

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

NO WAR

www.sydneyoperahousenowar.org

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Apologies for the long, long delay in getting this (final?) newsletter out. Our email server was broken (see below), and both of us have been submerged in other things and trying to get our lives back together (see also below).

PAINTPOT IN PERIL!

NSW Police have applied to the Downing Centre Local Court for the 'disposal' (i.e. destruction) of the famous paintpot. Now this is just mean, since the compensation money is all raised and we had intended to auction the paintpot off to raise money for the Mother and Child Hospital in Basra <http://www.smh.com.au/news/World/After-the-bombs-illness--and-few-to-care/2005/04/28/1114635692332.html>

And, it's as much a piece of history (peace of history?) as de Groot's sword, irrespective of the rights and wrongs of the case. So we'll be there to contest the application, and any moral support would be greatly appreciated. The hearing is listed for 9:30, Tuesday 3rd January (tomorrow!).

E_MAIL WOES

The e-mail account nowar@planet-save.com was broken from early November to 21st December due to a catastrophic disc failure on planet-save's part. This has finally been fixed, and we're able to receive mail and send out this newsletter. But, ALL emails sent to us between sometime early November and 21st of December have been lost unread, and all saved copies of all older messages also. So resend us anything you think we've missed, or that we should have a copy of to keep.

Must be the CIA behind it.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED? By Will

Both of us finished our sentences (nine months Periodic Detention, interrupted by the Appeal) back in August. Will finished up working in the native seedling nursery at Parramatta gaol, Dave ended up at Wollongong PDC. The stupidity and wastefulness - in money, effort and ruined lives - represented by Periodic Detention can hardly be exaggerated. The whole institution is a shame on the state of NSW. By definition, no one there is a danger to the community; the whole purpose is retribution and deterrence, for those who have taken the piss by knowingly breaking the law, whether by smoking pot, or driving unlicensed, or painting public buildings. No books, no pens and paper, no educational facilities whatsoever. In mid-year, Silverwater PDC moved lock stock and barrel to the Dickensian grimness of Parramatta gaol after the latter was deemed unfit for full-time prisoners. The rules are myriad, arbitrary, ever-changing, and crunchingly enforced, in an effort to break the miscreants' spirit. Not surprisingly, any success in breaking young men's self-esteem leads to more crime rather than less.

But as an introduction to a life of prison culture, it works just fine. Same screws, same rules, same language, same culture. The revocation rate (with the sentence being transmuted to full-time prison) is shockingly high, as is the offending rate while in prison (invariably for minor drug use), as is the reoffending rate on release. All the warders are on overtime from their duties in the main prison, and bring main prison attitudes and heaviness with them. There are some valiant attempts at rehabilitation – particularly the bush regeneration and nursery work – but these are continually undermined by the prison authorities preference for a chain-gang rather than something with positive outcomes on the ground.

What the system couldn't completely destroy was laughter. Sometimes keeping a sense of humour was difficult – during 20-hour lock downs; or during a strip search with dogs after a hard days work; or when some particularly psychopathic wader was throwing his weight around. But these were relieved by belly-laugh moments - Chinese tourists attempting to get on the prison minibus; arriving back at Silverwater with an extra prisoner – a nice old man barked back onto the bus with the cons; the warders locked with us into their own prison by a jammed padlock; being

asked if we were from Greening Australia when out bush-regenerating; my first cellmate getting his wooden leg searched for drugs every Friday night on entry; the warders excitement at finding white crystal powder inside an inmates cap, only to find it was smuggled salt; the inmate who loved the nursery so much he kept coming after his sentence finished...

No wonder the NSW government abolished the post of Inspector-General of Corrective Services in 2003. See <http://www.justiceaction.org.au/> for more information about the scandal that is Australia's prison system.

Sadly, the things we were trying to prevent – destruction and civil war in Iraq, brute power as a substitute for International Law, the hatred of half the world heaped on Australia, Australia's descent into a Police State – all seem to be proceeding pretty much according to the script. But, while studying the history of protest while preparing our defence, it was striking how long grass-roots protests always take to achieve their aims; how success always seemed a forlorn hope until suddenly achieved; and how enormous and beneficial were the changes wrought to society by that final success. The battle of ideas happening now for the heart and soul of the world is as epochal as the fight for the vote, or the civil rights movement, and eventually will change the world as much as they did. The signs of eventual victory, in an ever more liberal society and in the Government's extraordinary unpopularity, are everywhere. Don't forget your sense of humour in this darkness before dawn.

IT WAS ALL ABOUT EMBARRASSMENT by Dave

It was four days out from the NSW Election when we did our thing on the sails of the Opera House. This we knew, but Bob Carr's electoral fortunes were hardly at the forefront of our minds with our countries about to plunge into war, a difficult climb and paint job ahead of us.

