'll lose key people", says one Transgrid insider. "They'll have trouble replacing these engineers."

The PSA will be seeking a meeting with the Minister to resolve the issue. ✪

Film Review

by Andrew Jackson

# Good Bye, Lenin!

Directed by Wolfgang Becker

**It is 1989 and Christiane Kerner, mother of two and decorated citizen of the German Democratic Republic (GDR – East Germany), has fallen into a coma. For eight months she lies in hospital, life support machines whirring and beeping, blissfully unaware of the turmoil and counter-revolution taking place outside.**

When she awakens, the doctors warn her ever-faithful son Alex that her recovery may be only temporary, her heart so weak that shock or distress of any kind will certainly bring death.

How does Alex then protect his mother from the inevitable shock she will face on learning her beloved socialist homeland has been swept away?

Alex decides his mother mustn't know, and through elaborate set-making, scheming and outright lying he sets about recreating a last insular pocket of GDR in their apartment.

As his mother's strength grows so does her suspicion that something is seriously amiss, and so Alex is forced to greater lengths and wilder concoctions to conceal the truth.

After the spate of ferociously anti-communist films made in Eastern Europe during the last decade, notably *Burnt By The Sun* and *The Inner Circle*, I certainly approached this film with great scepticism.

A reviewer for the UK *Guardian* saw the film as a damning indictment of East German Communism. "It is a farce, founded on dishonesty: like the old regime itself. And Alex has become the neurotic, control-freak prime minister, acting on behalf of an ageing, debilitated monarch."

However, the narrative created by the *Guardian* reviewer appears to have been the product of both an overactive imagination and his own hysterical anti-communism.

*Good Bye Lenin!* is certainly not pro-socialist, occasionally resorting to ridicule of GDR life and those who continued to believe.

The son strives to recreate the East German reality for his mother, but he is naturally unable to recreate the free health care or guaranteed employment and housing, and indeed the film ignores this aspect of GDR life.

It does remind us of the job losses that followed reunification, but by taking some of the "shortcomings" of GDR life (less consumer goods than in the West, for example) out of context it gives them undue emphasis.

Christiane's surprise that the family had been allocated a car "after only three years" is one of these moments.

However, the force used by the police against 1989 anti-government protestors we see in the film pales against the lethal brutality meted out by the capitalist states in recent years against anti-capitalist protestors in Gothenburg, Seattle and Genoa.

But the film also captures the sense of great loss felt by Alex, his friends and neighbours – even those who embraced the West.

Alex is not alone in his deception, he quickly finds many who, for various personal reasons, are willing to participate in his charade.

As events escalate, Alex must even reassess his own motives: "Somehow, my scheme had taken on a life of its own. The GDR I

created for her increasingly became the one I might have wished for".

Some reviewers have passed off the film's box-office success as part of the wave of "Ostalgie" (nostalgia by Easterners) currently sweeping Germany.

This term, however, is dismissive and perhaps patronising of the genuine and heartfelt yearning many people have for the life and culture they enjoyed in the GDR.

"Ostalgie" also dismisses those who continue to hold a firm belief in the socialist system.

How widespread this belief remains was demonstrated in a recent TV series and poll in which Germans were asked to vote for the "100 greatest Germans of history". In an upset result Karl Marx came in third.

Out of a list of 500 Germans to choose from, those living in the East (former GDR) gave a massive 40 percent of their votes to Marx, putting him in first place in four of the five Eastern states. At one point in the poll Marx lead the vote across the whole of Germany.

There is growing dissatisfaction amongst Easterners of their new life. Twenty percent unemployment and continuing wealth disparity with the West have awoken feelings of "perhaps our imperfect past was no so bad after all".

T-shirts and flags with the GDR logo are displayed proudly on the streets; 400 films made in the East have been transferred to video and snapped up on both sides of the country. Consumer products of the East are reappearing on supermarket shelves bearing their familiar logos.

Whether this nostalgia reinvigorates the socialist movement and provides momentum carrying them forward to the restoration of socialism remains to be seen.

Those who bid "goodbye" to Lenin in 1989 perhaps should have said "until next time!"

*Good Bye, Lenin!* opens in capital cities on Dec 26 at Dendy, Keno, Palace & Nova cinemas & selected independent theatres. ☺

**"Somehow, my scheme had taken on a life of its own. The GDR I created for her increasingly became the one I might have wished for".**

## New law criminalises disclosure of information regarding ASIO actions

**The ASIO Legislation Amendment Bill 2003 was rushed through Parliament during the final sitting week of the year. The legislation adds new, alarming secrecy provisions to earlier legislation giving ASIO broad powers to detain and question in secret anyone who might have information about a terrorist act.**

Spokesperson for the Federation of Community Legal Centres, Peter Noble, explained that journalists, doctors, lawyers, friends and family members and even parliamentarians would all be prevented from speaking out about any knowledge they may have of ASIO's activities for a full two years after someone has been detained and questioned.

There is a five-year jail term attached to the new offences.

Given that ASIO is invariably involved in domestic "anti-terrorism" measures, these offences will have the knock-on effect of insulating the domestic "War on Terror" from the public gaze.

"The public has a right to know about how our intelligence agency is using the broad ranging power it has been given", Mr Noble said.

Senator John Faulkner,

Labor spokesperson on Special Minister of State issues and Public Administration and Accountability justified the ALP's vote for the Bill thus: "The fact is that ASIO, as they have gone about their important work, have discovered some loopholes in their new laws when questioning people about terrorism, especially when those people are foreign nationals", he said.

"The amendments are technical in nature." "It is plain common sense."

Senator Bob Brown of the

Greens said of the ALP's cave-in: "Latham Labor has capitulated to John Howard at the first hurdle."

"The ALP and Government rejected Greens amendments that would have inserted a public interest test and protected journalists who disclosed information which did not threaten national security.

"Latham Labor has joined John Howard in this remarkable assault on fundamental rights." He called Labor's argument in Parliament that the legislation is merely "technical" as "fatuous".

The legislation also allows ASIO to discriminate against suspects who require an interpreter to answer questions by allowing for them to be questioned twice as long as English speaking suspects. ☺

**"Latham Labor has joined John Howard in this remarkable assault on fundamental rights."**



Alex (Daniel Brühl) goes to extraordinary lengths to conceal the collapse of the GDR from his bed-ridden mother (Katrin Sass)



Mark Latham's first act as Labor leader was to preside over his Party's collusion with the Government in voting down a proposal to send the latest draconian ASIO powers legislation for scrutiny to a Senate committee. The Greens wanted to send the legislation to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee. "Any legislation subject to controversy should at least go before a Senate committee", said Greens Senator Bob Brown. "To deny such a serious Bill any scrutiny is to trample on our democracy."

You can tell there's an election looming when PM Howard tries to beat up an issue into a sensationalist piece of media drama. Last election he exploited asylum seekers. Last week he waded in with a shot at the legal injecting room trials in Sydney, telling the NSW Government that they threatened Australia's medicinal opiate industry. The injecting rooms provide a safe environment for addicts to inject, with health professionals on hand in case they overdose. The alternative – if it can be called that – is for users to be found dead in the street. Now the Federal Government is saying the UN Narcotics Control Board has sent it an objection to the trials. The suspicion is that Howard initiated correspondence with the UN body. Said the director of the St Vincent Hospital Drug and Alcohol Service, Dr Alex Wodak: "This is a hollow threat and says more about political positioning before a federal election than it does about policy."

The noxious embrace between big business and government has come about because governments are increasingly an extension of the corporations whose interests they represent. People nowadays are more cynical than ever about their elected representatives, and not without cause. The stoush over a proposed waste dump in the Sydney suburb of Auburn is a classic example. Transnational waste corporation Collex has been given the go ahead by the Labor State Government to build a waste dump there. When residents won a decision in the Land and Environment Court to have the project stopped, the Government introduced legislation to override the Court's decision. It turns out that Collex has kindly donated \$100,000 to the Government's coffers. The capitalist think tank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, has calculated that governments internationally are involved in bribery-related crime to the tune of US\$89 billion a year, enough to overcome world hunger.

**CAPITALIST HOG OF THE YEAR:** This being the last Dingo for 2003, the prize Hog of the Year is ... new ALP leader Mark Latham. Who owns Mr Latham? A curious question, I know, but a pertinent one. If you watched the ABC's 7.30 Report on December 2, the day Labor's parliamentary right-wing clique elected him as leader, you may have been given the answer. Host Kerry O'Brian informed viewers there would be no interview on the show that evening with the incumbent because Latham was appearing exclusively on Kerry Packer's Nine Network.

