Bob Briton

Qantas announced last week that it is axing another 1,750 jobs from its workforce. Workers are being urged to take unpaid leave, annual leave and to consider job sharing. The latest cuts follow on from the axing of 1,500 positions last year and the continued outsourcing of services, like aircraft maintenance, to cut-price overseas contractors. Qantas announced last week that it is axing 150 positions in order for the auto industry and the banks, "I haven't heard of any industry assistance like they have done for the auto industry and the banks," she told The Australian last week.

Gary Norris of the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers Association has called on Qantas to take the opportunity to bring outsourced aircraft maintenance work back from Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. “There’s absolutely no need for any redundancies in engineering while they are outsourcing aircraft maintenance," he said. Qantas fought a bitter dispute with its aircraft maintenance staff last year and was planning to use a Patrick-style icab workforce to break the will of the union. Engineers suspect Qantas will use the economic downturn as an excuse to advance its outsourcing agenda.

The Transport Workers Union believes Qantas is trying to offload its ground services to low-paying contractors by pricing itself out of the market. Qantas has lost Philippine Airlines, Etihad and its own Jetstar clients in the last six months by jacking prices up by 30 percent. “Whoever heard of putting up prices, especially this much, in the middle of a recession?” TWU national secretary Tony Sheldon asked. Employees at Aero Care, who now run ground operations for Jetstar, are paid almost $300 a week less than their counterparts at Qantas.

“Unfair competition”

Qantas and some media commentators have claimed union actions in recent times have in part precipitated the latest round of job cuts. Joyce claimed industrial action last year cost the company $150 million. That is the equivalent of a small number of golden handshakes for outgoing executives but that observation would not shift the blame in the desired direction for Qantas management. Neither does it consider the justice of the unions’ demands and actions.

The most interesting claim being made by big business’ cheer squad is that Qantas is facing “unfair” competition from state-owned carriers like Singapore Airlines, Malaysian Airlines and Thai Airways. They can ride out the bad times because planners in the government-owned airlines can take a longer view. How unfair! State-run airlines can ensure their skilled workforce is kept on, their aircraft maintained and updated and their services kept at full capacity despite a dip in the economy.

Instead of whining that government ownership of airlines is being bungled, why don’t the commentators in the financial pages admit it is the logical way to run things? It is a rhetorical question. If governments run viable airlines and reinvest profits in the airline or elsewhere in the community there are no nice juicy private profits. It’s way past time that Qantas was bought back into government ownership.
Call for US turnaround on Cuba relations

Serious deficiencies in services for disabled students

The Public Schools Principal Forum (PSPF) conducted a survey of NSW Public Schools in March 2009 and has now released a report. The report shows serious deficiencies in services for special needs/disabled students in NSW.

The report found that:
• More than 2,500 disabled/ special needs students in NSW government schools receive nil or seriously inadequate levels of funding.
• 98% principals, who have special classes or lead special schools, report thousands of multiply disabled students are resource for one disability only;
• 85% principals reported that school counselling services were so inadequate (1:1,500) that frequently the only tasks completed were related to student death rather than therapy or support.

The recommendations of the report include:
• The NSW government and Department of Education and Training (DET) provide appropriate levels of funding and resources to ensure that all disabled/special needs children have the opportunity of reaching their full potential;
• The NSW DET commence urgent program to reduce school councillor/pupil ratio from 1:1,500 to 1:500;
• The NSW DET diagnose and recognise the multiple disabilities of each special needs child and provide appropriate support based on the students’ overall capacity to function in the classroom setting.
• Comments below provided by principals indicate their anger and frustration with a system which provides inadequate resources and fails to understand the real problems they are dealing with.
• Some of our staff are injured every day.
• We are letting down our most vulnerable students by not providing with them adequate support.
• “Many students’ behavioural needs are significant but not part of their main diagnosis or level of support provided”
• “The job of the support class teacher is becoming extremely stressful and undervalued. Morale is difficult to support in the DET constantly pressures teachers to instruct students with multiple disabilities without extra support.”
• “Some students almost impossible to keep in small setting yet we are expected to cure them in three terms.”
• The communication from school through the system is fraught with misinformation and complexity. There is often a lack of communication at a high enough level to deal with these students.

Let a bureaucrat come to school and see what children present with and then ask if they could manage it.

“Decisions were made about this student by DET personnel who had never met him.”

“Because there is insufficient and politically driven screening these students are not provided with funding and are expected to survive a mainstream curriculum. It is a scandal!”

“It took nine months to gain funding for a student with a severe language disability (mutism) even though his learning needs are extreme.”

“In every application our ‘level of challenge’ is challenged and we have to continually restate our case to get support for children with serious needs.”

Why is time wasted with personnel coming to check if an autistic student is “autistic?”

“We should not need to justify how we use our time. Better to use this time supports kids than going around in circles having to prove an issue time and time again.”

In June last year the Rudd Labor government commissioned Murdoch University on the transition of the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) to a specialist division of Labor’s Fair Work Australia. His recommendations were released on Friday as part of Labor’s industrial relations reform.

They are a far cry from the expectations of the trade union movement that the ABCC would be abolished. The ABCC will become a Specialist Division within the Office of the Fair Work Ombudsman.

The ABCC was set up by the former Howard government to rid building and construction sites of trade unions and collective bargaining. It has been more often than not an unaccountable and unchallengable powers to summon and secretive interrogate people. Under the Act, individual workers face daily fines of up to $22,000 and unions of up to $100,000. Refusal to answer questions when being interrogated is punishable by up to six months jail. (See Guardian 26-11-2008).

The legislation that saw the defeat of the Coalition in 2007 elections.

ABCC Act (not ‘protected action’) and the Fair Work Bill (during the circumstances under which industrial action is unlawful under the Fair Work Bill which was far more repressive than the BCII Act (not ‘protected action’) and the Fair Work Bill (during the present).

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Unemployment grows, along with discontent

Peter Mac

Unemployment is beginning to stalk the staff of the private employment agencies that formerly provided employment services for the federal government.

The privatised national employment service, Job Network, was created during the Howard government era. The Rudd government has maintained the privatisation policy, and on July 1 it will replace Howard’s Job Network with a new organisation, Jobs Services, which will incorporate all the existing employment programs.

New arrangements were put in place by a tender process in which the existing government job agencies were forced to compete for their commissions. As a result, more than 5,000 employment agency employees will now lose their positions, their income and the continuity of their entitlements, and will have to go through the job-hunting nightmare.

Although two other agencies will be putting on staff, it is possible that 2,500 positions may disappear, including those of 380 employees at Wesley Uniting Employment. Jobjit Australia will be taking on 200 staff and then recruiting another 200 to work in different areas of employment.

As Linda White, assistant national secretary of the Australian Services Union, said recently: “The government has come under intense criticism from workers and their families will face an exacerbation of the job-hunting nightmare.

In a series of nationwide rallies, staff of the current employment agencies have demanded that the Rudd government direct the newly-appointed employment agencies to give them priority in allocating staff and their families will face an exacerbation of the job-hunting nightmare.

The Greens and the federal opposition parties are expected to launch a Senate inquiry into the unemployment agencies later this year.

Pete’s Corner

Welfare payments in question

Influential Treasury Secretary Dr Ken Henry is currently conducting a national tax inquiry, which is expected to conclude that taxes on Australia’s businesses should be lowered, and which will also include recommendations on the payment of welfare benefits.

