



No act too low for this gov't of liars

Marcus Browning

The Howard Government has ratcheted up its fear mongering over terrorism. The cynically timed arrests of people in Melbourne and Sydney are aimed at propping up PM John Howard's sagging public support. A man has been shot in one of the raids at Green Valley in Sydney's south-west. As *The Guardian* went to press his condition was unknown. The latest Newspoll survey shows public support for Howard is the lowest in four years because of the Government's industrial relations and terror laws.

It was no coincidence that Howard's blatant gambit – last week's announcement that there was "specific intelligence" of a "potential terrorist attack" – came on the day his draconian anti-union laws were pushed through the Lower House.

Fifteen people have been arrested in raids conducted by more than 400 police on a number of suburbs in Sydney and Melbourne in what the Victorian Police Commissioner called a "long-term operation". Eight of the nine people arrested in Victoria have been charged with being members of an unnamed proscribed organisation. One of those arrested in Melbourne was Imam Abu Bakr whose home has been raided by ASIO at least twice this year.

At a meeting in September of Australian Muslims, Agnes Chong of the Australian Muslim Civil Rights Advocacy Network warned of the danger of the increased police powers to democratic rights. "We know of at least 18 people who have been questioned and detained under ASIO warrants", she said. Those arrests were low profile and secretive,

yet the Sydney and Melbourne actions were unveiled with public relations hoopla.

At the same time one of Howard's allies in the war on Iraq suffered an embarrassing defeat with the Government of Tony Blair forced to put off a parliamentary vote on one of its terror laws.

Howard's dramatic posturing in recalling the Senate to rush through an amendment – changing the wording in the Criminal Code from "the terrorist act" to "a terrorist act" – to his terror laws, giving even more arrest and detention powers to the police, was a calculated move as unrest over the laws increased.

Howard refused to reveal any details of the alleged threat, and now the Government is being secretive about the latest arrests. But he will have an eye on Blair's dilemma in Britain. Home Secretary Charles Drake had to cancel a vote on the proposal to allow police to hold suspects for up to 90 days without charge because Labor backbenchers intended to cross the floor and vote against it.

Howard's reckless act certainly has the smell of desperation about it.

Sedition laws

The new sedition laws are there to gag critics of the Government.

Nick Parsons from Currency Press, the major independent publisher of the performing arts in Australia, warns that, regardless of Howard stating the laws will not "curtail legitimate free speech" the Bill makes no special allowance for criticism, political or otherwise. It says that sedition is an offence, regardless of how it is committed, or by whom.

There are other provisions for "unlawful



association" defined as "anybody [who] advocates or encourages the carrying out of seditious intention". This includes "an intention to bring the sovereign into hatred or contempt, to urge disaffection against following the constitution, the Government and either house of Parliament".

Mr Parsons also points out that unlike the crime of sedition, there is no defence of "good faith" when it comes to seditious intent.

Defence Minister Robert Hill also announced that the Government wants the power to call out the military in the event of a terrorist act in Australia and wants reservists to have a greater role in Australia as a "rapid reaction force".

He's backed to the hilt in this by the CIA's main representative in Australia, *The Australian* newspaper's foreign editor, Greg

Sheridan, who in a column last week called for Australian army and navy personnel to patrol the streets of the major capital cities.

Greens Senator Kerry Nettle pointed out that the Government already has huge powers to use the military. "Extraordinary new powers were passed in 2000 which gave significantly more powers to the Army than they had ever received", she noted. "Troops were given the power to cordon off areas, to stop and search, to detain people and shoot-to-kill powers".

Senator Nettle called the Government's announcement of a "specific" threat a smoke-screen. "We've seen now twice the terror card played by the Government as a way of seeking to garner support for their moves and making sure industrial relations isn't on the front page of the newspapers." ✪

Pine Gap – Notice to Quit

Pine Gap, 20 kms Southeast of Alice Springs, is one of the largest and most important United States war fighting and intelligence bases in the world. It is a satellite ground control station. It has been an important element of Star Wars for decades. It employs over 1,000 US and Australian personnel.

Established in 1968, it now consists of around 20 radomes working as satellite receiving stations for the various satellite programs such as reconnaissance and signals interception.

Every branch of the US military as well as the National Reconnaissance Office, National Security Agency and the CIA are stationed at Pine Gap.

Pine Gap's most important role is processing information gathered by satellites and transmitting that information to the United States. The satellites span a strategically important third of the globe, encompassing China, southern Russia and the Middle East oil fields.

Pine Gap receives from satellites and forwards to the US early warning of missile launches. It also provides information on the launch site, missile type, velocity, and what kind of warhead the missile may carry, intelligence for US economic and military activities.

US satellites transmitting through Pine Gap monitor missile launches and military,

economic, political and domestic telephone, microwave and VHF radio communications from allies and enemies alike.

They provide photographic surveillance of terrain, buildings, troop movements, the results of bombing raids, etc. The satellites can also intercept radar emanations, allowing mapping of air defences, anti-ballistic missile radars and early-warning radars.

The Australian parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Treaties has complained that MPs are kept in the dark about Pine Gap. Although members of the US Congress have visited Pine Gap and received classified briefings about its functions, the Treaties Committee is "entrusted with less information than can be found in a public library".

Pine Gap has been converted into a front-line base for the US "missile defence" (Star Wars) system. It has taken over the role of early detection of missiles and is integral to the change from the nearly obsolete DSP (Defence Support Program) satellites to the Space Based Infra-Red System (SBIRS), which is a key element in missile defence.

Missile defence is not a benign, defensive nuclear umbrella. It is a controversial space battle system which aims to allow the US to attack other countries without fear of retaliation.

In November this year the Federal

Government can give three years' notice that it intends to terminate the agreement which permits Pine Gap to continue operating. A note from Foreign Minister Downer to the US Ambassador, dated June 4, 1988, says:

"I refer to the Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the United States of America relating to the establishment of a Joint Defence Facility at Pine Gap, done at Canberra on 9 December 1966, as amended and extended (hereinafter 'the Agreement')."

"The Government of Australia proposes that the Agreement be extended for a period of ten years from 16 November 1998 and thereafter remain in force until terminated. The Government of Australia further proposes that after this extension has been in force for a period of seven years, either Government may at any time notify the other in writing that it desires to terminate the Agreement in which event the Agreement shall terminate three years after such notice has been given." ✪

Between November 1 and November 21, fax, mail or phone the Government, demanding that it give notice to terminate the agreement and close down Pine Gap.

Minister for Defence, Senator Robert Hill Fax: 02 6273 4118 Tel: 02 6277 7800
Prime Minister, John Howard Fax: 02 6273 4100 Tel: 02 6277 7700
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer Fax: 02 6273 4112 Tel: 02 6277 7500
House of Representatives Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

The Federal Government has recently upgraded its "spam" system and they may well be able to quarantine our email messages. We therefore recommend that messages be faxed.