# Tightening of the mortgage

## The Australian dream of home ownership

Social change is gathering pace in Australia. Nowhere is this more visible than in the housing sector. As housing affordability slips to its lowest levels on record, the great Australian dream of home ownership is under threat for broad strata of people who used to take this ambition for granted. Many working class Australians – particularly since WW2 – managed to save a deposit, get past the first few difficult years of their mortgage repayments and eventually wind up with a secure place to live. For those who did not wish or could not afford to go down the mortgage path there was the option of private sector rental or public housing.

by Bob Briton

The home could be sold to fund nursing home costs in old age or to provide a boost to the finances of subsequent generations. This pattern was at the heart of the widely held belief that Australia was the “lucky country”, spared many of the worst excesses and insecurities of capitalism. The fact that working class families became small stakeholders in the system of private property served to damp down disquiet at many of the inequities and injustices in Australian society.

These “certainties” are evaporating and dreams are being crushed. The Reserve Bank, which usually restricts itself to commenting in its brief on the broad-brush aspects of monetary policy, has felt obliged to comment on the crisis and some of the remedies that have been suggested to overcome it.

The Federal Government has sought to release some of the pressure on it by establishing a Productivity Commission inquiry into housing affordability for first homebuyers. It is due to report this month.

### The scale of the problem

Most of the widely expressed concern about the housing market is for the future of “Generation X” – young people aged 25 to 39 years. In 1989, 64 per cent of this group owned their own homes. Today the figure is 54 per cent. Greater numbers than ever of this age bracket are renting in the private rental market where insecure three, six and 12-month leases are the rule. Growing numbers live with their parents to reduce living costs.

Low, stagnating or fluctuating incomes and factors such as casualisation have reduced their purchasing power. The major cause behind the statistical shift, however, has been the skyrocketing price of housing throughout Australia in recent years.

Paul Willey is manager of the South Australian Government’s Housing Management Council Secretariat. At the start of SA’s inaugural Housing Week, he was asked in the media whether housing was affordable in Adelaide, which still has the cheapest properties of all the mainland capitals:

“For low-income earners – the bottom 40 per cent of income earners who get paid less than \$632 a week – clearly not. We have done some assessment that showed people in the lowest 40 per cent of the income range were only able to purchase less than 5 per cent of the housing available for sale. Part of the challenge is that affordability is

hitting the next income percentile – those who are typically middle-income earners. For essential workers like police officers and teachers, affordability is becoming a problem as well.”

Twenty years ago in Adelaide a house in the median price bracket would sell for three times average annual income. Today it is six or seven times that figure. In other capitals the situation is worse, particularly in Sydney where house and land packages have risen by 31 per cent in the last year alone. In response, the NSW Government tries to set aside part of every new far-flung development they undertake for middle-income earners in the \$44,000 to \$64,000 bracket.

With that income, the would-be homeowner can only borrow between \$210,000 and \$270,000. The tracts of land being released are themselves worth over \$300,000 and the house and land package is usually priced at over \$400,000. With rents and other costs like utilities taking bigger and bigger chunks out of the typical pay packet, the deposit gap becomes virtually insurmountable for the targeted group. Of course, established homes closer the city centre are even further out of reach.

Unfortunately, the beleaguered Generation X-ers’ problems do not end with the signing of the mortgage documents. There is then the problem of the repayments. It now takes nearly 40 percent of average household income to support repayments on the median priced Australian house – selling for \$339,400 in June 2003.

### One repayment away from homelessness

It has been said that many Australians are just one mortgage repayment away from homelessness. There is now an additional problem that could see all the trappings of the Australian dream repossessed. Housing-secured debt has risen dramatically. People are also adding cars and even holidays onto their mortgages.

When major segments of “middle-income” Australia become marginalised and dispossessed of their small stake in the system, a crisis of credibility becomes inevitable. Government politicians are doing the maths. If home loan interest rates get pushed up to 7.05 per cent following the 0.25 per cent rise in official interest rates last week, 33 electorates throughout the country will move into the “housing stress” zone. This means that most households in the electorates will

be spending more than a quarter of their income on housing. These people will be asking questions: What went wrong? Who is to blame? What can be done?

### What went wrong?

What could possibly have gone wrong? Interest rates, even with the recent increases, are at a 40-year low and the economy continues to grow. Since July 2000, the Commonwealth has given first homebuyers grants of \$14,000, recently reduced to \$7,000, to help overcome the inflationary effects of the GST.

Unfortunately, spiralling costs have swallowed the benefit of the first homebuyers’ grant and then some. The numbers applying for it have slowed. In Queensland, for example, only 6681 people received the grant in the June quarter this year compared to a similar quarterly period 12,577 just 18 months ago.

Some people, Federal Treasurer Peter Costello included, like to put the major blame on the shortage of land available for development. The resultant price increase, it is claimed, accounts for our housing woes. Opening up more land, even land previously “locked up” in national parks, will bring relief.

It is true that land values have surged. The problem is acute in Sydney but is a problem in other parts, as well. In Brisbane in the 1970s land accounted for 21 per cent of the cost of a land home package. It has since soared to represent 49 per cent of the cost. However, housing affordability is a problem throughout Australia, even in regional centres where land availability is not an issue.

Many others – like NSW Liberal Party Opposition leader John Brogden – have singled out stamp duty as the major fly in the ointment. It is true, particularly since the introduction of the GST, that the family home has gone from being the lowest taxed domestic item to the highest. Housing taxes are an \$11 billion a year cash cow for federal, state and local governments. On its own, stamp duty adds \$5494 to the cost of a \$300,000 house in NSW.

Brogden is suggesting a 10 percent reduction in this rate over the next four years. Clearly this is not going to have the required impact on housing affordability.

Federal Labor wants low-income earners to become part of a “savings culture”. Mark Latham has proposed granting families \$500 at the birth of each child and other payments into a “nest-egg” account that are conditional on the family making savings of its own. At age 18, it is hoped the young adult can then invest the \$10,000 “nest-egg” on higher education or as part of a deposit on a house.

The cost of a modern-day university degree – let alone that of a family home in Sydney – makes a mockery of this Blair-esque proposal.

Others blame current levels of immigration. NSW Premier Bob Carr is the most prominent of this theory’s backers. While the argument might have relevance to Sydney where most migrants still tend to settle, it goes nowhere towards explaining the Australia-

wide problem of affordability for new homebuyers.

Even in Sydney, it would be senseless to blame newly arrived migrants for pressures on the home-buying market. The overwhelming majority of recent arrivals are renters and in Sydney the vacancy rate has risen in recent months to 2.9 per cent for rental accommodation. “Stable population” advocates are playing a low card in the debate.

These are only some of the more notable of the suggestions being made in response to the crisis in housing affordability. There have been over 200 submissions made to the Productivity Commission’s inquiry into the predicament of Australia’s first homebuyers.

### Enter finance capital, stage right

The Reserve Bank has come off the sidelines to give the clearest indication of what is part of the problem behind the present crisis. Governor Ian Macfarlane told a parliamentary committee in June that, compared to several other countries with similar economies, Australia has a tax regime very favourable to property speculation. He pointed to negative gearing – by which the interest on borrowings for investment can be claimed as a tax deduction – as an example of the breaks given to the forces behind the speculative boom.

Banks and big non-bank lenders have exploited fears among the post-WW2 “baby boomers” over the security of their retirement. They have arranged loans for these anxious mum and dad investors with no deposit or low deposit for second third or even fourth investment properties. Purchase the property and let the income from rent fund the interest and loan repayments.

Along with the big investors, these small players have left the non-performing share and cash markets and moved into “bricks and mortar” with a new dream of multiplying assets.

Borrowing for investment housing grew by 36 per cent in the year ended last June. It grew by 8.4 per cent in the month of June alone! In September only 13.3 per cent of loans went to new homebuyers. Loans to investors now account for 45 per cent of total funds made available for housing from lending institutions.

These “baby boomers” are themselves now very exposed to higher interest rates, any periods without a tenant or decline in rental, as well as to any downturn in house values that may occur due to interest rate hikes.

Any such developments would be added to the underlying risks associated with illness, a decrease in wages, unemployment or divorce. Some may end up with “negative equity” – more debts than the sale of their assets can cover.



Unfortunately for first homebuyers, any slight downturn in house prices that might accompany the expected interest rate hikes is unlikely to benefit them either. Expensive housing at low interest rates is the equivalent of cheaper housing at dear rates of interest. What is more, housing prices will most likely plateau at a level still out reach for the sorts of buyers that used to have realistic expectations of becoming homeowners.

Cheap public housing, once a realistic option, is now in a state of crisis. State governments have wound back public housing, leaving thousands of people without adequate shelter.