Under the Newstart unemployment program the Howard government reduced the unemployment benefit, which now stands at a “stated” payment of only $225 per week. The disability pension is slightly higher, at $265 per week. Not surprisingly, welfare applicants are being offered a benefit of $300 per week.

Dr Henry’s standing among welfare organisations has not been helped by his use of language which is reminiscent of Howard government welfare doubletalk. At a recent ACOS ruling he remarked: “If you are in the grey area between unemployment and disability it seems better in every way to be on DSP. I wonder whether we couldn’t redesign the system to reduce disincentives to workforce participation.”

Official welfare discrimination

Needless to say, welfare groups are pushing for an increase in the Newstart payment, or for Newstart to be replaced by a single uniform pension arrangement. ACOS also wants penalties reduced for job seekers who fail to meet the conditions of their payments. In particular, they want a reduction in the number of jobs that welfare recipients must apply for in order to qualify for payment, and an increase in the supplement paid for people who participate in work for the dole projects.

They are also demanding the removal of official discrimination against single parent welfare recipients. During the Howard era single parents on welfare allowance were placed on Newstart, rather than the Parenting Payment, and thereby suffered a cut in payment of $58 per fortnight. In last year’s federal budget cuts and disability support pensioners received a $500 utility allowance, but single parents’ Payment recipients missed out.

Since then, the government has promised “measures to increase the financial security of seniors, carers and people with disability”, but single parents were again overlooked. The government’s recently-formed Pensioner Review Taskforce included representatives of disability pensioners, carers, self-funded retirees and ACOSS, but single parents were not invited to attend.

Because of differences in indexation, the difference between Newstart allowances and pensions has risen to more than $75 per fortnight. The Rudd government is expected to raise pensions by $70 per fortnight, but if allowances are not included, Newstart will end up $146 behind the Parenting Payment pension.

Which way to go?

Speaking during discussions with the government, Clare Martin, ACOS chief executive, described the process of reforming employment programs as having been done very poorly. She reminded the government rather sharply: “We are talking about the unemployed and the very vulnerable.”

So will Dr Henry’s report do the right thing by these vulnerable citizens? Will the Rudd government come good, fix up the employment agency mess and finally rectify the Howard government’s punitive legacy of miserliness and welfare discrimination? Watch this space.

Prison privatisation

Prison privatisation is a fundamental attack on the democratic social compact between citizen and state. It is a move from the Penal Colony to the Corporate Colony with loss of accountability and transfer of judicial power to corporations.

There is an inherent obscenity in the concept of corporations making money from the misery of others. Prisoners are human beings, not prisoners to be turned into shareholders.

Low standards of care

Privatisation of prisons has been seen to provide unacceptable outcomes in the management of offenders. Stephen Nathan, a leading prison privatisation expert, in the March 2008 edition of the Independent Monitor, disclosed that a recently-released report placed 10 of the 11 private prisons in the UK in the bottom quarter of the performance indicators of all UK prisons “and showed they are consistent well below their publicly run equivalents”.

Privatised prisons stand for minimum standards

The profit motive ensures that corporations will only spend as much as they have to when running prisons. That means they will not have the necessary regard to moral considerations of human decency, which are so important in a prison system. A study conducted by Biles and Dalton found that Fort Phillip prison, Deer Park and Arthur Gorrie all have higher rates for all deaths and suicides than the Australian average.

Australian Correctional Management was caught taking clothes from charities to avoid purchasing them for prisoners, until St Vincent de Paul discovered the scam. Then they tried the Uniting Church who refused when they realised what was happening.

Not in the public interest

In the corporate world, businesses need to grow to survive. In the United States it has led to prison corporations being accused of joining with and funding right wing media shock jocks to ramp up the law and order debate so they can have more people jailed to grow their profits. The more frightened the public is, the more they will pay.

Financially, privatisation doesn’t work

The decision by the NSW government to privatise Parklea and Cessnock prisons was based on a 2005 report of the Legislative Assembly, “Value For Money From NSW Correctional Centres”.

Jane Andrew of the School of Accounting and Finance, University of Wollongong and Damien Cahill from the University of Sydney, attacked the report’s conclusion that the privatised model of prison management delivered superior “value for money”. In their paper, “Value for Money? Neoliberalism in NSW Prisons”, they concluded that “the report is fundamentally flawed on its own terms” and is driven by concepts of ideology rather than any cost data evidence of financial savings.

Justice Action joins the prison officers’ stand

Justice Action has consulted in the prisons and now joins the Public Services Association and Unions NSW to utterly oppose the privatisations.

*Justice Action is a community based organisation of criminal justice activists working for prisoner rights.
The LIHMU, the childcare union, says #ABC2 Group childcare workers are bitterly disappointed that their future is still uncertain. PPB, the receiver of the ABC2 Group, announced last week that a further 19 ABC childcare centres will close by May 15, while the future of another eight remains unresolved.

“We welcome the news that most ABC2 Group centres will remain open and that families’ needs will be met,” Louise Tarrant, LIHMU national secretary said.

“PPB have said 80 percent of ABC2 Group workers have ‘ongoing employment opportunities’, leaving 20 percent facing uncertainty about their future. However, the uncertainty of the current situation affects 100 percent of ABC2 childcare workers.”

Ms Tarrant said that the receiver acknowledged that these workers have stuck it out over the past six months, continuing to provide quality education and care for children. They have also had to deal with parents’ anxieties and the very real fear about their own jobs. The last six months have taken their toll, she said.

“It is worth remembering that six months ago the big banks were ready to shut over 240 ABC centres. This would have resulted in the loss of over 2,500 jobs, 20,000 childcare places and traumatic upheaval for families and children.

“The fact that more than 2,000 jobs have been saved is a credit to the good will and endurance of all stakeholders; workers and their union, government and PPB. This process is worth emulating as business and communities face these dark days of the global financial crisis.

“While we all work to sort out the mess that was and is ABC Learning, fundamentally nothing has changed to prevent this happening again.”

Ms Tarrant said that Australia’s childcare system must change and that it was up to the federal and state governments to ensure basic protections because no family or childcare worker should have to go through this again.

“The Greens say the federal government has missed an opportunity to restructure Australia’s flawed childcare sector.

“The federal government could have used the collapse of a commercial childcare giant as an opportunity to transform the provision of this essential service in Australia,” said Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young.

Senator Hanson-Young pointed out that a large number of the new operators to take over the centres appear to be for-profit entities.

“To place so many centres back into the hands of profit-driven companies suggests that the government may not have learned the tough lesson it should have from the ABC Learning collapse,” she said.

“The delivery of an essential service like childcare should not be seen as an opportunity for profiteering.”

Ms Hanson-Young said that questions still linger over various connections between ABC Learning’s directors and entities which own the centres’ properties, such as Aустock.

“The Greens call on the Minister (Julia Gillard) to clarify whether or not taxpayer dollars through ongoing government subsidies are being funnelled back into the pockets of profiteers involved in the failed ABC Learning venture.”

Senator Hanson-Young said that the non-profit and community childcare sector may be under-represented in the list of new operators due to obligations to take on the existing contracts and conditions under ABC Learning’s previous arrangements.