Let the **Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition** know what you have done.
PO Box A899, Sydney South NSW 1235
Phone/fax 02 9698 2954 Email: aabcc@zipworld.com.au

For more information visit: www.anti-bases.org

The Guardian

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Liars at work – again

John Howard and his Attorney General Philip Ruddock are once again attempting to hoodwink the Australian people by doing what they do best – lying.

Howard's rush to amend the "terror laws" last week to introduce a one word amendment and the subsequent raids and arrests this week bear all the hallmarks of an elaborate and cynical exercise to achieve their shoddy political ends. Even the debunking by Ruddock last week, saying that no arrests have been made and may never be made, can be seen as part of an elaborate mind game.

It is transparently obvious that the whole incident is being beefed up to maintain fear and suspicion in the community and to divert attention from the unpopular industrial relations legislation and the undermining of democratic rights by the "terror laws" themselves.

Defence Minister Robert Hill has joined the Prime Minister's clamour with proposals to give wider powers to the military to patrol city streets during some events. Hill's timing is perhaps an admission by the Government that earlier scare-mongering was being widely criticised as a cynical exercise.

The events also come at a time when the PM's popularity as measured in the polls is on a considerable slide. Former leader of the Liberal Party John Valder says that Howard's honesty and integrity are being increasingly questioned. The Queensland Premier Peter Beattie now accuses the Federal Government of talking "alarmist rubbish" although he and other State Premiers had earlier signed on to the Federal terror laws.

But Howard's agenda is by no means limited to the Australian scene. The Federal Government is an integral part of the extreme international right-wing which is increasingly adopting fascist measures to control community opposition to their policies. Their drive for more wars and the most far-reaching attacks on workers' rights and living standards are bringing hundreds and thousands onto the streets in many countries.

A recent example is the rioting in France caused by mass unemployment, poverty, discrimination and hopelessness. Massive demonstrations and strike struggles are taking place in many countries across the world. Many governments have become unstable, some are being thrown out. Bush's popularity has also plummeted. He is facing one exposure after another.

But the lying, diversion and cover-up is not limited to the Federal Government. Did Bob Carr resign so suddenly because he knew that the truth about the disgraceful Sydney cross city tunnel contract was about to blow? The State Government willingly signed on to the contract while pursuing its vaunted public private partnership contracts, knowing that it gave tremendous advantages to the private contractors while leaving the public to pick up the tab for the enormous payouts that the contract provided for government default. Much of Sydney traffic was to be diverted to feed the profit interests of the private tunnel contractors.

Any claim that the reality of this contract was unknown to Bob Carr and his Ministers is just another of the lies that are being foisted on the long-suffering people of Australia. They are guilty! Rather than Bob Carr being rewarded as a richly paid adviser to the Macquarie Bank, he should be in one of the jails that his government has been building so enthusiastically.

The political climate in Australia is now changing as more and more people wake up to the cover-up and lying being resorted to by governments. The lying is the propaganda side of it. The other side is to be seen in the terror laws, troops on the streets, sweeping attacks on the democratic rights of workers and trade unionists in the IR legislation and the supreme crime of the new wars being planned.

One of the Federal Government's principal military advisers, Ross Babbage, a former official in the Australian Department of Defence who was tied up with defence industries, has predicted a major war in Asia in the 2020s. In the meantime he is calling for more and more money for the military.

That's the future that Howard and others are preparing for the Australian people. That's why every aspect of the Government's policies has to be opposed relentlessly and defeated.

PRESS FUND

You never know what you'll get in the Press Fund. Mind you, it's unlikely to be as surprising as Howard's last-minute addition to the terror laws, achieved by means of a terrorist warning which firmed up the State Premiers' wavering support for the legislation. In contrast, we believe that the commitment of the Press Fund's supporters to the human rights of working people won't be affected by such alarms. Nor will ours! And one of the best ways to demonstrate this is by boosting the level of Press Fund contributions between now and Christmas, so please, keep those contributions flowing in. We offer our thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

Bert Appleton \$40, G H Naylor \$5, "Round Figure" \$10.

This week's total \$55. Progressive total \$7955.

Public interest falls in a private hole

Peter Mac

The NSW Government has conceded that the operators of its proposed new water desalination plant would be guaranteed profits, if necessary with a standing order for the plant's water, even if ample supplies are available from existing dams.

The proposal to build the plant shocked hydrologists, local government leaders and environmentalists. They pointed out that recycling and treating Sydney's waste water would easily meet its citizens' rising thirst, at half the cost. The plant would consume huge quantities of electricity, would seriously damage Botany Bay's marine environment, and would disturb residents at near-by Kurnell.

Recently-resigned former premier Bob Carr is now a consultant for Macquarie Bank, which is expected to win the contract to construct and run the plant.

The Government's amazingly generous relationship with developers was demonstrated with the recent revelation that the operators of Sydney's cross-city tunnel would be

compensated if public transport improvements adversely affected tunnel profits. The government later admitted that renegotiation of the contract "could bankrupt the State".

Last week the Government revealed that the successful tenderer for the desalination plant would also be guaranteed high profits. However, they refused to consider the possibility of the plant being publicly-owned and run, or, better still, of reprocessing waste water, as is done in London.

Two days after these revelations, Frank Sartor, NSW Minister for Planning, declared that more than 2,500 hectares of undeveloped land in Sydney's north-west and south-west will be released for development.

Part of this land had been allocated as parks within two existing development zones. Sartor has not apologised for robbing current and future residents of these areas of these amenities.

The remaining area lies outside these zones, and had been allocated for "landscape and rural lifestyle" purposes, under recommendations

from the Department of Planning, the Department of the Environment, and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

This allocation was opposed by some property owners who had purchased local allotments, hoping to profit from an anticipated rezoning of the area for residential development.

Ignoring the blindingly obvious option of landscape regeneration, Sartor stated that 45 percent of the land had already been cleared. He also declared openly that the land had to be released in order to meet property owners' expectations, sneering that "There was a lot of blue-skying about the lifestyle zones, but when you are starting to affect people's property values then there is a problem".

The Government has claimed that there will be full disclosure and no "hidden nasties" in future contracts. However, it's clear that such assurances are only intended to placate the public, in order to ensure that the Government meets its commitment to big developers and construction companies. ☹



Review report sparks action

The only Indigenous-led assessment of any Australian government's response to the 339 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody has been handed to the Victorian Government.

Hailed as frank and fearless, the report was presented to State Attorney-General Rob Hulls, whose response was to the point: "This is a candid account of our shortcomings", he said.

"It is, quite simply, a government-commissioned kick up the arse – there's no better expression for it – and now it is time to gather our thoughts, assess our progress and draw up a map for the terrain in front of us."

Review chairman Mark Rose, co-chairwoman Joy Murphy and a support team compiled their two-part review over 18 months.

"The 1991 report concluded that the high rate of Indigenous deaths in custody was a direct consequence of the disproportionate incarceration rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people", Dr Rose said.

