

# EUREKA STREET

Vol. 1 No. 4 June 1991

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Stuart Macintyre and Paul Rodan ask:

## Can Labor deliver?

- Margaret Simons on the Murray River ruined
- Fay Zwicky on Vincent Buckley's *Last Poems*
- Peter Pierce on Australian envy





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# EUREKA STREET

Volume 1 Number 4 • June 1991

Graphics by Dean Moore and John Spooner



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## The more things change ...

**T**HE NEW WORLD ORDER seems to have slipped into public discourse by accident. One of President Bush's speech writers took up the phrase to give a broader justification of the Gulf War. It soon disappeared from official usage because the hopes that it articulated were manifestly too large.

But the phrase continues to be used, mostly as an ironic comment on manifestations of an unredeemed old order. Its continued currency, however, also points to the widely shared conviction that we stand at the beginning of a new period of world history. With the Cold War ended, at least in its familiar form, the immediate past offers us little guidance for the decisions which will inevitably shape our future.

It is equally clear that whatever new order is shaped will have to reckon with the consequences of the Gulf War for its alliances, possibilities and expectations.

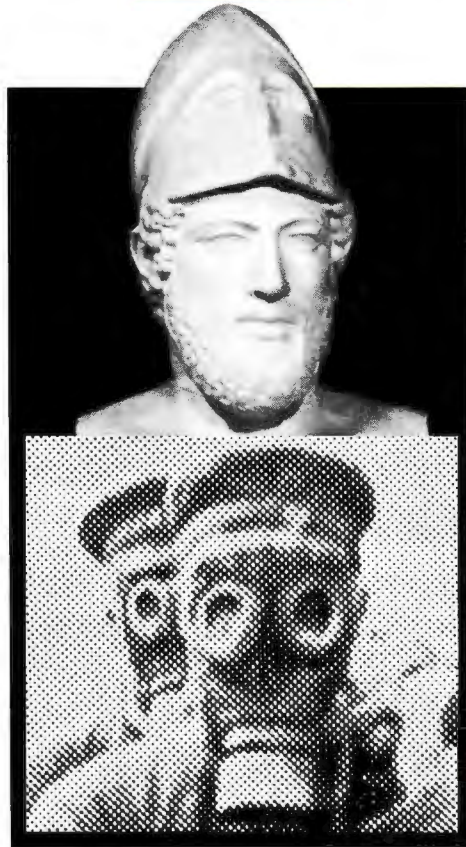
Given the importance of the Gulf War for the new order, Australian commentary upon it has been surprisingly tentative. It has concentrated on immediate strategic and political aspects, and not on its broader implications. With the exception of a few writers like Peter Smark in the Fairfax press, who consistently placed the war in the context of Middle-Eastern history, the comment has lacked any larger historical or cultural points of reference.

These inadequacies reflect a wider lack of cultural breadth in Australian political commentary. The defect is unfortunate, for events as far reaching and as seminal as the collapse of the Soviet empire and the Gulf War beg to be set against the accounts of other turning points which have shaped our history and understanding of it. Such reflection can pose to us illuminating questions both about our day and about ourselves.

One of the formative documents of Western culture is Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, in which he analyses the great struggle of his own fifth century BC between Athens and Sparta. His history invites reflection today because it is topical. His theme is the effect of war on the new world order which followed the Greek victory over Persia. It is also sharply relevant because Thucydides himself displayed a very modern interest in the technology of war, ranging from ways of prosecuting sieges to innovations in ship design. He combined this technical interest, moreover, with a less fashionable moral vision.

The issue which drove Athens and Sparta to war had to do with the dependence of most Greek cities on imported grain, and the consequent need to keep safe the trading routes. Athens was seen to seek mastery of the sea, and so to threaten cities. Under challenge, the Athenians fought the war in the name of the democracy, the freedom of action and the loyalty to colonies and allies, which had made Athens great.





The course of the war undermined both their enunciated goals and their interests. As war was then fought by destroying the enemies' crops, their dependence on food was intensified. The ravaging armies drove the farmers into the city, and made plagues catastrophic. Both sides tried to encourage factions favorable to themselves in neutral or allied cities. This led to suspicion, revolution, massacre and insecurity throughout the region. It also led to other powers, like Persia, entering the conflict and threatening the stability of the seas.

These changes led in turn to the corruption of rhetoric. Democracy and freedom became identified with particular forms of government. In the intensified factional disputes political analysis was reduced to identifying the speakers' interests rather than seeking truth.

The critical use of intellect was disparaged as corrupting the national resolve. As the city became more insecure, the only sanction that Athens seemed to possess was terror. So, revolts were put down first by finding eloquent reasons to kill and enslave those who took part, and later by dispensing with the eloquence. Acts of brutality, which at first had to be justified, eventually became the accepted standard of conduct. Finally,

Athens was starved into submission and an oligarchy was imposed on it.

**I**N SUMMARY, this is Thucydides' story of the war. It provokes many reflections on the Gulf War and the new world order. It also raises questions about the morality of war. The moral arguments made for and against the Gulf War correctly tried to weigh the consequences as well as the causes of the war. But Thucydides' account shows that the calculus of consequences is much more complex than is usually accepted.