What we didn't know was that while we were up there, George W Bush would issue Saddam Hussein with a final, meaningless (as the neo-con's script for war had been written years before) ultimatum to get out of Iraq. We also didn't know that a US delegation was arriving in Australia that day to give anti-terrorism measures drafted for prime sites around the country a stamp of approval. Nor were we to know that a union dispute between Opera House security and management had been taking place and the Sydney Opera House had actually cut security at the site.

These four things gave the action a lot more bite behind the scenes than we had envisaged. Bob Carr was reportedly furious as he watched it all happen from his office window. During his election campaign the then Premier had promised that the Opera House was the best-protected building in the state. The story goes that his anger was taken out in no uncertain terms upon those in senior security roles who drafted the prime target measures and the aggressive nature of it was referred to by Opposition Leader John Brogden during debate on the new Opera House laws our act inspired.

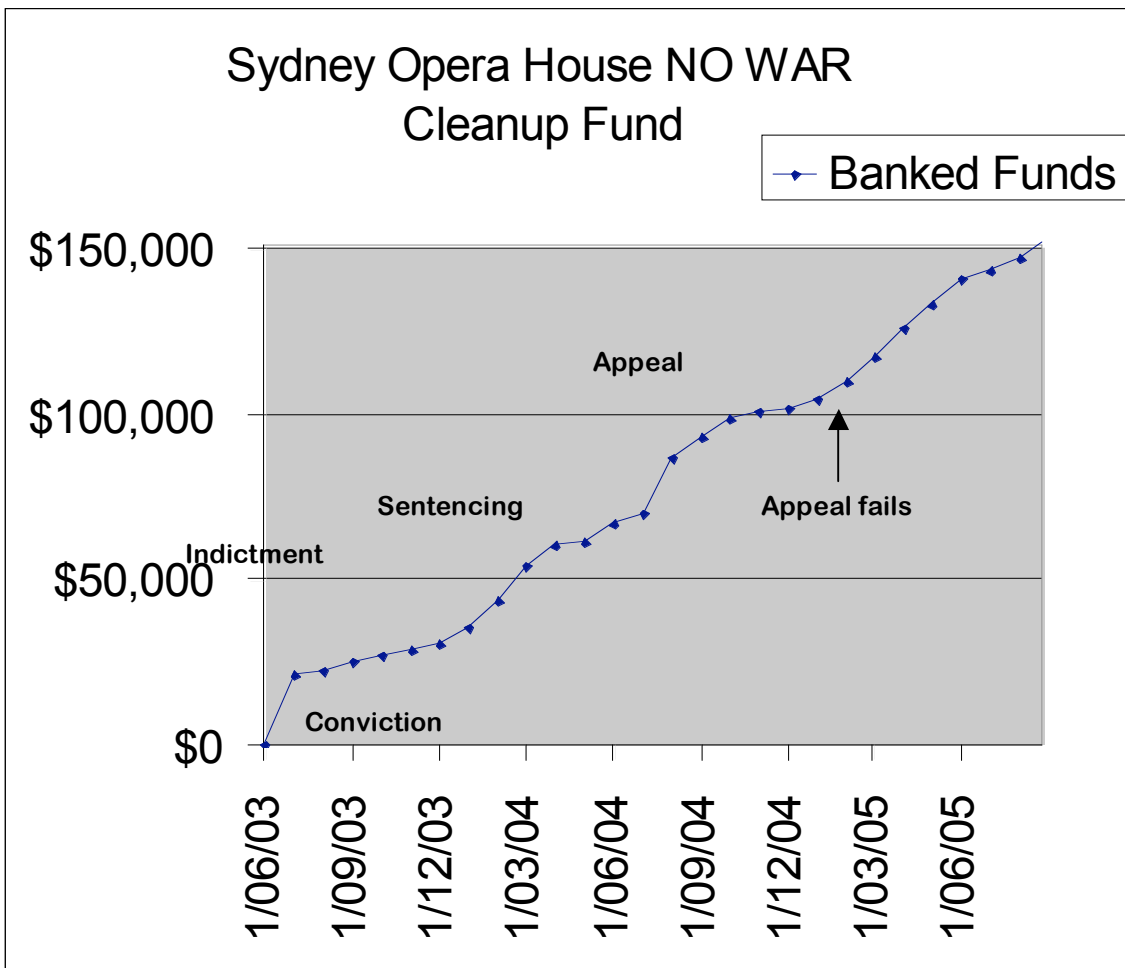
Opera House chief executive Norman Gillespie, speaking in the Financial Review, said while not an act of terrorism, people felt violated by the NO WAR action and that security issues were taking up a challenging amount of management time. He also questioned where all the extra security dollars were going to come from. Up to five companies then managed to cost the Opera House \$151,000 in what appeared to be a very messy clean-up operation that paperwork says lasted four weeks.