### Winners and losers

Mortgage House Australia was a home loan broking firm that has morphed into a funds provider. Its managing director Ken Sayer was interviewed in May by Melbourne’s *Sunday Herald Sun* and asked, among other things, how he would invest \$20,000.

“I would take out a \$20,000 margin loan and buy \$40,000 of blue chip shares. You can claim the interest as a tax deduction”, he replied. Mr Sayer’s response encapsulates the spirit of the times and the sort of attitude fostered by governments in this neo-liberal age.

For some time even Centrelink has encouraged “baby boomers” to attend seminars where the benefits of various speculative schemes were promoted.

Shares and property are portrayed as the means by which people will become self-funded and cease to be a “burden on the taxpayer” in old age. School children manage dummy shares portfolios to get the feel of

*It now takes ne  
of the average household in  
on the median priced Australian hous*

# ge belt ership crushed

WE CARE...  
ABOUT MONEY



managing their personal financial affairs in this new age.

A combination of greed and fear caused many to sign up to schemes promoted by get rich quick gurus like Henry Kaye. The collapse of his National Investment Institute left many out of pocket for amounts of up to \$55,000 to attend seminars concerning his dubious property investment schemes. Investors that took his advice have been badly burned. Other schemes still operate.

Investors and desperate first homebuyers have taken on unregulated and expensive "vendor finance". Some have fallen victim to loan "wrappers" who buy houses for the would-be homebuyer, then sell them on to the purchaser at a new, inflated price. The property deed remains in the name of the "wrapper" until fully paid off. Any failure to meet the payments sees the purchaser on the streets with no equity and no right of appeal whatsoever.

Common to all of these cases is that it is the lender – and in particular big finance capital – that wins at every turn at the expense of ordinary working people. Even the irrepressible Mr Kaye saw to it that he would be paid as a creditor to his failed company while its 80-odd sacked employees wait their turn.

## The people want answers, Howard urges inaction

None of these developments appear to faze our Prime Minister. In fact he congratulates himself on overseeing conditions in which the assets of better-off Australian families have grown in value. The

only pressure-relief valve that he has shown any interest in investigating is the possible reduction of fees and stamp duties.

The government appears set to ignore the Reserve Bank's warnings about negative gearing and has happy memories of the strike by finance capital that afflicted the construction sector the last time the then Federal Labor Government implemented the policy.

It is not likely that many of the submissions to the Productivity Commission inquiry will be thinking outside the capitalist square. Welfare agencies and the ACTU support a variant of Labor's deposit-building strategy. They want first homebuyers to have access to \$10,000 of their anticipated superannuation nest egg ahead of retirement to help them get into the housing market.

Real alternatives with real chances of controlling the turbulent housing situation and making housing affordable are not on the agenda. The reinvigoration of public housing to act as a brake on rents and prices in the private market will not be pursued. The re-regulation of the finance sector and the bringing of its institutions under social control will also be out of bounds. Big money need not fear an end to the movable feast of speculation coming from the Federal Government's inquiry into housing.

Access to affordable housing may yet provide one of the strongest drives for the forming of a government of people's unity, a government of left and progressive forces committed to the use of the country's resources to meet the needs of the people. The time to start getting active in the building of such a coalition is now! ✪

# Higher education legislation passed with help of Independents

**The Howard Government managed to push through its higher education Bill last week with the help of the four independent Senators. The independents did force the Government to back down on its proposals relating to the enforcement of individual work contracts on staff, an important victory for staff. But, unfortunately, the independents accepted the main thrust of the Bill's other provisions, in particular, its inadequate funding arrangements and increases in student fees. These are grim news for students and staff and the future of public education.**

by Peter Mac

The independents claim that they blocked the Government's move to increase the permissible proportion of full-fee paying domestic students to 50 percent. However, they still accepted a rise to 35 percent. They also claim that they blocked the Government's move to allow universities to raise their fees by 30 percent, but allowed a rise of 25 percent.

The President of the National Union of Students, Daniel Kyriacou, said that a basic science degree could now cost \$20,000, an increase of \$4000.

As Dr Carolyn Allport, National President of the Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) pointed out, these changes "are a particular threat to the affordability of a quality university education".

Not only is funding inadequate, but changes to the way it is allocated favour older "sandstone" universities as against newer institutions such as the University of Western Sydney, the Australian Maritime College, Victoria University and the Victorian College of the Arts.

The University of Western Sydney is expected to be hit so drastically by the funding changes that it may have to implement campus closures and staff cuts.

Sydney University staff last week took strike action for the third time this year, over an enterprise bargaining agreement that University management stalled, waiting for the government's aggressive industrial relations changes.

The Government has for the moment removed the requirement to force universities to use Australian workplace agreements (AWAs) for the employment of staff. It has, however, included a clause referring to the universities offering AWAs "in accordance with the Workplace Relations Act", and is free to return to the issue at a later date.

The Government agreed to increase the higher Education Contributions Scheme (HECS) threshold (amount of income at which repayment of HECS loan commences) to \$36,184 (at present \$24,365). This will not happen until the 2005/6 financial year. In the meantime the costs of degrees will rise.

The Government has promised

to index funding after 2007! Meanwhile the paltry increases offered will be eroded by rising prices.

The Government has agreed to review the issue of proper indexation of university funding, but has given no guarantee that having done so it will take action to rectify the current grossly unsatisfactory situation.

The federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson had previously promised that under the new funding arrangements no university would be worse off than at present. When it came to voting, the independents helped the government defeat an opposition demand that the legislation include wording to guarantee this as an outcome.

In accepting the legislation, albeit modified, they also accepted the principal that the government can use funding as a means to interfere with the operations of universities.

The independent Senators Harradine, Murphy, Harris and Lees claim to have effectively reversed the adverse effects of the legislation. In reality, universities will be forced to make serious staffing and course cuts, raise fees and seek corporate sponsorship – all steps towards privatisation.

The main thrust of the Government's user-pays agenda remains in tact. Higher education in Australia would have far better prospects if this appalling legislation had been defeated in its entirety. ✪



**T-Shirts \$16**  
(\$2 post + packaging)

**Mugs \$10**  
(\$2.50 pp)

from SPA Books  
65 Campbell St  
Surry Hill NSW 2010  
ph (02) 92126855  
Visa and Mastercard accepted

arly 40 percent  
come to support repayments  
e – selling for \$339,400 in June 2003.

# What really happened in the Iraqi city of Samarra

In the 24 hours following what is now being called the "Battle of Samarra", Arab and international news media are beginning to piece together a picture of what really transpired. Two separate American columns on opposite sides of the city were simultaneously ambushed by Iraqi Resistance fighters.

A ferocious battle ensued in which the Iraqis battled the US forces who fired back indiscriminately with everything from automatic weapons to tank cannon and rockets from helicopter gunships.

After inflicting casualties on the Americans the Resistance fighters withdrew. The American troops, however, continued to shell and rocket residential quarters of Samarra for hours as if to punish residents and drive a wedge between them and the Iraqi Resistance.

The result has been quite the opposite. One resident said: "Yesterday we were just sitting around, but today we will be in the ranks of the fighters for liberation, because we won't stand for the crimes of the American bull". The predominant theme in people's remarks was that they would take revenge and purge the country of the shame of occupation.

After initially claiming that they had killed 46 Resistance fighters in their Sunday battle US spokesmen claimed on Monday that they had actually killed 54 Iraqis as they used tanks and cannons to fight their way out of simultaneous ambushes.

Iraqi witnesses, however, painted a different story. The Associated Press reported that residents of Samarra disputed the American figures, saying that at most eight or nine people died. Al-

Jazeera TV reported that hospital sources in the city reported US gunfire killed eight people, all of them civilians.

Hospital director Abd Tawfiq told al-Jazeera, "more than 60 people wounded by gunfire and shrapnel from US rounds are being treated at the hospital".

"It appears that America is trying to cover up its ugly crime against the civilian residents by making out that those killed were all from the Iraqi Resistance", was the comment of Abu Adel to correspondents from IslamMemo website. Abu Adel was near by when the fighting broke out and says that "hysteria" gripped the American forces.

Another individual said that "the number of killed and wounded Americans was very great, as you can see before you burned out tanks, blown up cars, and a real battlefield on which the occupation forces sustained direct hits. The fighting units, and I think there weren't many of them, a moderate number as is normal in a Resistance war, slipped away after the fighting became intense, but the American forces insisted on continuing to shell houses with their civilian residents in them, despite the fact that some houses had put up white flags. And they kept on shooting at houses for hours. It was like they wanted to torture everybody so they would spurn the Resistance".

Associated Press wrote that when the US aggressor forces began firing at random, many civilians got their guns and joined the fight. Many said residents were bitter about recent night-time raids carried out by the American occupation troops.