The Peloponnesian War produced what we could describe as a predictable series of unpredictable circumstances. The storms, plague and series of massacres, revolutions and changing alliances in Greece could not have been predicted in detail, any more than could the Kurdish revolt, the revenge of Saddam Hussein and the sufferings of the Palestinians before the Gulf War. But these are the stuff of war, and needed to be weighed against whatever good outcome can be anticipated. Most critics who favoured the war took the short view of consequences, limiting their attention to what was concretely predictable.

The corruption of rhetoric in Athens, and the consequent damage even to Athenian self-interest, also bear reflection. There, phrases like 'democracy and freedom' and 'national strength' became identified with arsenals and institutions rather than values, and any uncomfortable search for truth was excluded. Political brutality and economic rationalism became the only accepted currency of debate, with the result that economic rationality and political realism were eventually also lost. The coverage of the Gulf War in Australia pointed sufficiently to these dangers. But the extent to which brutal political language leads naturally to brutal economic language, and thereby to national impoverishment, has yet to be measured.

The international order which resulted from the Peloponnesian War was characterised by fragmentation and fear. As alliances changed and weakened, smaller groups in regions and cities asserted and enforced their own independent interests. The result was consistently bloody civil strife in which larger cities sought their own interests by backing one of the factions whose ideology was congenial to them. These are the patterns which alarm observers of Eastern Europe. They are also the patterns of civil struggles in countries like El Salvador and Cambodia. The test of any new world order will be the way in which these patterns can be reshaped.

But, of course, historical reflection illuminates differences as well as similarities. The nations allied against Iraq have been constrained by popular opinion to limit the use of war and to help some groups in Iraq. This humanitarian imperative was less marked in the Greek war.

Both wars produced refugees. In Greece, mother cities and allies felt obliged to accept kinspeople affected by war. All the signs of the coming new order, such as the European Union, suggest that the boundaries will be the more tightly policed to exclude the victims of the new order.

If the standpoint from which we analyse the new world order is bare human dignity, this history suggests neither that war will further it nor that governments can be trusted to seek it, even for their own self-interest. ■

**Andrew Hamilton SJ** teaches at the United Faculty of Theology, Parkville, Victoria.



## May Day manifesto

**T**HAT POPE JOHN PAUL II chose May Day to promulgate his latest encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, will have been no coincidence. What better occasion, incidentally also the memorial of St Joseph the Worker, to mark not just the hundredth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*—'On the condition of the working classes'—but also the collapse of Marxism in Eastern Europe.

In his 114 page global balance sheet, John Paul finds himself no more at ease with what he sees in the troubled world than did his predecessor with the state of European and North American society at the end of the last century.

His condemnation of communism is emphatic, as was Leo's—and Leo was criticising an ideology which in 1891 had yet to be put into practice. Leo had predicted that the Marxist state would upset all classes, and 'close behind would come hard and hateful servitude for the citizens'. He could not have called it better, according to John Paul, for whom the 'violation of the rights of the workers' (coupled with the survival of their Christian convictions) was the decisive factor behind the revolutions of 1989.

However the bankruptcy of the 'collectivist' system does not, in the pope's eyes, mean that capitalism wins. Indeed, at its worst, what he prefers to call the 'free economy', with its corollary, consumerism, 'agrees with Marxism, in the sense that it totally reduces man [*sic*] to the sphere of economics and the satisfaction of material needs.'

In his 1981 encyclical on 'human work', *Laborem Exercens*, the pope expressed the hope that with improved conditions 'workers will not only *have* more, but above all *be* more'. He observes now that consumerism sacrifices the being to the having. Just as Leo found workers 'isolated and helpless, betrayed to the inhumanity of employers and the unbridled greed of competitors', John Paul finds whole Third World nations victims of capitalistic 'ruthlessness in no way inferior to the darkest moments of the first

phases of industrialisation'. The pope demands a new world system, a willingness on the part of the First World to give up some of its wealth, to disarm, and thereby help the rest of the world to help itself. Western nations, according to John Paul, should adopt the guise of the altruistic capitalist, sharing know-how and easing debt payments. The West, he affirms, also has an obligation to help Eastern Europe economically and morally. If it fails to do enough, chaos and violence could be the result.

The free market wins the pope's approval as the most efficient way to run an economy, but with reservations. He views profit as an indicator of good management, but not the sole purpose of business. That purpose is found principally 'in its existence as a community of persons'. Following Leo's teaching, John Paul says yes to private property, so long as its owners remember their primary duty to the common good and ensure that the dignity of work and workers is upheld.

Leo's sentiments are also echoed in the importance attributed to trade unions in *Centesimus Annus*. John Paul shares Leo's belief that such associations can and should do more for workers in the West and internationally than the state, provided that they do not fall under Marxist influence.

Papal wariness of the state is nowhere more clearly aired than in John Paul's attack on the welfare state which, he claims, 'leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase in public agencies'. Yet he underlines the need for unemployment benefits, family assistance and other government aid for the disadvantaged, because it is the state's duty 'to protect the weak.'

*Centesimus Annus* is hardly a ringing endorsement of the West. But according to episcopal sources in Rome, it should be viewed not as anti-Western but as 'a means of reconciliation, or rather clarification, between the teaching of the church and the West'. ■

— Damien Simonis



CUTTING ROOM

## Cholera threat

Latin American countries are enduring what some fear might become the biggest cholera epidemic in history. The disease, which has now infected the main waterways in Peru, Ecuador and Columbia, is spreading north to Central America.