“We understand that there were originally a number of expressions of interest from key players within the non-profit and community childcare sector, who have either withdrawn their bids or have been unsuccessful,” she said.

“The non-profit sector could have been enabled to take over centres by being offered capital infrastructure subsidies from the federal government, but this has not happened.

“The Greens look forward to tackling these issues through the Senate inquiry established into the provision of childcare in Australia, which is due to report in June.”

Rights on site!

Rally on 28 April for International Workers Day or Morning. Rallies are to be held in Perth and Melbourne on 28 April in remembrance of those who’ve lost their lives working in unsafe conditions on building sites.

In conjunction with this the Australian Construction Forestry Mining and Electrical Union will renew calls for the Rudd Government to scrap the heinous Australian Building and Construction Commission and not just rename it.

The horrendous toll

Every year in Australia around 440 workers are killed in work-related accidents (that equates to more than 8 per week). Diseases such as cancer and asbestos related illnesses cause an estimated 2,300 additional deaths per year (or 44 a week). Road accidents in Australia claim 16 lives per week.

Worldwide, there are at least 1.3 million worker deaths per year. This is nearly double the number of deaths due to war. 12,000 of those killed are children. Over 160 million new injuries and work related diseases are reported each year.

History

In 1993 the Canadian government passed legislation declaring each April 28 “a day of remembrance for workers killed or injured at work.” Recognition of this “Workers Memorial Day” spread, and it was adopted internationally via the United Nations in 1996.

Now the day is marked in countries all around the world.

What you can do

By scrapping the ABC the CFMEU will once again be allowed to act on the workers’ behalf to ensure building companies are complying with mandatory safety requirements.

A strong crowd marching on April 28th will send a clear message to government that enough is enough.

Go to the CFMEU website www.rightsonsite.org.au where you can instantly:

1. Send emails to Kevin Rudd, your local MP
2. Sign the petition
3. Email the campaign information to your friends and colleagues
4. Watch a series of short videos, including stories by those who’ve been penalised under the unjust and corrupted ABCC processes.

Rallies

Melbourne: 10am, Trades Hall, Lygon St Carlton

Perth: 9.30am, Esplanade, opposite the Bell Tower. A short march to Solidarity Park, Parliament House by 10am for the official commemoration.

If you want change, you have to make it!
CFMEU and Kores coal mine

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) has thrown its considerable weight behind the NSW Labor government's support for new coal mines in the Hunter and on the NSW Central Coast, despite vigorous opposition from community and environmental organisations.

A spokesperson for the union told assembled media last month that the new mines would produce more than 2,000 jobs and several times reiterated how many millions the company was investing in the project, as though the size of the corporate spend was a measure of the worth of the project.

No mention was made of the fact that the company expects to recoup many times that much in profits from the new mines.

The new mines on the Central Coast are not the only changes mooted for coal mining in the region: the caring, sharing “big Australian” BHP-Billiton is also undertaking a massive consolidation and enlargement of its Hunter Valley-Newcastle coal operations, combining mining all big corporations. BHP-Billiton’s response is not to join this movement (heaven forbid) but to protect their profits.

They, could, if they cared about the future of the planet, cease extracting and exporting coal. Instead they are choosing to boost the rate of extraction of coal, getting in while they still can, before public pressure develops to the point where it forces the mining and export of coal to cease.

BHP-Billiton’s primary concern as a corporation is to maximise their profits – the environment and the environment’s sustainability is very low down their list of priorities. Even the very real danger to the existence of life on Earth does not seem unduly to distress them.

Like all rich people, the heads of BHP-Billiton and other mining corporations seem blissfully confident that somehow they will be exempt – or at least cushioned – from the adverse effects of global warming. As long as they have enough money, they believe they will be able to buy their way out of anything.

If it wasn’t going to be so cataclysmic for the rest of the human race one would be tempted to leave them to “find out the hard way” that their confidence in the power of money is sadly misplaced.

Fortunately, the magnitude of the climate change problem has brought a large – and ever growing – number of people into action to join the fight against global warming. That they should have to fight and protest to have such a looming catastrophe recognised as a problem for everybody, one is itself a damning indictment of the system that puts profit before everything else.

In the port of Newcastle, there have been mass protest actions against the construction of new coal loading facilities, which are designed to increase the port’s coal handling capability; there is a public campaign against the huge increase anticipated in the number of trains lumbering through the area with truck after truck of coal.

Plans to open a vast open cut mine at Aivil Hill brought protest- ers together from all over the State.

They’ve changed the name of the mine but it is still going ahead.

Throughout the Hunter, signs are up everywhere protesting against numerous planned or even existing mines; wine makers and horse breeders have joined with residents in a general up-swell of protest. Huge bill-boards remind people “You can’t drink coal dust!”, while smaller ones tack ed to trees and telegraph poles point out that “Coal dust kills!”

Now the proposed mines on the Central Coast that are being so publicly supported by the CFMEU will open yet another front of struggle in defence of our environment, our climate and our future wellbeing.

These new mines are intended to produce coal for a South Korean power station company, Kores. The new Kores mines will be long-wall mines under the picturesque Yarramalong and Dooralong valleys, near Wyong. In long-wall mining, the horizontal mine shafts are deliberately oriented parallel to the overburden; they are advancing in a direction parallel to the overburden and towards the mining equipment as the mine proceeds forward. This means the mining was not reason enough, other more direct reasons for community opposition include the threat to the region’s water supply and the almost inevitable risks of subsidence, plus degradation of the local environment with coal dust, greatly increased traffic and noise.

Kores of course, as a transnational company, is not overly concerned about the destruction of Australia’s environment, nor, apparently, is it very concerned about the increase in global warming. Like most big capitalist corporations, it can see no further than its next balance sheet.

That people campaigning against the burning of fossil fuels would be viewed by Kores as a nuisance to be expected. That is what one expects from capitalist corporations. A progressive union like the CFMEU, on the other hand, should surely have a more mature, more sophisticated position, one that looks to the long-term benefits for its members and does not sacrifice long term benefits for short term gains.

One would hope that the CFMEU would have a thoroughly considered position, one that sought to provide the optimum result for all the parties that matter: the local community, the working class as a whole, and the people of Australia (and indeed the world).

Next week: Strong community opposition to the mines.
Ensuring maximum casualties in Gaza

Eva Bartlett

“We were still young and in love. We had all our dreams,” said Jamal Abu Abd al-Dayem, who said, holding a photo of his wife by the side of their home. Abu Abd al-Dayem was one of at least six killed by three flechette bombs fired by Israeli tanks in the Ezbat Beit Hanoun area, northern Gaza.

The dart bomb attacks came the morning after invading Israeli soldiers killed 35-year-old paramedic Ali Abd al-Dayem. Along with another medic and ambulance driver, Abd al-Dayem was targeted by the lethal darts just after 10:00am on January 4 while trying to aid civilians already attacked by Israeli forces in northern Gaza’s Beit Lahia area. Within two hours of being shredded by multiple razor-sharp darts, Arafa Abd al-Dayem died as a result of slugs to his lungs, limbs and internal organs.

Khaled Abu Saada, the driver of the ambulance, testified to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights: “I was told that there were injured people near the westernmost described as a ‘calm’ period. ‘Nothing was happening, not塀equipped with海报 and a little smile.’ We were sitting outside because it felt safe.