"Why do they arrest people when they're in their homes?" asked Athir Abd as-Salam, a 19-year-old student. "They come at night to arrest people. So what do they expect those people to do?"

Thirty-year-old Ali Hasan, who was wounded by shrapnel in the battle said. "They claim we are terrorists. So OK, we are terrorists. What do they expect when they drive among us?"

A kindergarten was damaged, apparently by tank shells. "Luckily, we evacuated the children five minutes before we came under attack", said Ibrahim Jasem, a 40-year-old guard at the kindergarten. "Why did they attack randomly? Why did they shoot a kindergarten with tank shells?"

The residents described what the Americans did as "collective punishment" of the sort that the "Israelis" inflict on the Palestinians.

Basil Mas'ud, 36, who works in one of the city's factories, and was wounded outside the hospital said, "Iraq's going to turn into a new Vietnam for the Americans. How can they treat us like this? We're going to kill them".

What is significant about the Battle of Samarra, according to the Jordanian paper al-Arab al-Yawm, is that for the first time the



"We will be in the ranks of the fighters for liberation"

Iraqi Resistance carried on a direct battle with American forces for two hours.

The Agence French Presse reported that walls in the area where Resistance Fighters attacked the American occupation troops the day before were now covered with slogans in support of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

IslamMemo's correspondent

spoke with a number of Samarra residents, most of whom indicated that from now on they will no longer stand aside from the war against the aggressor.

**Abridged. Acknowledgement to Information Clearing House. Complete text available at [www.informationclearinghouse.info/](http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/) Translated and compiled by Muhammad Abu Nasr**

## Urgent Baghdad Hospital Appeal

It's over the top! With contributions received during this week the Baghdad Hospital Appeal has reached the \$2000 target and more is expected before Christmas. Our congratulations and warmest thanks to all contributors.

While attacks on US and other military forces occupying Iraq are forcing the US to reconsider its "timetable" many more Iraqis are being killed by the actions of those exploding the bombs. The Iraqi hospitals are full.

The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) blames the US for the upsurge in violence and is calling for the US troops to get out and be replaced by UN-led forces. The Party is working for a national conference of all Iraqi political and religious organisations to be held next year. It hopes that this conference will elect a government of all the forces that oppose the occupation and any revival of forces that continue to support the restoration of Saddam Hussein. The Party's headquarters in Baghdad are reported to be a hive of activity 24 hours a day. The ICP has emerged as the most active and the best organised political force in Iraq.

**Contributors: CPA Maritime Branch \$200, Bert Heinemann \$10, Donna \$100, Frank Gosden \$20, Denis White \$20, Fred Roudy \$20, Blacktown Branch CPA \$250, Port Jackson Branch CPA \$100.**

This week's total \$720 Progressive total \$2173.

### Baghdad Hospital Appeal

I.....

of .....

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

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

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

Name on credit card \_\_\_\_\_

Credit card \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry date \_\_\_\_\_

## Russian elections

Elections to the Russian Duma (Parliament) took place on Sunday, December 7. The Central Electoral Commission has a deadline of December 22 to confirm all the results and December 28 to officially publish all returns.

As in the previous post-Soviet elections in 1993, 1995 and 1999, half of those elected to the 450-seat State Duma – the Lower House of the Russian Federal Assembly – will represent a specific single member constituency.

The other 225 seats are allocated proportionally to those parties that receive more than five percent of the votes cast nationwide.

The United Russia Party, which supports President Putin, is reported to have substantially increased its support.

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) has denounced the elections as marked by fraud and a massive media campaign favouring United Russia and other parties that supported President Putin. The CPRF ran second but with a reduced vote according to the results so far.

In the 1999 elections 46 of the CPRF deputies were elected in the single member constituencies with a further 67 seats gained when it polled 24 percent of the overall vote. Its vote in the current elections is claimed to be about half that percentage.

The current election campaign has raised little interest among voters who have come to regard elections as having little to do with their everyday lives. Many chose not to vote as voting is not compulsory.

Incredibly, the Liberal Democratic Party led by Vladimir

Zhirinovskiy, an extreme nationalist appears to have increased his vote while the liberal Yabloko, the Union of Right Forces and the Agrarian Party are not expected to reach the five percent threshold and will, therefore, not have any deputies in the new Duma.

### Main parties

The main parties in the outgoing Duma are:

**United Russia** with 187, drawn from three associations supporting President Putin – Unity faction (81 deputies), Fatherland – All Russia (59 deputies) and Russian Regions (47 deputies).

### Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF):

Held 84 deputies in the Duma. Its leading figures are Gennady Zyuganov (leader), Zhores Alfeyorov (Nobel Prize-winning scientist).

It formed the Agro-Industrial Deputy Group together with the Agrarian Party which held 43 deputies in the Duma.

### Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR):

This Party held 12 deputies. Its leading figure is Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

### Union of Right Forces (SPS)

Held 32 deputies. Its leading figures are Boris Nemtsov (a former Prime Minister under Yeltsin) and Anatoly Chubais (head of the state energy company RAO-UES and a former minister in charge of privatisation in the 1990s).

### Yabloko

Held 17 deputies. Its leading figure is Grigory Yavlinsky.

### Low public interest

Despite the low level of public interest in the elections the government of President Putin did not leave anything to chance.

In an open letter to President Putin, CPRF leader Gennady Zyuganov pointed out that there was "unprecedented manipulation of public opinion" and a preparedness to falsify the election results.

It was claimed in this dirty media campaign that the CPRF had connections with big business circles, an assertion that the Party denounced as "slandorous".

Election observers from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) have also pointed to the biased media treatment saying, "There is concern at the unequal campaign opportunities afforded to contestants, with verified instances of the use of administrative resources by United Russia, the leading pro-presidential political party.

"There is a clear bias in the State-owned media in support of United Russia and other presidential parties".



# African Americans in peril under the Patriot Act

Myths about the Patriot Act and how it affects the Black community are downright deadly. A potent myth is that the Patriot Act only affects a tiny number of Arabs and Muslims who were rounded up immediately after September 11. Some lament that immigrants are grabbing attention away from the problems of civil rights abuses and police violence against Blacks. In reality, however, the Patriot Act is not a shift, but a dangerous extension of unjust policies and practices that put all people of colour in jeopardy, even Blacks, in the USA.

by Tammy Johnson

We are not talking about a handful of highly scrutinised suspects here, but whole communities that have been victimised in the name of "national security". Eighty-two thousand men from 24 Muslim countries were required to register with the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Some 13,000 were detained and face deportation for minor or technical violations, such as failure to report a change of address.

Thousands more have become targets of hate crimes, fired from their jobs, interrogated by the FBI without a lawyer present, and jailed or deported due to INS bureaucratic snafus. Blacks know that you don't have to be a "foreigner" to be labelled an enemy of the state. So laws that imprison individuals without stating a clear charge or providing access to an attorney send up red flags.

## Serbian SP to make strong challenge in elections

The Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) will contest 250 seats in elections to be held on December 28, this year.

The Party decided, in accordance with the electoral law that the SPS party ticket will have the name: Socialist Party of Serbia – Slobodan Milosevic. Mr Milosevic will be No 1 on the party ticket. He remains a politician with the highest personal rating in Serbia because of his courageous and successful struggle against the NATO kangaroo court in The Hague.

The socialists will be fighting to win at least 20 percent of seats in the parliament.

Slobodan Milosevic addressed a session of the Head Committee of the SPS by phone from his prison in The Hague.

Mr Milosevic stressed that, "we, all together, have a duty to struggle for victory and win. It is in the interests of the whole people, of every family and each individual..."

"In these elections the Serbian people have a historic duty to choose the truth. Three years ago I warned citizens of Serbia what was going to happen if the exponents of foreign powers, that is, of their governments, come to power. Everything happened exactly as I said – nobody can deny it today."

"The Socialist Party of Serbia has a duty and the ability to gather and mobilise forces that will reverse the processes which are the sad reality of Serbia – in the interests of peasants, in the interests of workers, intellectuals, in the interests of Kosovo martyrs, in the interests of everyone who lives off his own work – as well as in the interests of the Serbian people, their national dignity and the dignity of every citizen." ☪

Lost in this debate is the plight of Black immigrants, who also suffer from unjustified detention and deportation. For example, US Attorney General John Ashcroft used the "national security" rationale to justify the indefinite detention of Haitian immigrants seeking asylum. His order had nothing to do with whether the immigrants themselves are dangerous.

Ashcroft's twisted logic is that detaining Haitians would discourage others from coming to America, thus preventing the diversion of Coast Guard resources from homeland security initiatives.