In Peru, where an estimated 1000 have died, with another 50,000 infected, the cholera resurgence was the result of years of malnutrition caused by poor economic conditions, said a Peruvian bishop on a visit to Rome. Bishop José Dammert of Cajamarca, president of the Peruvian bishops' conference, told the press that after 20 years of economic crisis, the Peruvian government was no longer able to develop the required health infrastructures: its budget went on paying state employees and servicing the 22 billion dollar national debt contracted over the past 30 years. 'All possible income goes to pay off the interest,' he said, 'and still the government cannot meet its payments.'

—The Tablet

## Peter's penury

Raising money to cover the Holy See's huge operating budget deficit will 'just take a little more effort,' says the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand.

Redemptorist Bishop George Yod Phimphisan of Udon Thani spoke following a two-day March meeting of presidents of the world's 109 bishops' conferences. The meeting was discussing ways of supporting the Holy See's activities.

'It came as no surprise to any of us that the Holy See needs help from all the churches,' the bishop said. He quoted a saying which circulated during the meeting: 'You're never too poor to give, and never too rich to receive.'

— Asia Focus



## In his sights

From Clive Keeley

I was particularly pleased with *Eureka Street* vol. 1 no. 3, which carried two illustrations of Colt's M16, one of a Winchester 92, plus a photo of a couple of gents with .38s who clearly know how to handle themselves.

However, there was one glaring error I feel duty bound to point out. Mark Skulley states that the Phantom is the owner of a couple of .45 revolvers. Kit Walker's grandfather may have been a revolver man, but my Phantom has always carried a pair of Colt M1911 semi-automatic pistols. Chambered for .45ACP. John Browning's classic design is the fighting handgun all others must measure up to, and is the clear choice of professionals who tend to find themselves involved in 'serious social intercourse'.

Perhaps I've made too much of a small slip. Still, *Eureka Street* will have to avoid such errors if it is to take sales from *Shooting Times* and *American Handgunner*.

**Clive Keeley**  
S & W addict,  
Winchester owner,  
admirer of Colts in general.  
Lesmurdie, WA

*Eureka Street* welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and letters may be edited. All letters must be signed, with the writer's name and address clearly written. (A box number is not sufficient.) Phone numbers should be provided so that letters can be verified.

## Our right foot

From Ernest Pennell

Some years ago I could prove that Roman Catholics were either misguided twits or were cunning people leading the former by the nose. I then became very friendly with a Christian Brother and finished up working for nothing in a Catholic technical school.

Then, by another set of circumstances I found myself making toys for St Vincent de Paul, and now I do all the maintenance at one of their sheltered workshops and find that these left footers are quite nice people. You also publish a jolly good magazine. I don't know how long you will be able to, but please keep it up.

**Ernest Pennell**  
Mt Martha, Victoria.

## Point taken

From Laurie Gardiner

Congratulations on *Eureka Street*. The features successfully discuss a series of issues of current interest, each of which raise questions of what the responsible citizen might consider as either moral problems or matters of social importance. The invitation to the reader is to respond to the discussion by reflecting on what is being neglected in the ordinary discussion of these subjects.

The press has assumed a role as arbiter which is not matched by how it goes about its business. For this reader it will be interesting to see how the serious questions for discussion will be continued in *Eureka Street*. Ideally, readers' commentaries and articles putting a different perspective might be hoped for. There is also the impact of the magazine in encouraging further discussion, e.g. the press issue was raised by Radio National's *Insights* program.

**Laurie Gardiner**  
Port Melbourne, Victoria.

**Laurie Gardiner, former lecturer in history at Melbourne University, died in April. *Eureka Street* joins the many who mourn him and remember him as a friend and mentor.**

## War's toll

The Gulf War has cast a shadow on the *haj*, the annual religious pilgrimage made by many Muslims to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. For the first time in years, the *haj* ministry has received less than half the expected number of applications from Islamic countries for the pilgrimage.

At the same time, the *hajjis* (pilgrims to Mecca) may have to share Saudi Arabia's war costs by paying \$US60 each to the Saudi Government as a war surcharge. According to the Karachi English daily *Dawn*, the Saudi government has informed the Pakistani government that every *hajji* will have to pay this amount on arrival at air or seaports.

The Pakistani government will

also be required to pay an additional \$US3.6 million to the Saudi government. Muslim religious leaders condemned the Saudi government for imposing the tax surcharge.

—Asia Focus

## Sit-in condemned

The presidium of the Polish trade union movement, Solidarity, condemned a sit-in at a Carmelite church in the town of Przemysl, which is due to be returned to the Eastern-rite Ukrainian Catholics to whom it originally belonged. A group of Polish activists are occupying the church, so that when the new Eastern-rite Bishop of Przemysl was installed last month the ceremony had to take place in the Latin-rite cathedral. The dispute over

the church is exacerbating Polish Ukrainian tensions on both sides of the border, since each state has a sizeable ethnic minority belonging to the other. According to Solidarity's leaders, the 'Polish sitters-in' are behaving in a manner 'incompatible with Solidarity tradition, and with its openness to people of different nationalities and religions. It is a denial of the "Solidarity spirit", which provided the basis for the message to the working people of Eastern Europe adopted during the first national congress of Solidarity' in 1981, the presidium said.