"The recommendations ad-

ressed national race relations and suggested ways to break the cycle of disadvantage that continues to land Indigenous people in prison.

"But almost 15 years later, our people are still falling through the net."

The review included more than 165 meetings with the Koori community, hundreds of self-assessment reports from key government departments and interviews with Koori prisoners and staff at 11 Victorian prisons.

The resulting review looks at how to adjust and fine-tune the original recommendations for the contemporary needs of Indigenous Victorians.

"It's about unfinished business, the lives of those people who have died since the Royal Commission represent an ongoing struggle. Their unfinished business must be our unfinished business", said Dr Rose who, along with other speakers, took time to thank and acknowledge the involvement of the family members of those seven Aboriginal people who have since died in custody in Victoria.

Victoria Aboriginal Affairs Minister Gavin Jennings said: "One death is one death too many, let's be very clear about that".

"The history of this nation over the last 200 years, the sins of dispossession, the sins of disadvantage, have profoundly let us all down. The issue of racism and reconciliation has not been resolved and we do not deny this."

Mr Hulls said that more than 200 years of dispossession could not be undone in only six years.

"Nevertheless, we had rightly hoped for more and I am, quite simply, ashamed ... that Koori communities are still at the bottom of all social indicators and that the same underlying issues of racism and disadvantage, persist", he said.

"The elected representatives of this nation must take responsibility for the state-sponsored march of dispossession that began with colonisation and that continues to pervade the experience of Aboriginal people".

(By Jirra Lulla Harvey for Koori Mail. 2/11/05) ☹

"We have to step up the campaign"

Looking at the struggle ahead – workers have their say



Burt Blackburne

Burt Blackburne, Victorian Assistant Secretary of the Communications Division of the CEPU, believes the campaign against Howard's new Industrial Relations Legislation is a life and death struggle.

The respected St Vincent De Paul Society has analysed Australian Bureau of Statistics figures that show nearly half the Australian population (8 million) is attempting to survive on \$21,000 per annum or less. Many of these people are in families where one or more persons are working. In August this year the *Medical Journal of Australia* reported that around 1,500 Australian children aged 14 and under die each year because of socioeconomic disadvantage.

A special report for the New Zealand Health Minister earlier this year examined the period in which workplace change was introduced along similar lines to the Howard Government's Legislation. It found that widening inequality had contributed to rising mortality rates and had created gaps in life expectancy between high and low income groups.

These laws can and will be stopped. In the late 1970s early 1980s when the conservatives last controlled the Senate our union representing then Telecom (now Telstra) workers



Mark Hayward

successfully defended members' wages and conditions in the face of dangerous anti-union laws.

In 1998, Howard and company attempted to destroy the Maritime Union of Australia. The battle was fought and won by unions and community groups defending workers' rights. This meant defying laws, mass pickets and huge demonstrations of workers including the 80,000 people in Melbourne.

ACTU and Victorian Trades Hall campaigns have seen union memberships grow and we need to build on this goodwill. If we want our rights we have to fight for them. Faced with a political crisis and massive public opposition, a government can be forced to back off. We have to step up the campaign to stop this injustice.

For Mark Hayward, a delegate for the LHMU at the Royal Perth Hospital.

The new IR legislation will have its worst effects at the next round of negotiations for new enterprise bargaining agreements sometime next year.

This means that workers have to get organised and prepared for the fight to retain



Andrew Freedman

working conditions achieved over the last 150 years.

The reality is that most government employees currently enjoy collective agreements but many of these are about to expire not long into the near future.

It is at this point that the struggle will begin and the need to get organised is a must or we loose.

I'll be there with my fellow workers on Tuesday November 15 at the National day of community protest at the Perth Esplanade from 12 noon.

Andrew Freedman is a shop steward at Ensign Linen Service and member of the LHMU Miscellaneous Division. He believes John Howard is right when he says that WorkChoices will change the culture of Australian workplaces, a change for the worse.

Take my workplace, Ensign in Melbourne, an industrial laundry owned by Spotless. By far the majority of employees are Australians with English as a second language and have been employed by the company for a considerable period.

Conditions of employment have not been



Vinnie Molina

great but have steadily improved due to a high level of union activity on site. This has sometimes been difficult due to Spotless taking advantage of every change in the law to maximise profits. The workers know that this generally means a stripping down of conditions in the workplace and are aware that the collective approach is the only way to defend their rights at work.

They are also aware that to negotiate AWAs with the boss puts them at a disadvantage from the outset because of difficulties with language.

In order to preserve the collective approach that the WorkChoices legislation is meant to undermine, the members asked the union to push for two things – a recognition of the award as it stood as of June 1, 2005 and agreement that no AWAs will be introduced on site.

After much wrangling and notice of protected action the company gave in to our demands. We are aware that this is only the beginning of a long struggle that can only be fought by keeping the union strong and active in the workplace, and these important victories put us in a much better position to combat the anti-worker legislation that WorkChoices really is.

Vinnie Molina, a cabinet maker by trade and currently an organiser in the Construction and General Division of the CFMEU in WA, believes that the changes have to be seen as part of the whole.

The Social Welfare reforms, the IR changes and the anti-terror legislation must be seen as part of the efforts by the big multinational corporations that are behind the Howard Government to drive Australian working conditions and wages to third world levels.

There are some industries that will be affected more severely because of low levels of unionism and the skill levels required to perform the work.

In other industries such as construction, particularly in the commercial sector where the level of unionism is high and jobs are booming with a shortage of skilled labour, the possibilities of defeating the legislation become real and achievable.

The attack on the CFMEU and other construction unions has become a priority for the Government to succeed in its adventure to drive wages and conditions to lower levels for the multinationals to be able to increase their already huge profits.

The workers and the community now have no choice but to fight the new laws with every means available in order to retain what has been achieved by workers over years of struggle. ☺

Childcare worker sacked while on holidays

A Sydney childcare centre director is fighting an unfair dismissal case after her boss sent a stranger around to her home, while she was on holidays, with a legal letter claiming she had "abandoned her job" and so she should consider herself sacked.

Colleen Hughes' union – the LHMU Child Care Union – is taking her employer to the NSW Industrial Relations Commission with an unfair dismissal case.

The union's NSW President, Jim Lloyd, points out that this might be one of the last unfair dismissal cases if the Howard Government is able to push through their industrial relations laws over the next few weeks.

"We hope to get her case heard expeditiously. We are lucky that we still have unfair dismissal laws in this country", Mr Lloyd stated.

"Once John Howard passes his laws people like Colleen Hughes will NOT be able to take an unfair dismissal case with their union to the Commission.

"Instead if Colleen wanted to appeal against her unfair sacking she would need to

find about \$30,000 out of her own pocket to take her boss to court."

Ms Hughes, 27, was appointed director of The Kids Club Kindergarten in Wooloowara Rd, Cronulla, by the new owner, Jason Caughlan, after he bought the centre 10 months ago.