“We heard explosions, coming from up the stretch of land usually reserved for Afghani,” said Jamal Abu Abd al-Dayem. Abu Abd al-Dayem himself was stepping in the doorway, two-year-old son Khalil by his arm, Wafa to his left, when they were struck by the darts of a new shelling.

“A shell exploded in the air, Wafa dropped to ground, struck by flechettes into the head, chest and back. She was 35 years old. She struck at the same time, in my right arm and in my back,” Abu Abd al-Dayem recalled. “I fell over with my wife, passing out. I came to shortly after and saw my wife covered in blood. I picked her up and carried her to the car, running. Then I passed out again from the pain.”

Although Abu Abd al-Dayem was still inside the doorway, he too was hit by the darts. Abu Abd al-Dayem’s son Khalil was hit by darts in his right foot and in one finger. One of the flechette darts that struck Abu Abd al-Dayem remains deeply embedded near his spin cord. Doctors fear precisely because they spread in a larger area, they may be lethal when there is no other option for penetrating a weapon to achieve the desired effect. In his Al-Shifa hospital room the day after the attack, Abu Abd al-Dayem’s son, 11-year-old Arafat said: “We heard a loud noise, a groan. We went to the house.”

“Arafat had received a direct hit on his chest, which contravenes the internationally-agreed limits on the dart bombs to distinguish between targets and civilians, and the lack of a safe distance from darts, which number between 5,000, and 8,000, per shell.

A flechette dart lodged in a 11-year-old boy.

Flechettes are designed to spread out from the impact point, with the ability to travel as far as 300 metres and 100 metres long, inflicting the maximum number of injuries possible. In the case of a densely populated community like the Gaza Strip, the number of potentially-injured is deadly high. The graphic shows how the head of the dart, generally 100 metres ahead of the men’s mourning house, there was a sudden explosion and I felt pain in my chest. Very quickly after, there was a second strike. This second attack was more serious as people had rushed to the area to help the wounded. I looked up from the second shelling and saw that my cousins Arafa and Islam had been hit. They were lying on the ground, wounded.

Said graduating from university.

“Every time I think of them, every time I see their grave, I feel like I’m going to crumble. I was so happy with them,” Sabah Abu Abd al-Dayem said. “Her brain is closed.”

“Arafat was martyred, my sons cried so much their eyes were red and swollen with grief. The next day they were martyred,” the father said, shaking his head in disbelief.

“I was near the mourning house, on my way to the market. I saw everything. My brother Orata, 37, was in the area. He was injured by a nail that dripped through his shoulder, and lodged in his neck. He had to have an operation to remove it.”

Sahab Abu Abd al-Dayem said she finally understands the expression “burning with pain.”

“Every minute, every hour I think of them. My son didn’t have time to enjoy marriage. I wish I had died with them.”

“In five or six months, you’ll see the effects on her,” Jamal Abu Abd al-Dayem said of his wife. “She isn’t eating, drinking, or sleeping. I hide all the photos of our sons and closed off [their] room.” The photos he’d mentioned had been laid out on display. Pictures of their sons at different ages and stages of life. A photo of Said graduating from university.

“The pain of his injury is minor compared to the loss of his wife. I still can’t believe it happened. I want to live, I don’t believe it, but I have to think about it. I don’t want to face it. It’s too much to bear.”

Twenty-nine-year-old Said Abd al-Dayem died after one day in the hospital, succumbing to the fatal injuries of darts in his head. His unmarried brother, Nafez Abd al-Dayem, 23, was also struck in head by the darts and died immediately.

The surviving son, 25-year-old Nafez Abd al-Dayem, was hit by two darts in his abdomen, one in his chest, and another in his leg. “I went to the mourning house to pay respects to my cousin, Arafa. When we arrived at the men’s mourning house, there was a sudden explosion and I felt pain in my chest. Very quickly after, there was a second strike. This second attack was more serious as people had rushed to the area to help the wounded. I looked up from the second shelling and saw that my cousins Arafa and Islam had been hit. They were lying on the ground, wounded. A crossmartyred man and Islam Abd al-Dayem was struck in the neck and died slowly, in great agony, after three days in the hospital. Fifteen-year-old Arafa Abd al-Dayem died instantly. After three days in the hospital. Fifteen-year-old Arafa Abd al-Dayem died instantly. When Nafez Abd al-Dayem regained consciousness in hospital, he learned of his two sons and two dead cousins. The dart that lodged in his leg was surgically removed, but three darts remain in his chest and abdomen.

“I was so happy with them,” Sabah said. “Her brain is closed.”

“She’s been laid out on display. Pictures of their sons at different ages and stages of life. A photo of Said graduating from university.

It is precisely the use of flechettes in dense urban areas which contravenes the internationally-accepted distance.

In the same post-attack hospital room as Abu Abd al-Dayem, 25-year-old Arafat Abd al-Dayem died instantly. His unmarried brother, Nafez Abd al-Dayem, 23, was also struck in head by the darts and died immediately.

Said graduating from university.

Flechettes are designed to spread out conically, covering a vast area which Amnesty International cites as 300 metres wide and 100 metres long, inflicting the maximum number of injuries possible. In the case of a densely populated community like the Gaza Strip, the number of potentially-injured is deadly high. The graphic shows how the head of the dart, generally 100 metres ahead of the dart bomb: numerous darts are still coming out from the wall.

“Arafat had received a direct hit on his chest, which contravenes the internationally-agreed limits on the dart bombs to distinguish between targets and civilians, and the lack of a safe distance from darts, which number between 5,000, and 8,000, per shell.

A flechette dart lodged in a 11-year-old boy.

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A flechette dart lodged in a 11-year-old boy.
the indiscriminate and deadly dart bombs. Joe Steork, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch (HRW), said that the “use of fléchette shells, with a wide ‘kill radius,’ increases the chance of indiscriminately hitting civilians,” adding that Israel “should stop its use of the weapon in Gaza, which is one of the most densely populated areas on Earth.”

Years before, HRW’s Hanny Megally had noted Israel’s usage of the darts in Gaza only, versus in the occupied West Bank where the illegal Israeli settlements and Israeli military bases are in many areas intertwined with Palestinian residential areas. Whereas using dart bombs in a Gaza district only puts Palestinians in neighboring areas at risk, the use of such fléchettes would put many of the nearly 500,000 illegal Israeli settlers at risk of injury.

Despite Israeli officials’ frequent justifications that the use of fléchettes is permitted under international law, there are guidelines to this usage which the Israeli military continues to willfully ignore.

It is precisely the use of fléchettes in densely populated areas which contravene the internationally-accepted principles of war: the inability of the dart bombs to distinguish between military targets and civilians; and the lack of precaution at avoiding civilian injury or death.

The two-inch-long scar on Rami al-Lohoh’s right shoulder is his reminder of the painful dart which had penetrated deeply beneath the flesh of his shoulder area. The 11-year-old was too frightened and fearful of his injury, but after speaking of his injury, his father Darwish al-Lohoh, by a group, reported that at least 17 Palestinians were killed between military and other recognised rights organisations have long been critical of Israel’s use of fléchette bombs in the densely-populated Gaza Strip. The group Physicians for Human Rights-Israel says Israel’s use of darts bomb is in contravention to the Geneva conventions. B’Tselem, an Israeli rights group, reported that at least 17 Palestinians were killed by dart bombs from 2000 through the April 18, 2008 killing of a Palestinian cameraman and three other civilians, including two minors, by a dart bomb.