—The Tablet

See also 'A Delicate Balance', p.30



## Blood, sweat and fears

*Australia now has its longest-serving federal Labor government. Under Bob Hawke, the ALP has managed to contain the conflict between left and right that has split the party in the past. But a new, and even more damaging, conflict has emerged. **Stuart Macintyre** and **Paul Rodan** ask whether Labor has forfeited the support of its traditional constituency.*

**I**T SOMEHOW FITS the present condition of the Labor Party that it cannot even decide when it began. Up in Queensland there was the gathering of the Australian Labor Federation at the end of the 1890 that worked out a scheme for political representation. New South Wales nominates the creation of the first Labor Electoral League in March, 1891, prefiguring the election of 35 Labor candidates there three months later. South Australians can point to the establishment of their United Labor Party in January 1890, and it entered the parliament there in May; while the Victorians held their festival in April to commemorate the centenary of the election of their first Labor member.

The starting point could be pushed backwards or forwards. We could go back as far as 1859, to the election of the Melbourne stonemason Charles Jardine Don, who claimed to be the first trade unionist elected to any legislature in the British Empire. Or, arguably, we might wait until the early years of the twentieth century when the creation of the Commonwealth caused the various colonial labour parties to come together as the Australian Labor Party.

The common feature of the decisions taken separately in 1890 and 1891 was that the organised labour movement turned to parliament to pursue objectives that it could not achieve by other means. Put simply, the unions were no longer able to protect their members' living standards by industrial bargaining; nor could the established framework of economic and political arrangements meet popular aspirations. The workers turned to the state to remake social conditions.

The circumstances in which they did so were eerily similar to our own. A period of sustained economic growth based on commodity exports had tilted into speculative excess marked by fraud and corruption. A

downturn in world prices and a contraction of foreign investment triggered a deep depression with widespread business failure and severe unemployment. Employers sought to restore profitability through wage cuts and changes to work practices. Their call for enterprise bargaining (under the slogan 'freedom of contract') was met by the insistence of the unions on the rights of labour.

Union coverage then was much thinner than it is today, and few workgroups were able to withstand the employers. But among the strongest of them (the shearers, miners and maritime workers) working in key industries (wool, power and transport) there were violent confrontations in 1890 and 1891, as union pickets fought to keep out strikebreakers. In every one of these confrontations the colonial governments came down on the side of the employers. Armed police and military forces cleared the wharves and pitheads, and broke up the shearers' camps.

The shock of these events was profound. William Lane's novel *The Working Man's Paradise*, written in the heat of the battle, sees the conjunction of bosses and state power as presaging a fall as tragic and absolute as that related by Milton. The Edenic innocence of the New World is defiled by the Old World evils of greed, poverty and ideology. For him there was no other recourse than starting again in his new Australia on the other side of the Pacific. For the young Henry Lawson, also, the loss is similar:

*And now that we have made the land  
A garden full of promise,  
Old greed must crook his dirty hand  
And come to take it from us*

—though his response is more intransigent:





*The workers turned to the state to remake social conditions. The circumstances were eerily similar to our own ... economic growth based on commodity exports had tilted into speculative excess marked by fraud and corruption. A downturn in world prices and a contraction of foreign investment triggered a deep depression. Employers sought to restore profitability through wage cuts and changes to work practices. Their call for enterprise bargaining (under the slogan 'freedom of contract') was met by insistence on the rights of labour.*

*We'll make the tyrants feel the sting  
Of those that they would throttle;  
They needn't say the fault is ours  
If blood should stain the wattle.*

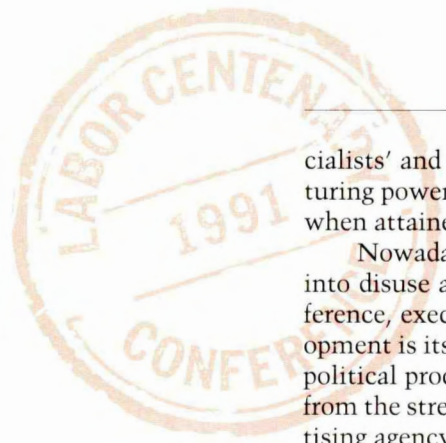
Set against these predictions, the outcome seems prosaic. The workers took up pens, not arms, and marched to the hustings. Their election platform, moreover, consisted of a list of bread-and-butter concerns (protection for trade unions, secure employment, the eight-hour day, a fair wage, pensions for the elderly) along with political and economic devices (democratic reforms, progressive taxation, immigration restriction, industrial arbitration) designed to facilitate their achievement. The judgement is often quoted of the visiting French sociologist Albert Méтин, who pronounced in 1901 that the platform of the Australian Labor Party amounted to socialism without doctrines. To clinch the matter, he quoted the response of an apocryphal worker to his question 'What is your program?' as 'My program! Ten bob a day.'

**M**ÉTIN COULDN'T TELL when his leg was being pulled. There was not an absence of doctrine in the early Labor Party but a superfluity—advanced liberals, radical nationalists, protectionists and free traders, land reformers, credit theorists, religious activists and socialists of almost as many varieties as Heinz soup. All struggled to embed their ideas in the new political force.