She worked at the same centre for seven years without any problems with the previous owner. Her performance on the job has never been questioned.

"If my old boss still owned the centre I would still be there", she said.

After Caughlan appointed Ms Hughes as the Director of the centre he started demanding she sack some of her staff – and disagreements over the alleged failure to pay superannuation to the workforce began.

"He was asking me to sack staff – even though I knew that they were good childcare workers who hadn't done anything wrong.

"If I had gone ahead and sacked them it would have meant we did not have the proper staffing which could have endangered our

ability to operate under the law", Ms Hughes explained.

"I had no reason to sack anyone. I've been working there for seven years and I would have known if there were any staff problems. Everyone working there loved the children and worked hard for the children.

"The staff were especially angry because while he wanted to get rid of them we were being told of plans to expand the centre."

"This unfair dismissal, while I was away on holiday, has upset my family.

"Mum and dad are angry that Mr Caughlan never rang – he just sent a stranger to knock on our door and hand me a termination letter.

"It's a time when I should be celebrating because I have just got engaged. Instead I am constantly walking around under a black cloud."

Ms Hughes, a member of the LHMU Child Care Union, has with her union lodged unfair dismissal papers on Monday with the NSW Industrial Commission. ☺

US threats to Syria blunted at UN

Dan Margolis

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution on October 31 demanding that Syria "fully cooperate" with a UN investigation of the February assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Failure to do so, the measure said, would result in unspecified "further measures".

The passage of the resolution, which was co-sponsored by the US, Britain and France, set off angry protests in Syria and drew criticism from peace and solidarity organisations worldwide.

Security Council Resolution 1636 was adopted in response to an October 20 report by the UN Independent Investigation Commission (UNIC) that claims to shed light on the February 14 killing of Hariri and 20 others in a massive roadside explosion in Beirut. The "partial" report, made public by UNIC head Detlev Mehlis, said that there was "converging evidence" implicating Syria in the assassination, and that Syria had stonewalled investigators.

Critics of the report have said

the evidence for its claims appears to be thin and its reasoning is overly simplistic. They cautioned against jumping to any conclusions.

The World Federation of Trade Unions, which represents tens of millions of workers in over 80 countries, issued an October 25 statement urging solidarity with Syria. Referring to aggressive actions by the US and its allies around the report, WFTU said it condemns "attempts to disregard the tragic events resulting from the occupation of Iraq, Palestine and other Arab lands as well as the plans to reinforce hegemony by the United States and expand Israeli penetration and their efforts to undermine solidarity with Syria and other Arab countries." It continued, "WFTU considers the report imprecise, not based on facts and lacking professionalism".

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation said, "The unfolding scenario of pressure against Syria is reminiscent down to the smallest details of the plan that was used to pump up tension around Yugoslavia and Iraq. ... There can be no doubt that the USA and England are attempting to direct the world community along this route,

which twice in recent years has led to violence and bloodshed, to the deaths of thousands of people."

In addition to demanding Syria's full cooperation with UNIC, the resolution also calls on Syria to make available to the Commission or the Lebanese government anyone who is named as a suspect for interrogation. It further says those individuals must be placed under a travel ban and have their assets frozen.

Syria, angered by the resolution, questioned its necessity, saying that it had fully cooperated with the investigation. Days before the resolution, Syrian President Bashar Assad issued an executive decree setting up a national inquiry into what he – in agreement with the Security Council – referred to as the "terrorist murder" of Hariri. The investigation, according to Assad, would be

not separate from, but complementary to the UNIC probe.

The unanimous 15-0 vote by the Security Council gives a false impression: while the US, France and Britain were quick to push for action, including sanctions, other nations, especially Russia, China and Algeria, were much more cautious.

The initial draft and the final resolution are markedly different in several key areas. The original version included a threat of sanctions, but that threat was removed by the sponsors in order to get the votes of other Security Council members. The new language instead refers to the use of "further measures" should Syria not cooperate.

Li Zhaoxing, China's Minister of Foreign Affairs, said, "The use of sanctions can only be authorised by the Security Council with prudence in light of actual situations." He was

alluding to the partial nature of the report and the fact that Syria has not been convicted of any crime.

Along the same lines, the resolution contains no references to Washington's claims that Syria supports terrorist organisations outside of its borders. Nor does it allow UNIC to unilaterally impose travel bans on individual suspects, as the original resolution read. Instead, such bans must be approved by a special commission of all Security Council member states, operating by consensus.

All parties at the UN, including Syria, agree Hariri's murder was a terrorist act, and the perpetrators must be brought to justice. But the Bush administration's rush to judgment against Syria, and its drive for sanctions, has been momentarily blunted.

People's Weekly World ✪



"Treasongate" hits Bush

Tim Wheeler

Emboldened by the indictment of Vice President Dick Cheney's Chief of Staff, Lewis Libby, Democrats forced the majority-Republican Senate into a closed-door session on November 1 to hear their charges that the Bush administration used false intelligence to whip up support for the war on Iraq.

Senate Minority Democrat Leader Harry Reid invoked Rule 21, a rarely used Senate procedure, to force the session. It wrecked President Bush's hopes that his nomination of Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court would remove Libby's indictment from the headlines.

In a speech on the Senate floor, Reid said Libby's indictment, the

first against a White House staffer in 135 years, "raises very serious questions. It asserts that this administration engaged in actions that both harmed our national security and are morally repugnant" exposing "how the administration manipulated and manufactured intelligence in order to sell the war in Iraq and attempted to destroy those who dared to challenge its actions".

The cloud hanging over the White House, Reid added, is further darkened by the prisoner abuse scandals, failure to respond to the human suffering after Hurricane Katrina, and "the cronyism and corruption in numerous agencies". The war in Iraq has cost the lives of 2,025 American soldiers and over US\$2 billion each week, he said.

Senate Republicans, Reid

charged, "have repeatedly chosen to protect the Republican administration rather than get to the bottom of what happened and why".

Fuming Senate Republican Majority Leader Bill Frist accused the Democrats of a "stunt".

But Frist was forced to agree to push ahead with a "Phase II" investigation of the administration's use of phoney intelligence to justify the war. The GOP leadership had agreed to the probe nearly two years ago but "stalled" and "stymied" the investigation, Reid charged. He hailed Frist's agreement to report on the probe within 14 days as a "victory for the people".

Democrat Representative John Conyers Jr, who served on the House committee that prepared the impeachment of President Richard

Nixon 30 years ago, called the October 28 indictment of Libby "Treasongate".

A grand jury handed down a 22-page indictment accusing Libby of five counts of perjury, misleading and obstruction of justice for lying about his role in "outing" CIA agent Valerie Plame Wilson. Conyers said Libby's indictment "represents the beginning but not the end of the process of holding the Bush administration accountable for its conduct in foisting a pre-emptive war on this country".