The attack raised renewed alarm among international rights groups about Israel’s usage which the Israeli military continues to this day. TheElectronic Intifada

The Guardian

April 30, 2009

The year the rot set in

Harold Holt.

Tom Southern

It all began on December 17, 1967, a day now forever etched in Australia’s psyche. Even the Gunpowder Plot pales next to this most sinister tale of events.

Yes, I am talking about that fateful day when then prime minister Harold Holt entered the water at Cheviot Beach in Victoria, swam to out to a waiting submarine and defected to the People’s Republic of China.

I know what you’re thinking – urban myth. But consider this: no federal inquiry was held at the time on the grounds that “it would have been a waste of time and money.” What, to investigate the disappearance of a Prime Minister?

No inquest was held by the Victorian government either, as there was no law on the books allowing for presumed or suspected deaths to be reported. Why wasn’t that law changed?

It was only in 2003 that the Victorian government began to investigate pre-1985 suspected disappearances, but Holt’s case was just lumped in with the other 161 of them to be considered.

Skip forward 38 years to 2005. Chen Yonglin, first secretary of the Chinese Consulate in Sydney sought asylum in Australia. Mr Chen claimed there existed a network of over 1,000 Chinese spies operating in Australia, monitoring ex-Chinese citizens, both Chinese and non-Chinese members of dissident support groups, and Australian politicians who voiced support for those groups.

But, if it is much worse than that – Mr Chen claimed that these spies were also kidnaping people and smuggling them back to China. In fact, their level of expertise in this area was and is so high that they are able to do without anyone even realising the people are missing!

Skip forward again to 2009: it was revealed earlier this month that Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon has been to China – twice. And they were not official government visits, no, neither were they privately-funded holidays. They were at the expense of a Chinese-Australian millionaire businesswoman.

There can be no doubt at all in anyone’s mind that a defence minister visiting China on a private holiday at a Chinese person’s expense (the daughter of Communist Party members, no less!) must present some threat to Australia’s security.

Of course, PM Kevin Rudd sprang to his defence.

Mr Rudd, as we all know, is a renowned Sinophile who speaks Mandarin fluently. He learned the language whilst studying in Taiwan in the early ‘80s.

Were you also aware though that during Bob Hawke’s tenure as prime minister Rudd worked in the Australian Embassy in Beijing? Shifting ties alliance from the Taiwanese “Republic of China” to the People’s Republic in the space of just a few years – at the request of no less than the prime minister Hawke himself!

So there you have it: defector Harold Holt and the federal government cover-up, defector Chen Yonglin and the 1,000 kidnappers, Bob Hawke the Machiavellian international manipulator, Joel Fitzgibbon, and the covert trips to one of our “Axis of trade partners” countries, Kevin Rudd the triple-agent prime minister.

For god’s sake Australia, wake up and smell the Peking Duck.

Ever since the first Chinese migrants to this land stepped ashore in the first decades of the 1800s governments, businesses, landowners and even trade unions have fanned the flames of Sinophobia in this country. In its mildest this has resulted in racist slurs and “jokes,” at its worst murderous rampages through city streets and in the gold fields.

Even today during the recent Queensland elections renowned racist – she of the “signs outside of Chinese shops shouldn’t be written in Chinese because we don’t know what they’re saying” – Pauline Hanson is still able to garner 21 percent of the vote!

Little effort has ever been made to highlight the enormous contribution Chinese-Australians have made to this country over the last 200 years. From the early days as labourers, gardeners and woodworkers to the current generations of scientists, medical professionals, factory workers, shop-keepers, restauranteurs – in fact, every facet of life in every far-flung corner of this country – they help keep the cogs of our economy turning.

There is no “Yellow Peril” coming to undermine our way of life. Never was, never will be.

The Electronic Intifada

Magazine

7
Israel’s new right-wing leaders pose threat to Israel itself

Susan Webb

Israel’s new right-wing government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu and, in particular, statements by his foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman, has raised considerable alarm, both within Israel and internationally. Just days after taking office, Lieberman inflamed controversy by saying that the new Israeli government had no plans to move quickly on a settlement freeze. Instead, Avigdor and Lieberman insisted that Palestinians have to do more on security first — even though the Palestinian Authority has been widely praised for improving security in the West Bank. Others have urged the US to re-enter negotiations with a new power base. There are worries that this is the key to advancing the two-state solution.

Peace advocates consider a settlement freeze to be key to advancing negotiations toward a peaceful two-state solution.

The protests forced the cancellation of the ASEAN leaders’ summit meeting in the resort town of Pattaya on April 11. A day later, the opposition supporters moved on to the capital and the protests continued there. Several days later former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s calls for a “revolution” fell on deaf ears as the general population supported the military in stopping the protest actions. There were hundreds of victims as the result of these events.

The situation in Thailand is returning to normality after violent clashes between the opposition and the present government. The protests forced the cancellation of the ASEAN leaders’ summit meeting in the resort town of Pattaya on April 11. A day later, the opposition supporters moved on to the capital and the protests continued there. Several days later, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s calls for a “revolution” fell on deaf ears as the general population supported the military in stopping the protest actions. There were hundreds of victims as the result of these events.

There was an interesting point of view expressed by Pravda on April 13.

Writing in Pravda last week Russian commentator Vladimir Anokhin noted that the ASEAN countries have decided to look for their own way of development which differs from Europe and the US. The ASEAN summit was to begin a break-through in the region’s economies and creation of a new power base.

China has declared that it will establish free trade zones with ASEAN countries in 2010. Trade, economic and investment cooperation will be the priority — exactly the areas most seriously affected by the current crisis.

The China is planning to lift import duties for Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Philippines, and by 2015 include Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

The International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) is calling on affiliates to back workers in Turkey as they gear up for Labour Day on May 1. Turkish trade unionists have been in the past borne the brunt of police violence during previous years’ celebrations.

The ITF has urged unions to send a protest email to the Turkish government to reinforce the federation’s demand for May 1 to be recognised as Labour Day by the Turkish government. It is calling on the Turkish government to make the move as part of ongoing assistance to its Turkish affiliates, Tumtis and Hava-Is.

Last year May Day celebrations were disrupted as police attacked venues, spraying people with pepper spray, carrying out brutal beatings and making arrests, all of which received worldwide media attention.

ITF transport section secretary Marc Urrutia commented: “The ITF strongly urges the government in Ankara and the governor of Istanbul to stop hindering trade union demonstrations and May 1 festivals - including those held in Taksim Square in the capital city.

Call for support for May Day celebrations in Turkey

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Visa request for wives of Cuban Five

Earlier this month a letter addressed to US President Barack Obama and a letter sent by 173 US congressmen to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton demanding humanitarian visas to the wives of the Cuban Five imprisoned in the US, Adriana Pérez and Olga Salanueva, were delivered to the US Interests Section in Havana. Also included, a request for multiple visas for all other family members of the Cuban Five.

Among other documents delivered were a recent Amnesty International statement and a call for sanctions issued to its membership, stating that the refusal to grant visas for these Cuban citizens constitutes an unnecessary punishment against the right of the prisoners and their families.