When I step a bit closer to the situation, as a Black woman I am alarmed to see familiar abuses taken to a whole new level. The story of Abraham, a Sudanese refugee in San Jose, California, illustrates the chilling link between the Patriot Act and racial profiling as we know it.

Ironically, he was on the way to the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) office to collect papers that would prove to his employer that he was in the country legally, when he was stopped for "driving while Black". Facing the barrel of drawn police guns, he realised, "they thought I was Black American". Police did not give Abraham a ticket for speeding, but extensively questioned him about his immigration status.

Most important, the atmosphere in which the government has

expanded its powers makes cops even bolder about racial profiling. Kenny Dukes, a young African American man, was killed by Chicago police officers in August. Dukes had returned home from a picnic with his girlfriend and was walking to the front door when the officers yelled at him to stop. Not realising that they were calling him, he continued walking with his back to the street. Although there was no warrant for his arrest and Dukes was not carrying a weapon, they shot him seven times in the back.

The good news is that communities across the country are exploding myths around the Patriot Act and making these connections. At public hearings in places like Los Angeles, Chicago, San Jose and Alameda, California, immigrant and Black leaders are standing together to take on government-sanctioned racial profiling.

This is not a new struggle. The Black community knows that the same racist fervour that inspired the recent shootings of Sikh cab drivers in Richmond, California, also led to the dragging death of James Byrd in Jasper, Texas.

The system that proposed asking people to turn in their neighbours using vague definitions of a "suspect" through the TIPS program (Terrorist Information Prevention System) is the same one that targeted African American leaders through COINTELPRO.

The targeting of whole communities through the Patriot Act is not just an "Arab thing" or a "Muslim thing". It's also a "Black thing".

Tammy Johnson is director of the Race and Public Policy Program at the Applied Research Center. *ColourLines Magazine.* ☪

## US pressure on Iran Silence about Israel

Under duress from the United States the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) continues to pressure Iran to come clean on its nuclear program. This, despite the fact that the IAEA has conducted inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities and is presently satisfied that Iran fulfils its international obligations.

The USA however keeps on claiming that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. This is the same course of harassment that the US and its allies applied to Iraq over its non-existent weapons of mass destruction.

There is, however, one Middle Eastern country, which definitely possesses nuclear weapons, but has not received attention or inspections from the IAEA. Its name is Israel.

Furthermore, Israel has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and has never officially admitted to having nuclear weapons. Non-proliferation analysts estimate that Israel has up to 200 such weapons.

Only recently, IAEA head Mohamed El Baradei, called on Israel to dismantle its nuclear

weapons arsenal, saying all Middle East nations would benefit from ridding the region of nuclear weapons.

"In my view, every country in the Middle East, including Israel, will benefit from establishing a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East as part and parcel of a comprehensive peace in the region", Dr El Baradei said.

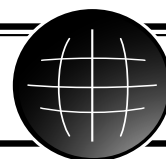
Mr Mordechai Vanunu, a courageous Israeli whistleblower is serving a life sentence at present for having revealed that Israel possesses nuclear weapons.

The United Nations General Assembly and IAEA General Conference have adopted 13 resolutions since 1987 appealing to Israel to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty. All have been ignored. ☪



Targeting people of colour – security check at Chicago airport

Eighty-two thousand men from 24 Muslim countries were required to register with the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Some 13,000 were detained and face deportation for minor or technical violations, such as failure to report a change of address.



## Global briefs

**USA:** The USA maintained its dominance in the international arms market last year, especially in sales to developing nations, according to a new Congressional report. The USA was the leader in total worldwide sales, with about US\$13.3 billion (up from US\$12.1 billion in 2001), or 45.5 per cent of global conventional weapons deals. Of that, US\$8.6 billion was to developing nations – amounting to almost half of all conventional arms deals concluded with developing nations last year. Russia came second in sales to the developing world last year with US\$5 billion, followed by France with US\$1 billion.

**JAPAN:** A joint survey by the Fuji News Network and Japanese Self-Defence Force (SDF) found that only 10 per cent of the population support sending Japanese troops to Iraq while the current instability continues. An overwhelming majority – 89 per cent – said they were dissatisfied with the government's explanation of why it promised to dispatch members of the Self-Defence Force (SDF). In July, the ruling coalition rammed a controversial Bill through parliament to deploy troops in a country where fighting continues – contrary to Japan's post-war constitution which bans the use of force to settle international disputes. The Japanese Government toned down an earlier pledge to send troops by the end of the year, following the deaths of Italian troops in mid-November. The deaths of two Japanese diplomats last week may further strengthen opposition to sending the troops.

**BRITAIN:** The mother of a British man shot in the head by Israeli troops accused the Sharon Government of treating her with "contempt" after it sent her a cheque that bounced. The Israeli Ambassador in London wrote to relatives of peace activist Tom Hurndall, who is in a coma, enclosing a cheque towards flying him home. When Tom's mother Jocelyn Hurndall tried to pay it into her account, her bank said that the cheque had been returned as there were not enough funds in the Israeli Government's account. Mr Hurndall had been working with peace campaigners in the town of Rafah when he was shot as he tried to help children out of the path of an Israeli tank. He suffered severe brain damage and is not expected to recover. The Israeli Embassy in London insisted that the cheque had been cashed, although the family's bank continues to deny this.

**INDIA:** India and Pakistan announced a cease-fire along the Line of Control between the countries in Kashmir. The cease-fire is the first formal cessation of hostilities since insurgency erupted in the long-disputed region in 1989. Officials from both sides expressed hope that the cease-fire would help ease military tensions. The agreement was preceded in recent months by confidence-building measures such as some cross-border transport links and diplomatic exchanges.

## The Storyteller's Oath

Poems by Tom Pearson  
Illustrations by Tom Pearson  
\$10 (incl p&p)

Order from SPA Books,  
65 Campbell Street, Surry Hills, NSW 2010.  
Payment by Cheque, Money Order or Credit  
Card (for credit cards include name  
of card holder, card type, number & expiry  
date) Further enq 02 9212 6855



## Death and destruction or life and construction

While agreeing with attention being put on the militarisation of Australia, there are at the same time spin off proceedings, such as the wreath-laying by President Bush to the Australian soldier killed in Afghanistan and the grand ceremony in London for the Memorial to all those brave men who died in past wars fighting for democracy and freedom!

All are moves to counter the ever-growing strength of the anti-war movement and to sanitise and popularise the idea of continuous war. It has worked successfully before, so why not now?

Pour it out in bucketfuls, saturate the people with it until it enters the very pores of their skin and they can no longer resist the blowing of the trumpets and the banging of the war drums.

For whose democracy and whose freedom are they really dying?

I have a little saying as follows – “politicians declare war, military chiefs organise them – but – the working class are those who do the fighting and the dying”.

And who do they fight? Not the politicians or military “class” – no – they fight the working class on the other side. And it is certainly not in the name of freedom and democracy!

Quite some years back I was having a discussion with an old WW1 mate on the memorials in all the cities and towns, even in the smallest country ones and he made

a remark that has remained with me: “our glorious dead”, he snorted, “what’s glorious about being dead”.

And that brings out very clearly one of the great differences between capitalism and socialism – the former glories in death and destruction, while the latter is all about life and construction.

Which is why it is so essential for the working class to come to power before capitalism destroys the world in the name of anti-terrorism.

And in this case there is only one true working class party and one true working class paper in Australia – and they are respectively – the Communist Party and *The Guardian*.

And we are going to need both very much in the torturous years that lie ahead of us.

We will have to withstand a veritable deluge of lies and propaganda that will pour from the capitalist media and spin merchants in their frantic efforts to stem the inevitable collapse of the capitalist system and the ever-growing anti-war movement.

So, lastly I have a few comments to make on the press fund for *The Guardian*.

We have a dedicated bunch of people who, week after week, collect information – local, state, national and international, edit, write articles, set out and publish it to keep us informed of the true state of affairs – and all they have asked of us is to contribute \$12,000 a year to pay for running costs.

This breaks down to \$1,000 a month or \$250 a week. \$250 not enough to pay a minimum wage for one adult person.

\$250 – 250 people paying a dollar a week or to reduce the load – 500 at 50c a week.

Yet we have the shameful (for us supporters) spectacle of the editor having to beg, plea, cajole every week for more contributions to reach this pitiful sum. Just how many supporters of socialism and *Guardian* readers are there right through Australia?

I can only reiterate the cry of a long time ago – arise ye workers from your slumber. The time is now. Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!