Conyers said, "The charges beg the larger question: what did the President know and when did he know it? I believe it is imperative that Congress pursue these questions and determine how these charges fit into the entire web of deception, manipulation and obfuscation laid bare by the Downing Street Minutes and Treasongate."

In announcing the indictment, special prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald refused to discuss any other Bush administration officials. But the investigation will continue, he said. Bush's chief political adviser Karl Rove remains under investigation for his role in the crime, a felony punishable by as much as 30 years in jail. And looming in the background is Cheney, who is widely seen as the orchestrator of the drive to war and the vendetta against anyone who stood in his way.

"This indictment is representative of this administration that consistently lied, deceived, distorted and distracted to get us into the war in Iraq", said Greg Coleridge, director of economic justice and empowerment for the American Friends Service Committee in Ohio. "We are focusing our energies on a peti-

tion for an end to the war now. We need to pressure Congress to stop funding the war, close the military bases and bring the troops home", he told the *People's Weekly World*.

Democrat Representative Dennis Kucinich introduced a Resolution of Inquiry on October 26 demanding that the Bush administration "turn over all white papers, minutes, notes, e-mails or other communications kept by the White House Iraq Group [WHIG] to Congress" within 14 days. Libby and Rove were key figures in WHIG, which orchestrated the media build-up for the war.

The President must "come clean with the American public", Kucinich said. "Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction, it was not involved in the attack on our country on 9/11 and before the war it was not aligned with al-Qaida."

We still do not know who produced the forged document indicating Iraq was attempting to buy enriched uranium from Niger, Kucinich noted. Plame's husband, Ambassador Joseph Wilson, had gone to Niger and warned the White House that the document was a forgery. Yet Bush used it in his State of the Union address as proof that Saddam Hussein was attempting to produce nuclear weapons, key to winning congressional authorisation of pre-emptive war on Iraq.

Wilson wrote a *New York Times* op-ed piece after the invasion exposing Bush's lie. The Libby indictment points to Cheney as the orchestrator of the "outing" of Wilson's wife – leaking her name to ultra-right columnist Robert Novak, *Times* reporter Judith Miller and others – as an act of revenge and to silence other dissent.

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SA 8.00am, ACT 8.30am, NSW 8.30am,
NT 8.30am, TAS 8.30am, QLD 9.00am,
VIC 9.00am, WA 12.00 noon

Quake relief racing against time

Pamella Saffer

A massive relief operation is under way following the devastating earthquake that hit Pakistan and parts of India on October 8, but all involved say the operation faces unprecedented challenges.

Current reports place the death toll at over 73,000, including at least 17,000 school-age children. About 3.3 million people are homeless in a mountainous area covering 10,000 square miles around Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, the epicentre of the quake.

Aid officials have repeatedly stated that the world has not grasped the severity of the calamity. "From a logistical point of view this is possibly the most challenging emergency operation that the international humanitarian community has ever faced", said Rashid Khalikov, the chief aid co-ordinator for the United Nations in Pakistan.

UN agencies have been working alongside the Pakistani army and numerous independent non-governmental organisations to bring relief to the hardest hit region of northern Pakistan and Kashmir, one of the most rugged mountain ranges in the world.

Mudslides from the earthquake and heavy rains have cut off access by road to many areas and relief efforts rely primarily on helicopter drops. Donkeys and mules are being used to carry much-needed

supplies. Despite as many as 100 helicopter drops per day, up to 20 percent of the mountain villages, or, about half a million people, have not yet been reached by any form of aid whatsoever.

Nine mobile health units treating 2000 people a day have been set up in Muzaffarabad and Mansehra, but more is urgently needed to meet the needs. Tent schools will be set up in the next week to restore some sense of order for the tens of thousands of children left cold, hungry and vulnerable to disease.

The World Food Program's mandate is to drop enough food for six months for one million people before they are cut off by winter snows, but the agency has received only 13 percent of the \$56 million in pledges it needs.

The urgent round-the-clock race against time is to provide protection against the harsh Himalayan winter, which will begin in the next three to four weeks. Once the mountain snows come, these remote villages will be virtually stranded. If aid does not come to the people in these areas soon the world will be faced with an even greater catastrophe: a disaster which could have been prevented by an adequate and immediate response.

Jan Egeland, the UN's top relief official, compared the disaster to that of last year's Indian Ocean tsunami. "We thought the tsunami was the worst we could get", he said, "but this is worse".

The governments of India and Pakistan are considering a proposal to open the border, closed since 1971, between their respective administrative areas in Kashmir, with the aim of setting up medical aid camps and easing the delivery of supplies. The Indian Government also lifted restrictions on telephone lines to Kashmir, and Indians, frantic for news of relatives, waited in line to make telephone calls to the other side of Kashmir for the first time since 1989.

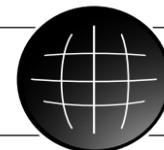
While numerous international aid organisations are on the ground, and many countries have offered personnel, helicopters, supplies and funds, the UN has received only 17 percent of the funds needed for its projected six-month emergency operation. Funds are trickling in too slowly to meet the demands. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan sent a special appeal to all 191 member-nations for funds for "an immediate and exceptional escalation" of the global relief effort.

OXFAM, a UK-based aid group, released a "name and shame" report on October 28 assessing the contributions of the world's richest countries to the relief effort. It said the United States has contributed only nine percent of its "fair share", based on the relative size of its economy. In contrast, Sweden, Norway, Ireland and Luxembourg topped the list, with each contributing more than 100 percent of its share.

People's Weekly World ☪



Once the mountain snows come people in remote villages will be stranded



Global briefs

GREECE: Union Network International's (UNI) first-ever Call Centre Conference, meeting last week in Athens, focused on how to ensure that outsourced or offshored work is unionised. The conference heard how UNI's newest union, UNITES in India, already has 5000 call centre and back office members in six cities. The union was launched in September with backing of UNI and its affiliates to organise the tens of thousands of information technology-enabled jobs arriving from Europe and the USA in a rapidly growing industry. "Wherever the work goes we want this work to be unionised", said UNI official Neil Anderson. "We want decent work for all to avoid a race to the bottom."

VENEZUELA: The employers' federation Fedecamaras met with President Hugo Chávez on October 25 at the Presidential Palace to discuss greater cooperation in order to increase investment and development. "We have ideological and conceptual disagreements ... we had what some called a fractured relationship", Fedecamaras President Jose Luis Betancourt told journalists afterwards, adding, "years have passed since then and we are building this important relationship because businessmen want security and employment". Minister of Development and Planning Jorge Giordani pointed to the government's use of oil resources to achieve a recovery in investment, and added, "There is no doubt that now it's the turn of the private sector to contribute." Fedecamaras had been seen as extremely hostile to the government since its former President, Pedro Carmona, led the coup that briefly forced Chávez from power in 2002.