The documentation was received by the Public Affairs Officer of the US Interests Section, Gregory Adams, with a specific request to the General Consul Sean Murphy of the US Interests Section to “send these documents to President Obama, which summarises the international demand to end the suffering of these men and their families” because “no matter what the circumstances, visits to maintain family relationships are a human right of all prisoners and their family members.”

International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five

Israel’s foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman in a meeting with former US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice.

Behind the auctions in Thailand

The Guardian

Australia, New Zealand and, in particular, statements by his foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman, has raised considerable alarm, both within Israel and internationally. Just days after taking office, Lieberman inflamed controversy by saying that the new Israeli government had no plans to move quickly on a settlement freeze. Instead, Avigdor and Lieberman insisted that Palestinians have to do more on security first — even though the Palestinian Authority has been widely praised for improving security in the West Bank. Others have urged the US to re-enter negotiations with a new power base. There are worries that this is the key to advancing the two-state solution.

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International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five
Texas governor threatens secession

James Richardson

HOUSTON – Governor Rick Perry of Texas has threatened to lead the state from the union. “Texas is a unique place,” Perry declared. “When we came into the Union in 1845, one of the issues was that we would be able to leave if we decided to do that. My hope is that America and Washington in particular pay attention. We’ve got great unique union. There’s absolutely no reason to dissolve it. But if Washington continues to thumb their nose at the American people, who knows what may come of that.”

Some pundits say Perry may be the answer to the buffoonery of Governor Palin of Alaska in her quest to ignite the ultra-right. Some of the more generous commentators on his statement call him a demagogue. Others point out that secession is the old line of the segregationists. Still others point out that his remarks are seditious and are blatantly anti-American. One Texas journalist, Joe Curbith, wrote in the Huffington Post that Perry has embroiled Texas and may have made it more difficult for the state to compete for top notch researchers. Some Texans are begging for him to be removed from office. All this occurs in the context of Perry leading the right-wing charge against the Obama administration’s federal budget. Perry and his cohorts have even been trying to block stem cell research in Texas and refusing to accept federal unemployment insurance funds from the president’s stimulus package.

In a moment of lucidity, the Texas Senate voted tentative approval of a bill that would allow Texas to receive US$555 million for unemployment. One of the Texas representatives, Rep. Charlie Geren, told the San Antonio Express-News that the bill would reduce the federal unemployment insurance funds from the president’s stimulus package.

MAY DAY FUNCTION

Sunday 3rd May at 6pm,
the Greek Community Club 206-220 Laikema S.L. Laikema N.W.

$20, includes Greek buffet dinner and music from around the world.
All welcome.

For more information contact the Sydney District Committee of the CPA on 02 9699 8844.

A new multi-polar world is rising

Chinese and Venezuelan presidents Hu Jintao and Hugo Chavez, held a meeting in the Chinese capital this month to review the political and cooperative relations between both countries. This is the visit to Beijing by Chavez, a fact that undoubtedly motivated the Chinese President of State to express his joy in welcoming him as an old friend of China’s, and for his work in favour of friendship and bilateral collaboration.

In his preliminary words, Chavez praised China’s economic strength, which can help other countries equip themselves well in the current international financial crisis. He also said that the world centre had been displaced and now is in China because some of the main institutions of the developed countries, such as the World Bank, have shown their failure in this crisis. This tour, he said, would contribute to shielding his country from the crisis, by means of boost to economic and social development projects.

The Venezuelan president also said that a new world is rising, the multi-polar world that everyone had dreamed so much about, and that new power centres were emerging in this world’s South and East.

The Bolivarian president held a working meeting with Chinese vice president Xi Jinping about the different economic, energy, infrastructure, scientific and technical projects, in which both sides are involved.

This was the third stage of Hugo Chavez’s tour of Asia, having previously visited Qatar, Iran and Japan.

Chile-Cuba

In another meeting of high level government representatives, the socialist Republic of Cuba and Chile discussed co-operation between their two countries. The Chilean foreign ministry announced a cooperation agreement between Chile and Cuba to promote exchange of strategies, information, professionals and delegates to strengthen bilateral trade. Officials of ProChile, the institution of Chilean chancellery in charge of stimulating exports and the Centre for the Promotion of Foreign Trade of the Investment Ministry of Cuba signed the agreement in Havana.

The agreement paves the way to implement full cooperation to improve and develop economic relations between Chile and Cuba, the ministry announcement indicated. It also points out that “it will favour an exchange of experiences on long-term strategies to boost exports.”

The agreement considered “an important step as part of a favourable context of trade relations between both countries”, and follows on from the signing of the Agreement of Economic Complementation between both countries last year.

US dollar challenged

In the current global climate of fear about the US dollar, the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) is planning to promote payments in local currencies in commercial transactions as a way to revitalize intraregional trade, ALADI officials announced last week.

A meeting of economic ministries and central bank officials from the 12 member countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela) will be held for this purpose on April 22.

The objective is to assess the operation of the Reciprocal Payments and Credits Agreement, to broaden it and speed it up, said chair of the ALADI Representatives Committee, Pablo Guzman, during a press conference.

According to experts, including Guzman, in the context of the current crisis, as there is talk of the very survival of the dollar, the use of local currencies in Latin American trade is not only viable, but necessary.

They explained that this is not new, as ALADI members like Argentina and Brazil have already activated the System of Trade Deals in Local Currencies and others (Uruguay and Paraguay) plan to follow suit.

They cited the example of Venezuela, a leader in using local currencies in up to 50 percent of its trade with other countries.

In this regard, Guzman termed very interesting the intention of member countries of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America including Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Honduras and Dominica, to create a virtual currency, the sucro, as a Regional Payment Compensation System for their commercial transactions.

Pressia Latina •

Global Briefs

SRI LANKA: “A bloodbath on the beaches of northern Sri Lanka seems an increasingly real possibility,” writes UN Under-Secretary General Sir John Holmes. The army is pushing Tamil Tiger insurgents to the end of a peninsula inhabited by 200,000 civilians. Renowned author Arundhati Roy writes on alternet.org that “business as usual” is business being bombed,” thousands have been killed or wounded, and those escaping end up in “compulsory holding centres.” Registration of all Tamils in Colombo is required on security grounds. The purpose, she maintains, is to “dismantle any semblance of democracy in the country, and commit unspeakable crimes against the Tamil people.” “A brazen, openly racist war” is possible, Roy writes, “because of the silence that surrounds it.”

VENEZUELA: Accompanied by ministry officials, President Hugo Chavez was in Japan on April 5-6 to sign energy, and manufacturing accords, in particular cooperation in making oil-based products, fertilizers and automobiles. Venezuela’s state oil company and Japanese corporations will together extract and refine extra heavy Orinoco basin oil. Japanese financial engineering will be used to fit out refineries for the task. Oil exports taken from the world’s second largest reserves will start out at 100,000 barrels per day, perhaps rising to 10 times that level, Chavez said. He told reporters, “Japan automatically assures its supply for at least 25 years.”

Russia: Nationwide worker protests were joined by 800,000 unpaid civilian navy employees who threatened to strike. Russian manufacturing dropped 13 percent in February. Projections put new car sales as falling by 25-50 percent. The Lada automobile factory in Togliatti, widely regarded as obsolete and inefficient, is being bailed out. Yet the factory’s assembly line workers see their jobs as secure. They are working four-day weeks and six-hour shifts, with employees taking voluntary holidays at two-thirds pay. Suppliers for the factory account for almost 2 million additional jobs. The New York Times business reporter quoted a factory clerk: “The factory is our wet nurse … if it stops, the whole town will be out on the streets.”
The resolution of the Central Committee of the CPA is part of the world movement for social change and socialism.