If one word was to sum up the determination and obsession with which we were pursued, it can only be *embarrassment*. As a senior Opera House staffer told me at a chance meeting some months later, "You don't know what you did". But when at the start of our trial Judge Blackmore asked why there were so many people in the gallery as he had never heard of the case, I knew we were in trouble and still find it impossible to believe him.

I spent time in both Newcastle and Wollongong PDCs. The only purpose of weekend detention seems to be to make life miserable enough that you won't do whatever you did again. As well as two days of being locked up, the punishment is equally about giving you only five days to do what you normally do in seven, putting severe stress on inmates' lives, jobs and relationships. There is also the issue of stepping from one world to the other every week – a schizophrenic existence. And if the saying 'you are what you eat' bears any truth, then NSW's prisoners are shit.

Iraq was invaded because they had WMDs that were going to get us – it turned out they didn't but that was OK because it was "the right thing to do anyway." We kicked out a US activist because of "something he said." We deport an Afghan family we believe are from Pakistan. They are later proved to be Afghani but it was "the right thing to do anyway." We introduce laws allowing the police to arrest anyone they want. These things and the media's acceptance of them are what scare me most at the moment. But it's good to be out of jail – probably damaged but not broken!

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE NO WAR CLEAN-UP FUND UPDATE



We're all done with the compensation order! The picture above shows us handing over the final payment at the Opera House, the day it was being locked down for the Forbes Conference. We couldn't resist the irony. The Opera House, supposedly belonging to all Australians, and above the grubby world of politics and money, being given over in its entirety to the richest men in the

world for the week. It seems that most of the people working at the Opera House were as unhappy about this as the people protesting outside, but sadly, they get no more say in how the Opera House is run than we do.

The account will be closed just as soon as can be arranged. There is \$7000 or so to go to Iraq, and much more if we get to auction the paintpot.

Many, many thanks for all your contributions.

NEWCASTLE GRAFFITI WASN'T US

On Monday morning Novocastrians (of the Australian variety) awoke to a spectacular addition to the upper floors of Latec House in Newcastle West.



During the morning and into the next day, the phone started running hot with calls from the media. Questions asked of Dave included:

“You coming from the Hunter Valley, did either Will or yourself have a hand in the operation?”

“You’ve obviously done this sort of thing before. What’s your opinion on how they did it and do you believe you inspired this latest act?”

The message – referring to the city’s coal exports in an age when we should know better – is not the first time someone has managed to put the architecture to good use. Some years ago, a climber or climbers unknown writ “THIS IS NOT ART” and “ONE PERFECT DAY” on opposite sides of the building. This Is Not Art has since become the name of a popular Newcastle Festival.

Meanwhile, Foreman on the Latec House redevelopment Mark Burrell was concerned. “It wasn’t a five minute job, they’ve spent a lot of time, they’re obviously professional climbers. They’ve gone to the highest point of the building. You can stand on the roof and you can’t get to the top of that where the lift shaft is so they’re very good climbers.

“It has been a long time since anyone has broken in there; it is disappointing but we’re doing our best to get things on track.”

Anyway, being so recently rehabilitated, it wasn’t us.

BABIES AND VISAS

Both of us have had our lives overtaken by other things. Dave's moved to Austimer to live with his partner Lisa and on 3rd November, became a proud father to baby Sammy Ekow [pronounced somewhere between eco and echo]. Many think Ekow is some hippie name for eco, which is nice, but it is actually a Ghanaian Day Name meaning 'born on Thursday, with rocks in your pocket, ready for battle and good at dealing with people'. Kofi as in Annan for example, means 'born on Friday, the wanderer, adventurous, wisdom and tenacity', While Dave's acquaintance Kwame, who was working for the Liberian secret service, comes over as 'born on Saturday, possesses the medicine for snakebites and able to reverse crisis'. So you can see it's accurate!

Will has been immersed in work commissioning a new spectrograph for the Anglo-Australian Telescope. He too has good news; in December DIMIA finally approved his permanent residency, after a year and a half on a bridging visa. The compensation order payment helped a lot; so you can all take some of the credit or blame for him staying here at all.

THANK YOU

This newsletter has only good news. For which we are indebted forever to the hundreds and hundreds of you who have gone out of your way to give us your support. Despite the best efforts of the NSW Government to make our lives as unpleasant as possible, this support has made the whole saga an overwhelmingly positive experience.

We have agonised long and hard – partly explaining the lateness of the newsletter - over publishing a list of those of you who have particularly stuck their heads above the parapet to help us. In the end, we have decided against this. In the current political climate it seems unwise to publish a general list without checking with everyone on it if they wanted their names publicised like this; and once it got to several pages and still incomplete, it became clear we could never produce a complete list.

But we know who you all are, and it's been a humbling experience. A happy and peaceful new year to you all.

Love
Will and Dave