GERMANY: Two Iraqi trade unionists, Mrs Bushra Abbood and Taha A Ibraheem Breshdi from the General Union of Oil Employees, Basra, were denied visas in mid-October, just before they were to embark on a three-week tour of Germany. Abbood's participation would have marked the first overseas visit by a female Iraqi oil trade union activist. The tour, entitled "The other Iraqi resistance", was backed by 100 German trade unions, peace organisations and anti-globalisation groups. It was to visit 20-25 cities, and was an attempt to show the non-violent Iraqi resistance to the US occupation and privatisation of Iraq's resources and industrial base. Tour organisers urged protest messages to German embassies around the world, including Australia.

AFRICA: A study published by the *New England Journal of Medicine* says sub-Saharan Africa is hit hardest by the movement of trained physicians to wealthy countries. Almost one out of seven physicians from African countries having over 1000 doctors – and 30 percent of Ghana's physicians – have moved to Canada, the USA, the UK or Australia, the study found. Such doctors account for around a quarter of physicians practicing in the four countries. The rise of HIV/AIDS has further strained the region's inadequate health systems, the journal said, adding that with some 600,000 doctors and other health workers for 600 million people, at least a million additional skilled health workers are needed. Africa's smallest, poorest countries are targeted by medical recruiters from wealthy nations.

Adding Palestine to the map

World attention was galvanized last week by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's statement that "Israel must be wiped off the map". Such crude, far-right rhetoric plays right into the hands of forces for war and domination. The Iranian Government itself quickly backtracked, emphasising that Iran

is committed to its obligations under the UN Charter and has never tried to use force or threats against another country.

Amid the torrent of condemnation Ahmadinejad's comment evoked, Palestinian Authority chief negotiator Saeb Erekat's response deserves special attention.

"Palestinians recognise the right of the state of Israel to exist and I reject his comments", Erekat told BBC News. "What we need to be talking about is adding the state of Palestine to the map and not wiping Israel from the map."

The incident highlights the complexity of the long-standing crisis in the Middle East, now greatly exacerbated by the US war and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Despite its formal withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, the Israeli Government continues its military and economic suppression of the Palestinian people's national and human rights, even though a majority of Israelis would like to see a two-state solution to the long and deadly conflict. Despite occasional hand-wringing, Washington has done nothing to move its closest Middle East ally to take a more reasonable position.

Meanwhile, Israel has threatened Iran with military attack over nuclear facilities the International Atomic Energy Agency says are entirely lawful. Iran, now surrounded by US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, has been named part of the "axis of evil" by President George W Bush.

There is a way out of this deadly snarl. It involves the Bush administration acknowledging that the only sane solution to its Iraq disaster, which has cost over 2,000 US lives and countless Iraqi ones, is to end the occupation and withdraw US troops now. Washington must press Israel to follow UN resolutions and support a viable, sovereign Palestinian state.

Those actions will set the stage for peaceful, mutually acceptable resolution of the region's remaining conflicts.

People's Weekly World ☪

Telesur begins transmissions in Bolivia

The Latin American TV channel Telesur initiated broadcasts in Bolivia at the end of October. The launching was attended by numerous popular leaders, diplomats and other personages from Latin American countries.

Telesur is being shown in 15 countries through 53 cable services, as well as five free stations.

Freddy Morales, Telesur press correspondent in Bolivia, said that Telesur's signal can be seen in the interior of Bolivia, and mentioned the mining community of Llallagua, historically a rebellious locality.

Telesur has contracted its services to La Paz University and other Bolivian channels and is negotiating with a State-owned national TV station.

Telesur is promoted by Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay and Cuba and will champion greater Latin American integration. The beginning of transmissions was a decisive step for construction of a different and integrated America.

Telesur is financed mainly by Venezuela with help from Argentina, Cuba and Uruguay. It began with top stories on political tensions in

Bolivia and Chávez's predictions of a hearty debate over US-style capitalism at last week's Summit of the Americas in Argentina.

One news anchor proclaimed it "a great day for Telesur", which has been running taped programs and limited news segments since its July 24 launch.

The station promises to be a Latin alternative to large media conglomerates like CNN, and has taken on the slogan "News from the South".

"I think it's easier to do independent journalism with a station like this than with a private station", said Jorge Botero, Telesur's Colombian news director. "There are too many interests in the private channels that impede independent journalism. Despite the fact this channel has funds from various governments, we haven't been pressured at all."

The station is carrying public service announcements and musical interludes instead of commercials. It has 12 correspondents in bureaus in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Haiti, Mexico and the United States. ☪

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



email: guardian@cpa.org.au

To see a young child gasping for breath

I wish to bring to your attention the serious effect that dust and other air-borne pollutants are having on the residents of Muswellbrook, a major coal-mining and power generating area of the Hunter Valley of New South Wales.

What has caused me to report on this serious situation is that a work mate's young four-year-old son was admitted to Muswellbrook District Hospital recently with a serious bout of childhood asthma. To see a young child gasping for breath is a sight that one can never forget. This young fellow was born healthy with no respiratory problems and is now taking daily medication to prevent further attacks.

I have asked the owner of a Chemist shop in Muswellbrook how many people on average were having scripts filled for asthmatic and other respiratory complaints and he told me that he fills 50 a week at this time of the year. Some of this can be put down to rye grass allergies during spring but it is mostly to dust from mine dumps.

The past 25 years has seen a huge increase in coal mining activity here close to the township. To the south of the town we have the Drayton open cut mine doing their best to pollute the atmosphere with unchecked spontaneous combustion coming from mine dumps. Their neighbour ("the worker friendly, caring, sharing, BHP-Billiton" - operators of the Mt Arthur open cut mine) is certainly adding to the air-

borne pollution with the size of their ever-growing mine dumps.

The edge of these dumps is within 2kms of the industrial estate that has hundreds of people working in workshops and supply companies. Whenever asked about their environmental policy, BHP-Billiton always refers to their glossy handbook, chock full of wonderful photographs and scientific facts and figures designed to convince the reader that they care about the environment and the local community. At the same time, they look like the unchallenged kings of environmental bastardry - take the Ok Tedi mine in New Guinea, for example.

Within the next two years we will see the Mt Arthur underground mine start its development using its longwall method to mine an estimated 1750 million tons of underground reserve taking the combined open cut and underground mines' output to 22 million tons of product within 10 years, all railed to the port of Newcastle.

From my humble abode I can see the Bengala open cut mine quite clearly, as the edge of their mine dump is approx 3 kms away. This is a Rio Tinto mine that has been in operation now for about seven years and uses a dragline as its main tool to remove the overburden from the coal seams below the ground. The government issued the OK to commence mining with 22 clauses in the consent orders for the mine, one of those being that the dragline stops working when the wind blows from the west behind the mine and in the direction of the township. I am convinced this is not happening as the clouds of dust are still rolling over the town coating the place with a fine brown colouring of mine waste.