Phyllis Johnson 72 years a member of the Communist Party Padstow, Sydney

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Andrew Mellis Grafton NSW

Kimberley gas hub shows lack of vision and opportunity

The decision by WA Premier Colin Barnett to announce the location of the Kimberley LNG at James Price Point, 60 kilometres north of Broome, demonstrates a lack of vision and opportunity on at least three fronts.

In these times when the impacts of the global warming are increasingly being felt, the contribution to carbon emissions from this project will add significantly to the problem as evidenced by the increasing length and duration of droughts in some areas of Australia – the drying of the Murray River and associated food bowl. Second, the world is running out of non-renewable carbon-based energy and the Barnett government is sustaining our addiction to energy sources, uranium and gas, to meet the energy needs of this nation and the world, instead of investing our money into renewable and sustainable energy sources (wind, geothermal and solar). Third, the money given to the Aboriginal owners of their country will compensate them for their suffering in cultural and identity that will occur from the direct and indirect impacts of this project. Though the “use of the land” has been traded for the prospect of needed social improvements” for Aboriginal people, this move will only speed up the process of assimilation of Aboriginal people into white society. Language, culture and way of life in the world becomes increasingly marginalised.

Richard Titelius WA

Public is best

Your article “New public health care system needed” (Guardian April 1) is scarily to the point that if ever it comes to fruition it will mean the premature deaths of thousands of our poorer citizens.

In relation to the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission set up by the Rudd government, the last thing any fair and unbiased commission needs is to be dominated by the private sector. The private sector cannot deliver an impartial recommendation on a public utility or service owing to its predisposition to making profits.

A prerequisite for commissions who are devoted to the well being of the public, in this case the patients needs, is in locating commissioners who are dedicated to the quality of service and infrastructure being supplied and the ultimate success of the public health system.

Private consultants on commissions are renowned for instigating systems that are more complex to administer, and to preserve their disgustingly lucrative courses (he is hoping to talk a rich lady’s lawyer into giving him his museum a large grant). Katherine plays his ball instead of her own and drives off in his car instead of her own, while berating him for standing her up. Katherine sets her cap for him, and although he was due to be married the very next day, by the time she is through with him he has been arrested, humiliated and – most importantly – shown how to have a good time. Needless to say, he marries Katherine, not whatever her name was.

Danny Peary notes that in this film whenever Hepburn’s character is around Grant’s, “terrible things happen – just as they happen to Oliver Hardy when Stan Laurel is around.”

The script actually explicitly states its theme: “The love impulse in man frequently reveals itself in terms of conflict.” For me however, the highpoint of the film is Charley Ruggles demonstrating “the mating call of the sho-leopard,” with decidedly unforeseen results.

In keeping with the mood of the times, screwball comedies frequently poked their tongue out at authority, cocking a snook especially at police and courts of law. In Bringing Up Baby, most of the cast end up in the cells, while Catherine Hepburn convinces the local constable she’s a lawyer – just as they happen to Oliver Hardy. Nevertheless, serious questions were raised in the media about the public’s right to know what the country’s spy organisations were up to, official attempts to clamp down on reporters; the nature of relations between Australia and the USA when they were competitors in Asian markets and Australia in essence supplied its “trade enemy” with information which could advantage their trade at Australia’s expense.

Forward to 2009 – the media is far more interested in a country’s own Chinese cawing down on Australia/ USA if it gets a mine which is near the US spy base at Pine Gap and all and sundry still kept in the dark.

Matt English Sydney

Work safety plundered

It annoys me at how the papers relentlessly turn fallen soldiers in Bush’s wars in Afghanistan and Iraq into instant heroes.

Construction workers, farmers, factory workers, miners and industrial workers face greater dangers every day and their deaths are often not even recognised. The figures state it all. More Australians are killed at work than at war.

With unions banned from entering worksites, their safety role is made worthless by arrogant bosses.

While we should be concerned [there’s] a lot of law and order is really a workplace tragedy. We are all working to defend the wealth of the wealthy and to preserve their disgusting corrupt way of life.

Andrew Mellis NSW

The Great Depression of the 1930s was, of course, an economic downturn. For many people, this was an emotional downturn as well. Times were tough: food was very hard to get, for many housing was hard to get, for many housing was hard to get, and the work of the Communist Party branches for discussion, change, or protest was even more difficult. The Central Committee resolution is now in the hands of party Branches for discussion, change, or protest. The Central Committee resolution is now in the hands of party Branches for discussion, change, or protest.

World-wide capitalism causes as many as 200 million people to die of starvation and disease day by day.

For example, the Soviet Union and the work of the Communist Party gave the Aboriginal people the land, resources, and the ability to build for themselves, to maintain and expand their culture. The Central Committee resolution is now in the hands of party Branches for discussion, change, or protest. The Central Committee resolution is now in the hands of party Branches for discussion, change, or protest.

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German films like the Expressionist classic The Cabinet of Dr Caligari were shown in Sydney, for example, at Paramount's Prince Edward Theatre, one of the most elegant picture palaces in the city. Paramount and MGM had financial involvement with Ufa, Germany's biggest film production company.

In the late 1920s, as Hollywood's studios began to develop their global economic dominance, they began recruiting the best German filmmakers and performers (as well as those of France, Sweden and Central Europe) to work in the US. The Nazis did not come to power in Germany until 1933, but already by 1929, Hollywood had enticed away such luminaries of the German screen as directors Ernst Lubitsch, Buchowetski, EA Dupont, Paul Leni, Lupu Pick, FW Murnau, actors Pola Negri and Emil Jannings (amongst others), and producer Erich Pommer.

So many German film artists were working at Paramount by the end of the 1920s that the studio's films developed a distinctively German-influenced "look" (as well as a Berlin-style sophistication). Hollywood was not the only place of interest to German film production: Berlin's most important were the film industries of Vienna, Paris and London.

Germany itself in this period was a maelstrom of political conflict. Left and right contended sharply for political control of the country, with a frightened ruling class turning more and more towards the Nazis and their uniformed thugs to suppress the increasingly militant workers, who of necessity had to develop their own self-defence corps.

Progressive filmmakers Pabst, Piscator and others established the Popular Association for Film Art in 1928 to encourage the making of artistic and progressive films. The Nazis were making short propaganda films, ostensibly for private use, but they frequently bribed or pressured cinema managers to include them in regular programs.

In 1927, in Nazi-supposedly democratic Germany, the government's response to the rising workers' movement was to shift steadily to the right, aiding and making concessions to the Nazis. Promotion of the right and censorship of the left became so prevalent that in 1929 the German League for Independent Film was created to "resist the glorification of war and the growing censorship." The Nazis organised "spontaneous" demonstrations at screenings of left-leaning films (like Kameraschaft (Comradeship), a grand mix of propaganda, folk humour, stylized drama and epic set pieces ("the climactic Battle on the Ice is perhaps the greatest battle scene in movie history" – Danny Peary) the film is definitely the definitive example of the integration of sound and image; Prokofiev's score forms a single whole with the visuals.