B Appleton  
Killcare Heights, NSW

## A special message to Santa?

Shortly a plane will touch down in Kabul, Afghanistan. It is freezing and snowy but Santa Claus does not live here, in fact if Santa is planning a stop over he would know from the TV ads to look at [smartraveller.gov.au](http://smartraveller.gov.au).

I hope he reads carefully the part that says, “We advise against all travel outside Kabul. Warlords control many areas and overland travel can be very dangerous. There is the added danger that some Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters remain in parts of the country thereby creating a significant security risk...”

“You should consider permanent armed protection. You should be aware that even these precautions cannot guarantee your safety. The prevalence of unexploded landmines throughout the country adds to the risks.

“Australians should ensure that their vehicles travel in a protected convoy. Banditry in rural areas by armed groups is common.”

Unfortunately those landing

on the tarmac now, are returning asylum seekers from Australia’s camp on Nauru. They know what it is like to see the body of a tortured brother. They know the screams of their little sister. Australia has told them it is safe to go home. Happy Christmas?

Elaine Smith  
West Haven, NSW

## Unrepresentative Caucus swill

It is interesting to compare the media hoopla that went on around the election of the leader of the ALP and the virtual media blackout of the election of the ALP President. Let’s cut straight to the chase – Mark Latham, like Kim Beazley and the rest of the unrepresentative swill in the Labor Party Caucus are just varying shades tarred with the same brush.

Carmen Lawrence became the first President of the ALP to be elected by the party membership. Of the 20,000 votes cast, Lawrence received more than 6500, former Party President Barry Jones received 5000 and the candidate from the NSW right wing, Warren Mundine came in a long third.

These three will hold the Presidency for a year on a rotating basis, with Lawrence taking the first round. Carmen Lawrence is a lefty and wants to move Labor Party policies on such questions as refugees, to a more progressive position.

She is not the saviour of the ALP, which in my opinion is skipping down the aisle to a marriage of like-minded capitalist

lap dogs with the Liberal Party. But Lawrence’s election and Latham’s anointment raise an interesting question: that is, where to now for the Labor Party rank and file faithful?

The Labor Party has for a long time been a formidable obstacle in the way of the emergence of a real left-progressive alternative. Those 20,000 members who voted obviously relished the opportunity to have a say, albeit in a small way, in determining the direction of their Party.

One thing it tells us is that there is clearly a growing gap between the handful of power brokers in control of the ALP and its membership.

Nathan Barnes  
Brisbane, Qld

Got something to say?

Got an opinion about the system, about human rights, the labour movement, peace, land rights, socialism, privatisation, child care, your local community?

Then write it down and send it to us.

Letters of up to 400 words are preferred.



## Culture & Life

### Terrorism and drugs

Terrorism is not a movement or an ideology. It is a tactic. And you cannot destroy a tactic.

by Rob Gowland

The “war on terrorism” is nothing of the sort, as we know. An excuse to allow the US and its few allies to attack countries and governments for reasons having nothing to do with terrorism, and everything to do with markets, resources and global domination.

That the US of all countries would use “the threat of terrorism” as a cover for its aggressive plans has considerable irony that *Guardian* readers will readily recognise. What country has devoted more time and resources over the years to training terrorists than any other? Give you one guess.

Take the right-wing feudal Islamic fundamentalists, for example (these days invariably lumped together as “al Qaida” to give “terrorism” form and substance). The US sought out, armed and trained the feudals in Afghanistan to overthrow the revolutionary government there.

Former Canadian diplomat and Professor of English at the University of California Berkeley Campus, Peter Dale Scott, in a recent article points out that according to George Crile, in his

book *Charlie Wilson’s War*, “about the CIA’s arming of Islamists during the Afghan War”, the training provided by the US agency included “urban terror, with instruction in car bombings, bicycle bombings, camel bombings, and assassination”.

Scott thinks some of that training is coming back to haunt the US now in Iraq.

The CIA also trained fundamentalists in Somalia (in the mid ’70s, Somalia, remember, had a pro-Soviet government and a vibrant, left-wing people’s movement). They too, later, used their US training to bring down US helicopters when Bush’s father tried to assert US power in their country.

Scott again: “One trainer of the Somalis, Egyptian-born Ali Mohamed, was also a veteran of US Special Forces and the CIA. While allegedly still on the US payroll, Mohamed had been recruiting and training Arabs for the US-supported Afghan War, at the al-Kifah Center in Brooklyn, New York. This served as the main US recruiting centre for the network that after the war became known as al Qaida.

“In 1993, ... Mohamed was picked up by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in Canada in the company of an al Qaida terrorist. Almost certainly he would have been arrested; but Mohamed insisted that the RCMP put in a phone call to his FBI handler. The call quickly secured his release.”

I’ll bet it did! Scott’s most recent book is *Drugs, Oil and War: The United States in Afghanistan, Colombia, and Indochina* (published in 2003 out of Lanham, Maryland, by US publisher Rowman and Littlefield). Here is a potent little extract from it:

“I have no evidence that the United States intervened militarily as a conscious means of maintaining

control over the global drug traffic. However, conscious decisions were definitely made, time after time, to ally the United States with local drug proxies.

“... Furthermore, drugs from regions where the CIA has been active have tended to migrate through other countries of CIA penetration, and more importantly through and to agencies and groups that can be classified as CIA assets.

“In the 1950s opium from Indochina traveled through Iran and Lebanon to the Corsican Mafia in Marseilles and the Sicilian Mafia under Lucky Luciano. In the 1980s mujahedin heroin was reaching the Sicilian Mafia via the Turkish Gray Wolves, who worked in tandem with the Turkish Army’s Counter-Guerrilla Organisation, which functioned as the Turkish branch of the CIA’s multinational ‘stay behind’ program.

“The routes shifted with the politics of the times, but the CIA denominator remained constant.”

The CIA’s involvement with the Sicilian Mafia dates back to before the agency was even called the CIA, to when it was still the wartime Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Using mob connections on the New York waterfront (another denominator that has remained constant), the OSS/CIA organised for the Mafia in Sicily under Salvatore Giuliano and others to massacre members of the Communist anti-fascist Resistance, in advance of the US invasion of Sicily.

The “War on Drugs” is as phoney as the “War on Terror”. Drug trafficking, and the money it generates, is an integral part of the global capitalist economy.

The huge amounts of cash generated by drug trafficking (and the profits from the laundering of



that cash) provide “legitimate” businesses and capitalist entrepreneurs with plentiful funds for takeovers, funding of election campaigns, bribing officials and manipulating markets.

And it has been known for many years that this money is a major source of supplementary and unsupervised funding for the CIA and the National Security Agency (NSA).

This black money allows the CIA and the NSA to clandestinely carry out operations expressly forbidden by Congress, to foment civil strife including war, and to fund CIA activities in the USA where the agency is not supposed to operate at all.

Clearly, the best contribution George Bush could make to a real war on drugs would be to close down the CIA. Hardly likely! ❖

**Rob Gowland**  
*previews*

**ABC & SBS**  
**public television**  
**programs**

Sun December 14 ~  
~ Sat December 27

**During WW2, the British Government's agency for carrying out assassinations and other dirty work was the Special Operation Executive (SOE), which officially didn't even exist. It was SOE that sent a team into Czechoslovakia that assassinated Heydrich, against the wishes of the Czech Resistance and at the subsequent cost of hundreds of Czech lives.**

The two-part docu-drama *Killing Hitler* (SBS 7.30pm Sundays Dec 14 and 21) reveals the formerly top-secret Operation Foxley, an SOE project to assassinate Hitler himself.

They didn't get to do it, so the matter is essentially academic, but the program intersperses its recreation with "expert commentary on the likelihood of it being a success".

Hitler alone did not cause WW2: his death would not have stopped it. German imperialism would still have wanted fascism at home and imperial conquest abroad.

Only the defeat of fascism could – and did – bring WW2 to an end.

How do you get your camera hup really close to an elephant herd? You miniaturise it, make it remote controlled, mount it on a little mobile platform (like a remote controlled toy car) and cover it with dry elephant dung (either real or simulated). The result is "dung cam" and it produced some amazing footage for *Elephants: Spy in the Herd* (ABC 7.30pm Sunday Dec 14).

At one point an elephant picks up the camera (the dung with the odd smell and whirring noises) and walks around with it, still filming: "Elevision", archly announces narrator David Attenborough.

Like some of the classical Greek dramatists, Thomas Hardy's themes tended to be buffeted by an indifferent force that rules the world and inflicts on humans the sufferings and ironies of life and love.

The following line, referring to Michael Henchard, the central character in Hardy's 1886 novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, could equally apply to the characters of most of his novels: "Through a combination of unhappy circumstances, troubles accumulate."

In Henchard's case, he goes

from drunken poverty to position and wealth through hardwork and sobriety, then, through greed, back to poverty.