Rio Tinto has before the government a proposal for further expansion of their Muswellbrook operation, called Mt Pleasant Mine, directly to the north of Bengala.. Nothing pleasant about this lit-

tle beauty, I assure you readers!!! It will be tacked onto the Bengala mine and will eventually have two draglines working 24 hours a day mining the low hills on the western side of the township.

I must include in this letter that to the south of Muswellbrook we have two coal fired power stations, namely Liddell and Bayswater. During the past couple of years we have seen the operators of these places come under scrutiny for emission control and I believe that some measures have been put into place but lots more needs to be done.

In concluding, readers, I wish to commend the new Upper Hunter Council for their stance on no mining within their shire boundaries as I know that some coal companies are eyeing off some coal seams near the little town of Bunnan, approx 30 kms west of Scone. If all this extra mining is approved around Muswellbrook, will we see parents at the bus-stop seeing their kids off to school checking to see if the kids have their Ventolin puffer and

enough clean dust masks to last the day.

Peter Kennedy
Muswellbrook, NSW

Penny for a Guy

In the wake of John Howard's dire warning of a credible, impending terrorist attack, it may have escaped government attention that Saturday November 5, 2005 was the 400th anniversary of the notorious Gunpowder Plot of 1605.

Terrorist Guy Fawkes and Co stuffed the cellars of Parliament with enough explosive to blow away the King, his Queen, the Privy Council and leading members of both Houses.

But before Parliament finally opened to pomp and circumstance, the conspirators - the terrorists were dobed in, rounded up and sent to the gallows.

I believe the Gunpowder Plot may be a cautionary tale for our times. It scared the hell out of King James, who launched a series of draconian laws to prevent terror-

ism from spreading throughout his realm. They remained on the books for many years.

Parliament, flushed with rare energy rushed to outlaw terrorism in any form with Catholics singled out for punishment. Heads rolled. Printers worked overtime so dire warnings could be posted throughout England, Scotland and Ireland.

The Gunpowder Plot instilled so much anxiety and anger that by royal command its anniversary became an official "celebration" that was formally held each year in Parliament for more than 300 years. There will always be an England.

These days, not many kids in Western Australia seek a Penny for the Guy or light bonfires to dance around on November 5. Bushfires, you know - a real and present danger out here.

Rasjad Moore
Gingin, WA

P.S. I forgot to compare Howard to King James I, who after the plot piled goose feathers around his bed in the palace, to cushion any further terrorist bombs!

Visit Cuba

Experience the social, political and cultural life of revolutionary Cuba.

Join the 2005-06 Work/Study Tour to Cuba organised by the Australia-Cuba Friendship Society.

The work/study tour expresses the support and solidarity of its members for Cuba's struggle for independence and socialism. Mornings of voluntary work are a practical expression of this solidarity. The work is never too strenuous for anyone, and is performed with local workers and volunteers from Cuba and abroad.

Highlights of the tour

- Visits to workplaces, educational, health, cultural and scientific institutions * Seminars by leading political and intellectual figures * Voluntary work on a Cuban co-operative farm * Concerts, cultural performances, music and dancing * Visits to museums, places of historical interest, beaches and mountains
- Free time to pursue individual interests * Homestays with Cuban families.

Approximate cost: \$4900.00 - Included in the price: all airfares, all transfers and accommodation, all meals, excursions and transportation in Cuba.

NOT included: Compulsory travel insurance, Airport taxes.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Nick Rawson (NSW Coordinator)

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Sydney

Sydney Trade Union Choir

Singing for Our Rights

Rights at Work and Human Rights
A tribute to our former member,
Norm Clark

Sunday 20 November 3-5pm
Annandale Neighbourhood Centre
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\$15 (\$10 concession)

Refreshments provided

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Culture & Life

by
Rob Gowland

As part of the Revolution that began in Petrograd on November 7th, 1917, the working people of Russia took over the palaces and other grand dwellings of the former ruling class.

They turned these great houses into museums, art galleries and other public buildings. The ordinary people, who had previously been chased away from the gates when they had the temerity to beg for kopeks from the high and mighty denizens of these mansions and palaces, were now the collective owners of those same fine estates.

There is a very different feel to viewing a publicly-owned palace and looking over a privately-owned one. I have previously written about the experience of visiting a crumbling but sprawling palace in Hyderabad, "one of the palaces" still owned by the former Maharajah of that State.

The palace was in the process of being refurbished to become a five star hotel, despite being completely surrounded by the hovels of the local poor - who, of course, are very poor indeed.

In revolutionary Russia, the Soviet people were concerned to preserve and conserve these great buildings as part of the people's col-

lective assets. I do not know to what extent they have been returned to their former owners or to new private owners since the overthrow of socialism. (If any reader has information on this subject I would be grateful for the chance to see it. Thank you in anticipation.)

In the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel's "Velvet Revolution", lauded with such extravagant praise by the bourgeois media, saw the return to their former owners of almost all buildings - whether mansions or factories - that had been nationalised by those awful Communists.

Havel the great democrat was not going to leave mansions and palaces (let alone factories, mines and mills) in the hands of the common people. No sir!

They were returned to whoever owned them in 1948, when the Communists came to power. This led to the spectacle of Jewish citizens' former property, that had been seized by the Nazis during the war, being "returned" to the Czech fascists who had obtained from the Nazis and who therefore "owned" it in 1948 when it was nationalised!

The construction of great mansions continues today unabated. In many countries, the filthy rich still display their wealth through extravagant and ostentatious - and usually excessively large - dwellings.

And not just dwellings: office buildings: yachts, parties, weddings even gambling at the casino - in fact, anything that can demonstrate conspicuous consumption - can be used by these "jet setting high flyers" to set them apart from common people.

Earlier this year, Indian con-



glomerate head Subrata Roy flew 10,000 guests (yes, 10,000) to his corporate estate, a meagre plot comprising (in *The Sydney Morning Herald's* words) "120 hectares of mod-cons, luxury amenities and grandiose statues".

The occasion was apparently his daughter's wedding, and the term conspicuous consumption does not even come close to describing this tasteless squandering of wealth other people worked for.

According to the *Herald*, "the candles alone cost US\$250,000".

But that shindig was tasteful and modest compared to the obscenely expensive wedding extravaganza thrown by Indian super-rich steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal. His daughter's wedding bash cost US\$60 million.

When I was a kid, it was the custom to admonish children who did not want to eat their vegetables, "Eat up, there are children starving in India!" There still are, and it's easy to see why.

In fact, the *Herald* article on the Mittal wedding pointed out that, at the same time as these super-rich weddings were taking place, the number of calories the poor in India consume "tells a terrible tale".

"Rural India, and the urban poor, are actually getting hungrier."

The article quotes an Indian economic commentator, P Sainath, who points out that "with well over 400 million hungry people, India alone has more undernourished human beings than all of sub-Saharan Africa combined".