A splendid achievement, Nevsky is both historically important and great fun to watch and to listen to.

Sydney film night

**NEW IN**

**Cinema's Exiles: From Hitler To Hollywood** (ABC2 Sunday April 26 at 8.30pm, repeated ABC1 Sunday May 3 at 3.00pm) – *Der blaue Engel.*

The Nazis maintained the support of their rank and file by railing against Jews, but they garnered the support of Germany's industrialists and bankers by promising to rid them of the threat of Bolshevism.

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, however, most of the progressive filmmakers plus many of those who were just democratically-minded found it expedient to leave Germany in a hurry. The first people the Nazis arrested were not Jews, however, but Communists; the first concentration camps were built for Communists and socialists, not Jews. The mass purging of Jews from intellectual and artistic life (including from the film industry) came later, after the Reds had been cleaned out, and was not completed until the film industry was finally nationalised in 1942.

However, to the satisfaction of the Nazis, many Reds were also Jews. In fact, Jews had made a disproportional contribution to Germany's artistic and intellectual life, a fact that offended Hitler's racist followers.

Not all the various film-workers who fled Germany were German. They also included Hungarians like Fred Zinnemann and Peter Lorre, Czechs like Heydy Lamarr and Walter Slezak. They naturally went to other centres of film production – Vienna, Paris, London and of course Hollywood. However, by the time war engulfed all of Europe, most of them had found their way to the USA (many with the help of long-time Hollywood residents Marlene Dietrich and Ernst Lubitsch).

For more details on the program and for entry details see our website.
The Guardian
April 22 2009

The US border’s “Agent Orange” controversy

In the Vietnam War, the United States sprayed vast tracts of land with the chemical defoliant Agent Orange as part of a counter-insurgency strategy aimed at removing forest cover for Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces.

Although the toxic dioxin released by Agent Orange was later blamed on US soldiers and Vietnamese of veterans’ groups and Vietnamese officials for illnesses and diseases that struck thousands of former US soldiers and up to 200,000 Vietnamese citizens, the US Supreme Court recently refused to consider a case pursued by Vietnamese plaintiffs against the manufacturers of Agent Orange.

Four decades later, on the US-Mexico border, the US Border Patrol intends to employ a chemical herbicide in order to eradicate stands of the Carrizo cane, an invasive plant that grows as tall as 30 feet and provides cover for undocumented border crossers and smugglers.

The variety of Carrizo cane that is common in the Laredo-Del Rio borderlands is from the region of Valencia, Spain.

The US Border Patrol plans to commence aerial herbicide spraying along a slice of the Rio Grande between the twin cities of Laredo, Texas, Nuevo Laredo and Tamaulipas. The experimental spraying would cover an area that stretches 2 kilometres between the Laredo Railroad Bridge and Laredo Community College directly across from Mexico, said Roque Sarriñana, public affairs officer for the Border Patrol’s Laredo sector.

In addition to aerial spraying of the herbicide imazapyr, the Border Patrol will employ hand-cutting and mechanical methods that involve applying the killer chemical at ground level, Sarriñana told Frontera NorteSur* in a phone interview. Getting rid of Carrizo cane should improve the Border Patrol’s “line of sight up and down the river,” Sarriñana said.

Concerns about risks to public health from possible herbicide spray drift, runoff and leaching, officials from the city government of neighbouring Nuevo Laredo are steadfastly opposed to aerial spraying. “I’ve always been respectful of the law and sovereignty,” said Nuevo Laredo Mayor Ramon Garza Barrios.

“Herbicides that affect health in both countries should not be sprayed.”

Garza, but stressed it did not mean other US officials had not received a letter. “This is all in the works, so we’ll see what happens,” Sarriñana said, adding the Border Patrol plans on releasing a more detailed statement about the future of the Carrizo cane project.

Opposition to the Border Patrol’s aerial spraying plans is likewise growing in Laredo, Texas. The two sides turned out to a March 16 meeting of the Laredo City Council in which elected officials narrowly approved by a controversial 5-4 vote an easement for the US government on city property targeted for spraying.

Jocelyn Castro Sr, executive director of the Rio Grande International Studies Centre of Laredo Community College told Frontera NorteSur the planned aerial spraying caught residents off guard. The aerial applications could threaten more than 1,000 bird and other species at the time when spring hatchings begin and migratory birds are still in the area, Johnson said by phone from his office. The Border Patrol’s Carrizo Cane Eradication Project destroys a nature trail running near the community college, Johnson lamented.

“Nobody knows the impact of imazapyr,” Johnson contended. “It’s no different than Agent Orange.” Citing the program’s environmental assessment, Johnson said aerial spraying could eventually extend along a strip of river bank 25 kilometres upstream from the pilot project zone. Despite the potential magnitude of the project, the Border Patrol did not gather local input as required by the National Environmental Policy Act, Johnson charged.

“The zone targeted for spraying is across the Rio Grande from Nuevo Laredo’s Hidalgo neighbourhood and only hundreds of metres from the Mexican city’s public water intake system. Carlos Montiel Saab, general manager for Nuevo Laredo’s water utility, said the Border Patrol advised his office to turn off water pumps a few hours prior to spraying. “If there is no problem, why are they asking us to do this?” Montiel questioned.

Border Patrol spokesman Sarriñana said he had not seen a written objection from Mayor Garza, but stressed it did not mean other US officials had not received a letter. “This is all in the works, so we’ll see what happens,” Sarriñana said, adding the Border Patrol plans on releasing a more detailed statement about the future of the Carrizo cane project.

The zone targeted for spraying is across the Rio Grande from Nuevo Laredo’s Hidalgo neighbourhood and only hundreds of metres from the Mexican city’s public water intake system.

Graffiti on the US-built “Great Wall of Mexico” reads “Borders: scars on the earth.” The spraying of imazapyr along the waterways separating the two countries will give a new literal meaning to this term.

Public controversies over imazapyr applications have previously erupted in Alaska, California and Colombion, where experimental use of the herbicide to control illegal coca plantings was approved in 2000. A report on the chemical’s history developed for the non-governmental group Alaska Community Action on Toxics said evidence existed that identified imazapyr as a contaminant of soil, groundwater and surface water. Imazapyr also contains an acid that can irritate the eyes, skin and respiratory system, the report stated.

According to the report’s authors, additional evidence linked the herbicide to Parkinson’s Disease-like symptoms.

With the clock ticking, Johnson and a growing network of activists on both sides of the border are lobbying high officials to prevent aerial spraying before it occurs.

In an e-mail, long-time border environmental advocate and Sierra Club activist Bill Addington contended spraying would violate the 1983 La Paz accord between the United States and Mexico that requires mutual notification in the event of projects impacting the environment within a 120 kilometre radius on either side of the border.

“We’re considering all democratic options – court actions, public protests, media attention,” Johnson added. “We expect our message to be heard by the environmentally-friendly Obama administration. This is too unprecedented to allow aerially spray a toxic chemical in a densely-populated area.”

Mario Garcia, a Mexican national who frequents the Rio Grande on the Nuevo Laredo side with his sons, also expressed concern to a Mexican reporter. “I frequently come to fish in the area,” Garcia said. “With what degree of confidence are we going to eat a fish if we know it is contaminated?”

* Frontera NorteSur provides online news of the US-Mexican border.