In the end, however (and the end was apparent by 1923 when V.G. Childe published his definitive critique of *How Labour Governs*), the politics of the Labor Party

were constrained by two crucial mechanisms. First, its structure. The Party was constituted by the massed ranks of affiliated trade unions and a far more limited number of branch activists. While sometimes deeply critical of the Party, the unions—up to now—have remained imbricated into its activity through the state institutionalisation of industrial relations. While sometimes straining against its industrial base, the party—up to now—has remained finally answerable to it. This symbiotic relationship has been the persistent dynamic of Labor's history. Second, its parliamentarism. Ever since 1891 the ALP has remained committed to a particular form of political activity, elections, and has resisted others. Given the character of the Australian electorate and electoral system, this has entailed an appeal beyond the membership of the labour movement itself to those additional voters whose support is required to win office.

At first this was done reluctantly and with restrictions. The selection of candidates for public office by rank and file ballot; the sovereignty of conference in determining the party platform; the pledge to follow the platform that every endorsed candidate had to sign; the control of parliamentary leaders by caucus, and caucus election of ministers—these were rules meant to safeguard the party against the temptations of opportunism and the ambitions of parliamentary leaders. Even by 1923 it was apparent that this machinery was deficient, and Childe lamented the 'state of soulless mechanism which seems to come over all Labour activities in the hour of their apparent triumph'. He described the Labor Party as a force that had started 'with a band of inspired So-



## A question of dignity

cialists' and 'degenerated into a vast machine for capturing power, but did not know how to use that power when attained except for the profit of individuals'.

Nowadays, such of the devices that have not fallen into disuse are circumvented by the operation of conference, executive, caucus and leaders. But that development is itself a response to the transformation of the political process into something irretrievably removed from the street corner and public platform to the advertising agency and the television studio.

There is much in the early history of the Labor Party that is unpalatable. Prominent in its platform was the White Australia Policy. It was repressively monocultural in its social policies and committed to a sexual division of labour that enshrined the privileges of the male breadwinner. It had careerists with egos as large and consciences as small as those who use it today. It has a bad record of intolerance of activists on its left. Yet we do not have to mythologise the past to feel a sense of loss as we compare what was begun with what eventuated.

**T**HE UNITY OF LABOR IS THE HOPE OF THE WORLD'. For all its equivocations and all its flaws, the creation of the Labor Party expressed a belief in a new social order. You can see those redemptive hopes in the iconography of the early movement—trade union banners where labourers stand tall and proud; where the sun rises on homes free from want; where peoples of different nations meet in friendship. The pioneers of the labour movement expected the elimination of exploitation in the workplace to allow elimination of exploitation in other spheres of social life and a full flowering of humanity.

That expectation of unfolding progress seems naive to us today, habituated as we are to the intractability of discontents and sceptical of all emancipatory panaceas. For over a century idealists have spent their energies in the Labor Party with precious little to show for it. The past decade of Labor in office suggests the imminent exhaustion of its last potential for social amelioration. Yet the Labor Party has undergone major setbacks before. It split in World War I and was out of national office for a decade. In the great depression of the 1930s it failed to protect workers' living standards, split again and was once more banished to the wilderness. It was again ravaged by the Cold War of the early 1950s.

After each of these disasters Labor reformed and recovered. The task in the next few years will be to undertake a similar regeneration. This cannot be a return to an idealised past, for there is no model Labor Party to rebuild. We shall need new structures and new methods. But as long as the majority of Australians labour for a living, and suffer the discontents this entails, there will be a need for a labour movement. ■

**Stuart Macintyre** teaches history at the University of Melbourne. His most recent book is *A Colonial Liberalism: The Lost World of Three Victorian Visionaries*.

**T**HERE I WAS AT 50, an age at which a man expects to have attained some dignity and grace, being dragged along the pavement in Flinders Street by two large policemen. Television cameras captured the event and friends rang up to voice their consternation, bewilderment or out-and-out glee as my predicament was relayed to the world on the Channel Seven news.

Why, they asked, was I spending my off-duty hours outside a rival newspaper, standing with a group of people who were waving placards and sitting down in front of the loading bay doors, only to be dragged away by the police as laden trucks made a frenzied dash for Flinders Street through a hooting, jeering crowd? It just wasn't dignified. I could only agree. It was too difficult to explain that dignity was really what it was all about.

The day before, 16 Melbourne journalists from Rupert Murdoch's *Herald-Sun* newspapers were having breakfast or were still asleep when a courier tapped on their doors and handed over a letter that told them they had been made redundant. At what used to be the journalists' workplace, security guards checked everybody entering the building against a list of names. Those who had received the letters, and another four of their colleagues who got the word from the security guards, had their office passes confiscated immediately, were escorted to their desks to collect their belongings and then shepherded out of the building that 24 hours earlier had housed their careers, hopes and loyalty. One tried to call his wife; the telephone was snatched out of his hand by a security guard.

The journalists' union, the Australian Journalists Association, had earlier accepted that after 50 journalists had volunteered for redundancy a further 20 would lose their jobs. But the union had persuaded the company to drop its callous plan of informing the unlucky workers by posting a list on a notice board. Instead, the company agreed to tell them, man to man, or man to woman, in a personal chat with the editor-in-chief. Who knows, he might even thank them for past loyalty, for staying back without overtime to get vital stories into the paper, or for dragging themselves in when they were





ill because a task was incomplete. He might even say: 'Sorry, mate' and shake their hands.