The *Herald* article had some backhanded compliments for China: in discussing the plight of the Indian rural poor, it notes "India is not China, where low-cost manufacturing has sucked hundreds of millions of once destitute farmers and labourers off the land."

In India, by contrast, "the past five years have seen the most violent increase in urban-rural income inequalities since independence" (Booker Prize-winning author Arundhati Roy).

As the editor of India's *Financial Express* puts it: "You can live behind a wall in a luxury high rise, you can afford servants to wipe your shoes, but you still have to drive through the beggars sleeping on cardboard at your gate to get out." ☸

A warning from NZ

The 10th Congress of the Communist Party of Australia was pleased to have as a guest Comrade Dale Frew from the Socialist Party of Aotearoa. Based in Christchurch, Dale was a Union Official between 1982 and 1992 of first the Butchers and Graziers Union and then Timber Workers Union. Whilst Branch Secretary of the Timber Workers Union the National Party Government brought in the Employment Contracts Act (ECA), a model of Industrial Relations legislation similar to that being introduced by the Howard Government in Australia today. Howard is pursuing a less direct approach. Dale tells *The Guardian* what the legislation meant to trade unions and how the new laws affected New Zealand's workforce.

Dale Frew: In that ten-year period I worked under three different sets of industrial relations laws. We started with the Labour Relations Act, which had been in force for a hundred years. Then we had the Industrial Relations Act and then the Employment Contracts Act (ECA) introduced by the National Party.

As soon as workers were handed new contracts under the ECA they contacted the union to have them negotiated as collective agreements. However, that legislation also stripped unions of all their members overnight.

The area I covered as an official was probably 600 kilometres across covering 200 worksites. So it was impossible for the unions to go back to every single workplace and sign up every single worker again and then negotiate their contracts for them.

The big sites and the well-organised ones were the ones we concentrated on first – mainly because we needed those numbers to sustain the union. However, by the time we got around to the smaller workplaces we had lost a lot of membership because they had already been forced to sign individual contracts.

At the same time as this, the Government attacked the welfare system.

They cut the unemployment benefit by \$20 a week on average. They increased the waiting period for unemployment benefits: if you left your job or got sacked or you were made redundant, you couldn't get a benefit for six months.

So of course, when the employer came along and said, "here's a contract sign it or you don't have a job", workers had to sign it because they knew that otherwise they would have no income at all for the next six months.

Guardian: Were there changes in the way the minimum wage was determined?

DF: Under the Employment Contracts Act there was still the minimum wage but it was so low and it was an arbitrary figure.

G: Who would determine that?

DF: It was determined by Parliament. And of course at that time the Nationals were in govern-

ment. Another affect has been that since the national Awards were done away with big pay discrepancies have developed between different regions of the country.

G: What about things like minimum annual leave, sick leave or long service leave. What protections were there?

DF: There was the Holiday Act which only gave workers three weeks annual leave a year and our public holidays. There were also five days of official leave, which included sick leave and bereavement leave.

But it immediately did away with overtime and penalty rates, so people were working 50 hours a week, 60 hours a week for their flat hourly rate.

We are seeing a lot more shift work – more 12-hour shifts, broken shifts and rotating shift work.

G: Do you get a lot of casualisation with people just on call – waiting and hoping?

DF: In some industries, yes. Retail for instance, has been casualised very severely. There have always been casual workers in that industry, but at least before everyone got penalty rates for working on the weekend – that doesn't happen anymore.

We've even had examples of managers encouraging their secondary school students to take time off school to come into work.

Another serious change in conditions is that it is now common practice for the workers to have to supply their own safety equipment.

G: Can you give an example of that?

DF: Safety Boots is a prime example. In the construction industry people have to supply their own equipment such as hardhat, earmuffs and safety goggles – everything.

I worked in the construction industry before I became a union official and all safety gear was supplied by the employer – even the clothing. Now that responsibility has been put back onto the employee.

G: Once a workplace was signed up on individual contracts, how did that affect the union's ability to then come back in and represent those workers?

DF: Under the ECA unions got



Dale Frew from the Socialist Party of Aotearoa

mentioned about twice and that was only where certain rights were being repealed. The legislation instead started talking about "bargaining agents" as opposed to unions.

And that's had a flow-on effect on to all who are working in the area of industrial relations. So you no longer have union officials – they call themselves "bargaining agents". This has been a major philosophical change, and it's affected the class consciousness of the trade union movement.

G: Are the unions carrying out their traditional roles or are they just bargaining agents?

DF: It varies. Some unions still have a class consciousness and get out there and organise their membership and deal with social issues as well. Others just go and sign the members up, negotiate a contract and then send the member a newspaper every so often.

G: Has there been an emergence of private, non-union bargaining agents?

DF: The current legislation allows for private bargaining agents so there's being quite a rise in that. You are getting a lot of lawyers and some ex-union officials doing that. And the lawyers will charge a hefty fee to negotiate.

G: What about the ability of unions to operate onsite at a workplace?

DF: Well, things like Right of Access technically still existed.

We had to demand entry to see the workers, the employer then always had the right to say: "no you can't come in, it's not convenient".

On one job I had the employer said, "you can come in" and we arranged a time. I thought I had a nice bit of a victory because he was a bit of a rogue employer. However, when I arrived that afternoon I found that he had given the workers paid time off – as I'm pulling up there's all the workers walking off.

I have to admit some did stay behind and listen to what we had to say. But we probably only got a quarter of the workforce there.

There was another change – if the workers went on strike the employer then had the right to go and employ replacement staff.

Of course there were picket lines but the police were always called in to bust them. It got the police more involved with industrial relations. In the past the police always had the right to do that but they were reluctant to get involved in industrial disputes – suddenly they were a lot more willing to use their powers. On a number of occasions it got very nasty.

In one instance I tried to gain access to a work site and I was threatened by the employer. I went to the police and the senior superintendent; but he openly said that the employer has the right to use whatever force they deem as reasonable to remove you from their property. It made

things quite clear what side of the fence they were on this time.

G: So when you had a change of government did you have many of your previous rights and conditions restored?

DF: Not immediately, no. We have regained some rights under the last six years of Labour Government, but they're still minimal. We are finally going to get four weeks' annual leave from April next year, and they are bringing in paid maternity leave. But it's still a hard struggle.

G: But they haven't tackled the question of individual contracts?

DF: Not significantly, no.

G: What do you see as the main issues now?

DF: Probably the hourly rate and the safety equipment.

G: Is there anything else worth commenting on or lessons we can learn from it all?

DF: I guess the biggest lesson is don't get complacent – even if you are on a well-organised worksite.

If you have a highly-skilled worker in an industry where there is a labour shortage then you might be OK. But this has the potential to dramatically affect the lives of low-skilled and less organised workers, particularly in the retail industry.

G: Do you feel that the union movement is getting back to anything like its former strength?

DF: We've got a long way to go. A very long way to go. ✪

The biggest lesson is don't get complacent – even if you are on a well-organised worksite.



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