The two part British ITV adaptation (ABC 8.30pm Sundays Dec 14 and 21) treats the work as a moody love story, which is probably as good as any other approach.

I have not seen *Dreaming In Motion* (SBS 9.30pm Sunday Dec 14), a package of five contemporary Australian short films, the result of SBS Independent's Third Indigenous Drama Initiative, but they sound excellent: "wickedly funny", "moving", "poetic", "deeply moving yet humorous", and so on.

The work of five young Aboriginal writer-directors they star actors like Sophie Lee (*The Castle, Muriels Wedding*), David Gulpilil (*The Tracker, Rabbit Proof Fence*) and Aaron Pederson (*MDA, Water Rats*).

The German-made documentary, *September 11: The Intelligence Failures*, screening on *Cutting Edge* (SBS 8.30pm Tuesday Dec 16), recounts numerous occasions during the '90s, when US and foreign intelligence services received specific warnings about plans to crash planes into major New York buildings.

In fact, as SBS puts it, "a joint Congressional enquiry found that US intelligence agencies knew the plan, the goals, even the perpetrators, and could have prevented the terrorist attacks of 9/11". Why didn't they then?

According to the program, the reason is a mixture of scandals and lies "in a litany of mutual distrust, non-co-operation and dreadful ignorance".

If there were also those in the US Government and intelligence community who did not want the attacks thwarted, this program is not going to venture an opinion.

Directed by Oscar, Emmy and Royal Television Society award-winning documentary filmmaker Vikram Jayanti, *The Christmas Truce* (ABC 8.30pm Monday Dec 22) recalls an event on the Western Front in 1914.

On Christmas Eve, during a lull in the fighting, troops on both sides came out of their trenches, tentatively at first and then in droves, and "fraternised". They exchanged tobacco and mementos with the enemy, sang carols and played football together.

*The Christmas Truce*, made for the notoriously unreliable History Channel, maintains that this spontaneous (temporary) rejection of war "almost transformed the course of world history forever". That is nonsense, but it did send shivers through the top brass, governments and big business on both sides in WW1.

The moving story of the Christmas truce is brought to life through cinematic recreations,



The ironies of life and love (*The Mayor of Casterbridge*)

never-before-published photos, rare archival film footage, first-hand oral histories from the British Imperial War Museum and exclusive interviews.

A few weeks ago, *Living Famously* included a dreadfully superficial, inaccurate and dull account of the life of Marlene Dietrich. The *Masterpiece* documentary *Marlene Dietrich: Her Own Song* (SBS 10.00pm Tuesday Dec 23) may be considerably more interesting.

Directed by J David Riva, Dietrich's grandson, it allegedly explores her "political mission", the way both sides in WW2 tried to use her for propaganda, and her own private agenda.

The film that made her famous, Josef Von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (shot in Berlin in English and German versions), screens as the *Cinema Classic* this week (SBS 11.30pm Sunday Dec 28).

*Little Wolf's Book of LBadness* (ABC 8.00pm Christmas Eve) is a children's cartoon based on Ian Whybrow's best-selling books. Although it has a certain charm, it has, sadly, been animated with little imagination.

Simply making the characters in Whybrow's illustrations move across the backgrounds does not take advantage of the possibilities of the cartoon medium. It's as though the great animators of the Warner Brother's cartoons had never existed.

There are no less than eight guests on the *Parkinson Christmas Special* (ABC 8.30pm Christmas Eve). Three of them are worth bothering with.

One is Barry Humphries, who relies on blue humour to get him

through two stints as first Dame Edna and then as Sir Les Patterson. Another is Jamaican poet Benjamin Zephaniah who is a funny man, and the third is magician Mark Paul, who combines cardtricks with a "mind reading" act that is damn good.

Otherwise, the show is tedious.

Literal interpretations of the Bible are a great source of time wasting. *The Mystery of The Three Kings* (SBS 8.30pm Christmas Eve) spends an hour "searching for the truth behind the mystery". It ponders such weighty questions as: Were there really three of them, or more? Were they kings – or astronomers?

Best of all, could a star have guided the kings to Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem? (Neat and very precise piece of celestial navigation if it did!) And more of the same pointless speculation.

If Christmas Eve is a bit of a televisual waste of space, Christmas Day and Boxing Day are a sackful of repeats, some of them for the umpteenth time. *Merry Christmas, Mr Bean* (ABC 8.00pm Xmas Day) is amusing as always, but how many times can you watch Rowan Atkinson spectacularly stuff up the stuffing of a turkey?

*Me And Mrs Jones* (ABC 8.30pm Xmas Day) is a lightweight romantic comedy-drama featuring Robson Green as a tabloid journalist who gets to bed the (female) Prime Minister, Caroline Goodall, with the reluctant aid of his best friend (Michael Maloney, who played the psychotically devoted manservant Albumen in *Believe Nothing*). It's froth, with pretensions to be something deeper, but I've enjoyed it a couple of times now.

*My Family* (ABC 8.00pm Boxing Day) was and remains a very forced series that struggles for laughs. Robert Lindsay's long-suffering husband does better than Zoe Wanamaker's steely wife but the kids have the best jokes. This episode's about average.

*Dalziel And Pascoe* (ABC 8.30pm Boxing Day, part 2 screening 8.30pm Friday Jan 2) is the episode about murder at the fox hunt, with the aggressively uncouth Dalziel right in his element (or out of it) and enough suspects to singlehandedly solve unemployment among British actors.

Also getting another repeat, possibly more welcome, is the three-part Series Five of *Silent Witness* (ABC 9.25pm Boxing Day), beginning with *World Cruise*, the episode about anti-Semitism and unpunished Nazis. Amanda Burton is at her prickly best as forensic pathologist, Sam Ryan.

*The Wright Brothers' Flying Machine* (SBS 8.30pm Saturday Dec 27), screening to mark the centenary of the world's first powered flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, reveals the popular image of the Wrights as amateur bicycle mechanics who tinkered their way into the sky to be a total myth. This BBC documentary by Ben Southwell explores their astonishing inventiveness and methodical approach to the problem of powered flight.

It features exhilarating footage of flights by exclusively commissioned replicas that use the same original materials and the only existing Wright engine for the frail craft that first propelled humans towards the clouds. ☺

Subscribe to **The Guardian**

12 MONTHS: \$88 (\$80 conc.)  6 months: \$45 (\$40)  3 months: \$23 (\$20)

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

POSTCODE: \_\_\_\_\_

Pay by  Cheque  Money order  
– to Guardian Subscriptions  
65 Campbell St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010, Australia

or by credit card:  Bankcard  Mastercard  Visa

Card #

Amount: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**The Guardian**  
65 Campbell Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010  
Phone: (02) 9212 6855  
Fax: (02) 9281 5795  
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au  
Editor: Anna Pha  
Published by T Pearson  
65 Campbell St  
Surry Hills NSW 2010  
Printed by Spotpress  
105-107 Victoria Rd  
Marrickville 2204  
Responsibility for electoral comment  
is taken by T Pearson,  
65 Campbell St, Surry Hills, 2010

**Communist Party of Australia**

**Central Committee:**  
General Secretary: Peter Symon  
President: Hannah Middleton  
Australian Marxist Review:  
Executive Editor:  
Hannah Middleton  
65 Campbell St, Surry Hills, 2010  
Ph: (02) 9212 6855 Fax: (02) 92815795  
Sydney District Committee:  
Rob Gowland, 65 Campbell St,  
Surry Hills 2010  
Phone (02) 9212 6855  
**Wollongong Branch:**  
Leanne Lindsay  
PO Box 276 Corramal 2518  
**Riverina:** Geoff Lawler  
PO Box 1016 Wagga 2650  
Phone: (02) 6921 4316  
Fax: (02) 6921 6873  
**Website:** http://www.cpa.org.au

**Victorian State Committee:**  
Andrew Irving  
PO Box 3 Room 0  
Trades Hall Lygon St Carlton South 3053  
Ph: (03) 9639 1550 Fax: (03) 9639 4199  
**Brisbane Branch:**  
David Matters  
PO Box 2148 Salisbury East 4107  
Phone: (07) 3398 9623  
**South Australian State Committee:**  
Marie Lean  
Room 5, 1st floor, 149 Flinders St,  
Adelaide 5000 Ph: (08) 8232 8200  
**West Australian Branch:**  
Vic Williams  
5B Jemerson St Willagee Perth 6156  
Phone: (08) 9337 1074  
**Newcastle Branch:** 303 Hunter St  
Phone: ah (02) 4926 1752  
**Email:** cpa@cpa.org.au

# Nicaragua

## The crisis deepens

Señora Eva Irma Dominguez wakes to a lovely August morning in her sprawling 12-acre estate on gently rolling hills and gullies. Looking out the window of her faux colonial style bedroom, she can view part of Managua in the foreground, and then the placid blue expanse of Lake Managua. On a clear day she can see the tallest of Nicaragua's volcanoes about 90 kilometres away.

by B Prasant

She rises late, has a leisurely bath, dresses in her fineries, eats a hearty breakfast of fresh fruits, juice, eggs, bacon, bread and coffee, and goes shopping in one of her four chauffeured limousines. Her two Rottweilers accompany her. Two "houseboys" follow in the "spare" car. At the bank, she makes a substantial withdrawal in US dollars, changes a few into gold cordobas, and descends on the glass-fronted shopping mall to splurge to her heart's content.