But he did none of those things. During the night the company decided to jettison the workers with an early morning courier letter-bomb raid (as the chief of staff of the *Sunday Sun* called it later that day, as he resigned from his position in disgust). And so, from being a member of what some of us used to call a profession, I became somebody whose colleagues could be sacked with just three taps on the front door from jobs in which they had invested their talent, loyalty and long hours and by doing so had sometimes wrecked their social life, marriages and health. This was no isolated instance; the action was taken with the full knowledge of the executives who controlled more than 60 per cent of Australia's newspapers. It had set a new low for how journalists should be seen by their employer, by the public and by themselves.

I walked the picket line for hours through the night, sat in the way of trucks, was dragged, pushed and shoved by the police—for all the reasons the AJA said I should, and particularly to protest at the sacking of the union's *Herald-Sun* house committee chairman, David Glanz, whose crime was that he had been elected by his mates

to represent them in negotiations with management. But, as the anti-union campaigners always say, I also had a hidden agenda. I was there to try to tell the boss (*any* boss) that I did not approve of people being sacked by couriers and security staff. I wanted employers to see that if things get so bad that some of us have to go, we should be treated with humanity and understanding.

**A** LOT OF JOURNALISM is about feelings and hopes and personal sagas. It often catalogues actions as newsworthy because they highlight the innate dignity and worth of individual human beings. I have a bit of skin missing from my left elbow, four finger-shaped bruises fading from my right bicep and a small scar on my left index finger to remind me that I did my bit to oppose News Limited's callous actions and to keep up that journalistic tradition; and to remind me that I helped to claw back a little bit of personal dignity for all workers. ■

**Patrick Hayes** is an *Age* journalist and a member of the AJA's federal council and Victoria branch committee.

**A**S IT ENTERS ITS SECOND CENTURY, the ALP is in a state of change that is possibly the most significant in its history. This does not mean that Labor was traditionally socialist until Hawke and Keating took over. The evidence suggests that the party has been occasionally socialist in thought, less often socialist in word and even less often socialist in deed. Even with rubbery definitions, it is virtually impossible to equate Labor with socialism. But it is possible to identify key elements of a Labor tradition, and to conclude that the ALP, under Hawke, has departed substantially from them, in kind and not just in degree. Not surprisingly, these elements are those which have most distinguished Labor from its conservative opponents.

Central to the Labor tradition has been distrust of the market as a mechanism for resource allocation. This is hardly surprising given the partial origins of the ALP in the failed strikes of the 1890s—hard evidence then that the market favours the strong over the weak. Although the market may be an adequate mechanism for the preservation of the status quo, Labor's existence was based on a conviction that the existing distribution of wealth needed to be challenged.

Labor governments from Watson to Whitlam may have struggled to achieve much in terms of the redistribution, but the key point is that they never lost sight of the goal, and never failed to enunciate it. This adherence distinguished them from conservative opponents committed to the defence of the forces of privilege. Related was Labor's commitment to a vigorous and well funded public sector as a means of helping achieve the party's ends. Again, a distrust of the market and of 'free' enterprise constitutes a common thread. Labor, from Watson to Whitlam was a moral critic of capitalism, however muted and disguised that criticism may have been on occasions.

It would take a fertile imagination to depict the Hawke government as a moral critic of capitalism. The ALP under Hawke has embraced the free market and scorned the public sector with a zest that almost challenges the rationale for a continuing Labor existence. As a party with a rationalist tradition, the ALP is entitled, in fact obliged to weigh the evidence in the free market/interventionist debate. If proof were forthcoming that the market constituted the best means of achieving Labor's goals for a fairer society, then so be it. But, no such evidence has been provided. Indeed, experience from other western countries should have given pause for thought to a government allegedly driven by a concern for the less well-off in society.

When pressed on this point, apologists sometimes instance the collapse of the Soviet satellites as some sort of justification for the ALP's disillusionment with the public sector and its embrace of deregulation. The implication that our choice is limited to the free mar-

## Just a glimmer on the hill

ket model or East European communism is patently silly and does nothing to assist the economic debate.

A less spurious, and hence more worrying argument in defence of the Hawke government is one which depicts governments as passive, reactive rather than proactive. Governments are limited by constraints of public opinion, the boundaries of what is economically possible, media acceptance and so on. These are perfectly plausible arguments—for a conservative government. Labor parties, by definition, cannot be so intimidated. It is their historic role to be at the forefront of ideas, challenging the dicta of those whose sole aim is to defend existing privilege. Labor parties must place a high priority on changing public opinion, not merely react to an agenda dictated by Labor's enemies.

The propagation of fundamentally challenging ideas and the criticism of the existing distribution of wealth and power, is an inherent part of the Labor tradition. A Labor party cannot 'squib' the (admittedly difficult) task of communicating its basic message to the electorate. In the terms employed by Dean Jaensch (*The Hawke-Keating Hijack*), the ALP must be an 'expansive' party rather than a 'responsive' one, represent its constituency rather than trying to be all things to all people. That has been, to now, a key distinguishing feature of Labor, and it abandons this at the cost of its own rationale. It appears to have been replaced by the politics of the opinion poll and consensus. A Labor Party that mostly responds to public opinion rather than one that leads and forms it is not worthy of the name. The tragedy is that when (rarely) this government has influenced public opinion, it has been in the direction of legitimising its opponent's agenda—deregulation.