While coming out, bulging shopping bags on the shoulders of her "houseboys", she is accosted by a gaunt-cheeked woman and her children. The men-folk, aware of the tradition of machismo, hang back. She carelessly hands out the cordobas, mutters under her breath about the "dirty vagabonds from the villages", and waves her chauffeur on. She will relax for the rest of the day, before the party she throws every evening for the elites of Hispanic descent of the capital city.

### Hollow-cheeked

One of the undernourished women upon whom Senora Dominguez chose to shower her largesse for the day is Isabel Alonzo. With her two boys in tow, Isabel makes a beeline for the shopping mall on the other side of Managua. As she half-runs, half-walks, cursing her children for slowing her up, the frontage of the mall is crowded with dozens of hollow-cheeked men, women, and children.

Lacking the energy even to hunt for food, she falls asleep. Her two children wander away. They know when not to bother the *madre* by hanging uselessly around. There is a good chance that the two Dominguez boys will become members of the street gangs who roam the city after evening descends. They also have a fair chance of being brutalised in the process. Had they a sister, her fate would be sealed: the bordellos beckon.

### Welcome to post-neoliberalism Nicaragua

The return of the "two Nicaraguas" does not surprise me. Having been a steady visitor to the country between the 1970s and the 1990s, I am quite prepared for the tense co-existence of hunger and opulence, of the idle rich and the uprooted in this very poor Central American nation.

This had been the picture in Managua and Matagalpas when the military-backed ruler, Luis Somoza was in office from 1956 to 1967.

The US administration was quite enamoured of "their men" in Managua. The most endearing epithet was reserved for Luis Somoza's father, General Anastasia Somoza, fondly referred to by one US president as "our son-of-a-bitch".

### Winds of change

The winds of change started to blow when the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN or Front for short), led by, among others, José Daniel Ortega and Tomas Borge, started to organise guerrilla-style military offensives against the dictatorship and commenced redistribution of land in the countryside in the late 1970s.

Popular support for the Front grew rapidly. Trembling in fear of what the Pentagon described as a "Cuba-style takeover", the US imperialists poured men and money into the country. Direct intervention was repeatedly attempted as the CIA went into "secret war" mode.

In July 1979, a Front-led government was set up in Nicaragua. The US then sponsored hordes of rebels, based mostly in Honduras and led by CIA operatives and regular US army commanders, to try to topple the new government. But the new government of President Daniel Ortega soldiered on.

The real disaster took place when the Front, having won the battle against authoritarianism and imperialism, lost the 1990 elections to the US-backed centre-right National Opposition Union.

### Achievements

Before its defeat the government had redistributed nine million hectares of arable land among the rural poor, to benefit 720,000 families. Rural credit was given to the *campesinos*. The system of co-operative farming took root.

Agricultural production increased. Lacking substantial mineral resources, Nicaragua was able to sustain its economy by large quantities of agricultural exports. The fishing and mining industries were strengthened. Highways were built with full consideration for ecological imperatives. Small townships grew up in a planned manner across the country.

Youth brigades were mobilised to ensure that literacy was increased from a miserable 9.8 percent to 52 percent. The education budget was

raised from 5.5 percent under the Somoza regime to 15 percent of GDP. A large number of schools, colleges and universities were set up.

UNESCO declared that Nicaragua had mobilised the largest number of young men and women for educational tasks in the present century. The government launched programmes to educate street children.

Healthcare was made free. Five new hospitals and 300-odd health centres were set up. Diseases like poliomyelitis and measles were eradicated. Child care centres were set up across the country. The average life span increased from 50 to 67 years.

The greatest qualitative change was in the political sphere. Democratic functioning was nurtured. Political parties of every ideology, or lack thereof, were encouraged to take part in the democratic process. Elections become free and fair. Left-wing mass organisations flourished, including a strong trade union movement. The rights of the indigenous people were protected and allowed to develop. Women's rights were established and expanded.

Yet the Front and its allies were defeated in three successive presidential elections – 1990, 1996, and 2001.

The country, now in the clutches of neo-liberalism, is in the doldrums and things are getting worse everyday.

### Roaming the streets

Bereft of food, habitat, social recognition and courage, the young of the nation have taken to roaming the streets after darkness falls, looking for victims. Unemployment has grown to nearly 60 percent. The infrastructure is in complete ruin. Hospitals work only partially. Nursing homes and clinics flourish only for those who can afford them. Schools and colleges are falling into disuse while "centres of excellence" are encouraged for the rich.

The vast majority of the populace (5.4 million and growing rapidly) face hunger, disease, social conflict, and early death. The life span is down to 54 or less. The contribution of AIDS to the state of affairs is considerable. Polio and measles have come back. Infant mortality is spiralling upwards.

The transport system appears beyond redemption. Environmental degradation is everywhere. Corruption in high places is common.

During my stay, I learned how the coffee industry (the chief foreign currency earner of Nicaragua) has suffered a great setback. The oversupply of cheap, low-grade coffee from neighbouring countries and from Asian, Latin American and African nations has seen coffee



A large number of schools were set up by the Sandinistas

prices touch rock bottom. With no subsidies in sight, the farmers have started to starve and die.

On August 27, more than a thousand coffee cultivators trooped to Managua. The contingent that I saw were beaten mercilessly by the City police.

The indigenous people are also in great jeopardy. I shall cite one example. A 500 kilometre-long pipeline has been designed to carry oil across Nicaragua. This World Bank-funded project will cross the land of indigenous communities, causing environmental degradation. Massive deforestation has added to the miseries of the indigenous communities. The FSLN has been organising the affected people, but construction of the pipeline has started.

The most important popular movement now taking place is spearheaded by Centro Sandinista Trabajadores (CST) against the US-backed Central America Free Trade Agreement or CAFTA. Big anti-CAFTA demonstrations were held in Managua and other cities in September when the CAFTA session was in progress in the Nicaraguan capital. The Front is also campaigning for the cancellation of Nicaragua's foreign debt, which now stands at US\$6.5 billion.

Sadly, however, the sharp edge of the movement that inspired me during earlier visits is not present this time around. The rural base of the Front appears to be slowly disintegrating. Many *campesinos* I spoke to say that the Front is not able to take along the rural poor in its effort to resist the return of the great estates and the drive to reverse the land reforms.

Another regrettable reason was the accusation that a small section of Front activists were seen to be entrenched in the countryside as the newly rich, each having a substantial estate. There is no denying, however, the strong support for the Front, especially in the cities and townships.

### Catholic Church

As in other Central American countries, the Catholic Church plays a big role in the political realm. Thus, Padre Miguel d'Escoto served as Foreign Minister in the Front government with the poet Ernesto Cardenal as its Minister for Cultural Affairs.

Recently, the Front has rebuilt bridges with the Church, boosting its prospects in the municipal polls for Managua in 2004. The Front is in control of 54 municipal bodies, either alone or in coalition with other progressive parties. This includes Managua.

Of late, the Front has formed an alliance with the Renovation Movement, the Christian Socialists, and the National Project parties. Jacinto Juarez of the Front told the left-leaning *La Prensa* newspaper that this move represents a "unity in diversity" approach.

Front leaders like Managua's mayor, Jose Osorno Lopez, are confronted by a tough challenge. More than 70 percent of the city's populace live in extreme poverty. The abandonment of rural areas around the capital is a big problem for the Front-led mayoral council.

The Mayor's problems are compounded by the national government's unwillingness to release its share of assistance to a city in the hands of the opposition. The situation was summed up recently, when the mayor said he would not bother setting up new health centres and schools since the government was not willing to hire teachers and doctors for the capital city.

Elections to the National Assembly are slated for 2006. Until then, will Señora Dominguez continue to enjoy her siesta, and will the children of Isabel Alonzo continue to rummage in the sun for food at the city dump? I leave Nicaragua with a heavy heart. *People's Voice, Canada's communist fortnightly.* ☪