A lack of intellectual content has been a key feature of this most formally qualified of ALP governments. The virtues of the market have been advanced with fundamentalist passion rather than analytical rigour, while opponents have been derided as clinging to shibboleths. Media laws, for example, appear to have been devised with a view, inter alia, to 'getting' Fairfax (*The Independent Monthly*, March 1991)—not much conceptual depth there, but a lot of the politics of personality. In the same vein, the Treasurer's penchant for personal abuse of his coalition opponents can be seen, not as mere parliamentary indiscipline or New South





Photo: David Bartho, *Sydney Morning Herald*



Photo: *The Age*



Photo: *The Age*

Wales right-wing etiquette, but as a smokescreen to cover the common economic philosophy shared by Labor and the Opposition.

To be sure, the Hawke government has drawn the line, to date, at total deregulation of the industrial relations system, for power-politics reasons that are self-evident. But this again highlights the lack of intellectual consistency in this government, and will make impossible the task of Labor in opposition when responding to the labour market deregulation program of Minister Howard. He will claim that his policies are merely a logical and consistent application of what Hawke and Keating started. The same could be said in tertiary education, where it will be impossible to assert that Australians prepared to pay the full fee are not as entitled to a place as those from overseas.

It is worth stressing that while Labor has moved to accommodate the new right, there has been no concession from the other side. Eight years of wage restraint and relative industrial peace have done nothing to stem the flood of union-bashing. A massive increase in profit share over wages (a curious 'achievement' for a Labor government) has not silenced the industrial primitives who appear set on inflicting on us the labour market system of our regional neighbours. Progress in award restructuring is seldom highlighted—by media or opposition—while problem areas such as the waterfront are hammered ad nauseam. Thanks to conservative and media propaganda, unions are more unpopular than ever in the public mind—after eight years of restraint and cooperation!

**I**T REMAINS A MYSTERY as to whether the government's decision makers genuinely believe new-right economic dogma or whether, mindful of the Whitlam experience, they have calculated the cost of staying in power, and have struck their deal with the devil accordingly. If the former is the case then it says little for the intellectual calibre of the decision-makers and not much for the ability of the left to mount an effective case, both inside and outside the Labor Party. To be fair, a concentration of media ownership (aided by the Hawke government) has not assisted those wishing to propound an alternative economic view.

If the second interpretation is true, that post-Whitlam Labor can only govern by pandering to media moguls, attacking the public sector and generally

reversing ALP policies that displease powerful interests, then what on earth is the rationale for the party? Are fears of media attacks and a strike of capital destined to cripple every Labor government from now on? Is Labor limited to just 'managing the system' rather than articulating an alternative vision of society? Is it not realised that protection of the Labor constituency involves, by definition, confrontation with powerful interests?

To compound its sins of substance, Hawke Labor has erred grievously in style. Even if one conceded that all of the government's economic measures were absolutely necessary and unavoidable, there is no excuse for the style and rhetoric of this government—for the public hobnobbing and back-slapping with business characters who, far from being the saviours as depicted by a naive Prime Minister, have done more to ruin the economy than any unionist. Cutbacks in the public sector and in real wages, even if absolutely necessary (a moot point) should be communicated in a measured way, not proclaimed with Liberal-like glee (as in 'We've cut back more than you did.'). Most pathetic has been the apparent belief that calling the American president by his first name (a gauche breach of protocol) somehow changes the realities of international politics. Try telling the farmers!

At the time of writing, it seems more likely than not that Labor will lose the next election and return to opposition, with a leadership largely determined by the survival rate of aspirants in marginal seats. Opposition does provide an opportunity for introspection and reappraisal and this must be grasped. The party needs to assess what it stands for—whether it is basically content with the capitalist system with its gross inequities, and merely wants to manage that system, or whether it wishes to articulate a vision of a more just society in which, as much as possible, resources are reallocated to those most in need. The party needs to examine its new-found faith in market solutions and assess how, if at all, this fits into a Labor rationale. And if the party ultimately concludes that it is neither necessary nor possible to advance a different vision of society, then we will no longer have the Labor Party as we have known it. The hill will still be there, but the light will have gone out. ■

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## Minding the closed shop

**T**HE CLOSED SHOP HAS LONG BEEN one of the principal tenets of trade unionism. Some of the bitter industrial struggles fought in Australia at the turn of the century—disputes that led to our system of compulsory arbitration—were over the issue of compulsory unionism. And now, as the industrial-relations debate focuses on enterprise bargaining, workplace practices such as the closed shop are again under the spotlight. The federal opposition's spokesperson on industrial relations, John Howard, wants a less regulated labour market and has promised to outlaw the closed shop if a coalition government is returned. In NSW, the issue of compulsory unionism is also in the headlines. Indeed, one of the main reasons the Greiner government called an early election was that the upper house had rejected its Voluntary Unionism Bill.

This bill had been part of the original legislation on enterprise bargaining, but after repeated rejection of that legislation by the opposition it was split and introduced as separate bills. The first of these, passed last year as the Enterprise Agreements Act, allows enterprises covered by state awards to reach agreements on their own terms of employment. The agreements would be referred to the Industrial Commission, supplanting the provisions of state awards previously covering each enterprise. Such agreements may be made between an employer and unions representing the employees,

or between an employer and a works committee formed by the employees. An agreement must be approved in a secret ballot by at least 65 per cent of the employees whom it will cover. The Voluntary Unionism Bill was meant to complement this act. Its title is something of a misnomer, and demonstrates the ambiguity of the closed shop: in fact, the bill would legalise the closed shop for the first time in Australia.

The main argument used by supporters of the closed shop is the 'free-rider' issue. Is it fair, they argue, that

workers should receive the benefits that unionism provides without contributing to that effort either financially or morally? It is a strong argument, with which even many employers would secretly sympathise. Unionism relies on collective strength, so measures such as the closed shop are justified because they benefit all members in the long run. Yet compulsion sits uncomfortably with most people. Is it right to compel people to join something they may not believe in? Some countries have attempted to reconcile the free-rider problem with individual freedom by allowing conscientious objectors to opt out of union membership, on condition that they pay the equivalent of their union dues to a charity of their choice.

Arguments against the closed shop often have a hidden agenda; the real goal is the weakening of trade unions, if not their complete destruction. The arguments, however, are nearly always couched in mystical tones. John Stone put it this way in the *Australian Financial Review*: 'Men and women, press-ganged into union membership, are too timid to resist the abuses of power to which they are then committed in its name, [and they] are spiritually diminished in that process, as serfs are everywhere.' Ironically, governments that have called for an end to compulsory unionism because it is an infringement of individual freedom have not seen a problem in supporting conscription to the armed forces. Arguments and legislation against the closed shop are often ways of scoring points against unions and the labour movement generally. But if we leave the philosophical arguments aside and look at the history of the closed shop, a different picture emerges.

The closed shop arose due to union pressure at the turn of the century, and it grew principally in industries that were prone to casualisation, such as stevedoring or construction. The seasonal and erratic nature of such work allowed employers to hire labour through a kind of spot-auction market. The closed shop allowed unions to restrict the labour supply and exercise greater discipline over their members. This gave workers in these industries a better chance of controlling the erratic

*Arguments against the closed shop often have a hidden agenda; the real goal is the weakening of trade unions, if not their complete destruction*



nature of their occupations, to win higher wages and to build solidarity for future struggles.

The experience of economic growth, however, led many employers to realise that the closed shop also helped effective management. It standardised industrial relations procedures, helping day-to-day decision-making in the workplace. Management support of the closed shop suggested to unions that they were seen as a legitimate party by management, which often led to more responsible union attitudes. Survey evidence indicates that many closed-shop arrangements are the result of union-management agreements—many managers pay lip service to the ideal of voluntary unionism, but would not be prepared to end the closed shop in their own workplace.

Indeed, some may even argue that a closed shop is a necessary evil if enterprise bargaining is to operate successfully. By reducing the number of unions present in the workplace, the closed shop can help the bargaining process through increasing the stability of any agreement. One suspects that this is the main reason why the Greiner legislation, which is primarily aimed at removing preference to unionists clauses in awards, would actually legally enshrine the closed shop in NSW. Preference clauses, which are prescribed in 80 per cent of NSW awards and 27 per cent of federal awards, discriminate in favour of union members in terms of hiring, redundancy, promotion and the taking of leave. There is evidence to suggest that these clauses may lead to *de facto* closed shops in some industries and occupations.

The proposed legislation allows closed shop arrangements to exist in workplaces where the employer has consented and at least 65 per cent of the employees directly affected have voted in favour in a secret ballot. This procedure must be repeated every four years. There is unlikely to be a major employer backlash on the issue, though there are signs that some employers may take the opportunity to attack the legitimacy of unions in their workplace. This is due more to present economic conditions than to a belief that the closed shop is a barrier to greater efficiency and productivity. In times of economic growth and stability, management has used the closed shop to its own advantage. Pragmatic managers are unlikely to risk losing good-

will and co-operation in the long term by campaigning against the closed shop. In the short term, they realise it will be a useful tool when the economic conditions change once again.

Ironically, the biggest danger of the closed shop may be to unions themselves. In an era when union membership is in decline, the closed shop may appear to be one solution to the problem. But there is substantial

evidence that the closed shop leads to less militant and less effective unions, to a poorer provision of services to union members and to complacency among union officials. Union officials secure in the knowledge that they have no membership problems make less effort to visit their constituents, less effort to ensure that they can all read English and less effort to find out what their members want. In many ways, what management likes about the closed shop is precisely the fact that it can have this effect on unions.

It is estimated that a quarter of union members in Australia have been compelled to join against their will. In other words, if it were not for the closed shop these people would not have joined their present union. For the unions, this is a sobering statistic. If legislation to ban the closed shop were passed at a federal level, the proportion of the workforce who are union members could drop substantially.

Unions need to *demonstrate* to their members that belonging to the union is important. This is not to say that the closed shop is not a valid union goal, for the free-rider issue will always be with us. But a ban on the closed shop may also be the spur needed to make Australia's union movement more sensitive to the needs of its rank-and-file. A ban could affect union membership initially, but ultimately it may provide a more solid basis for unionism in Australia's future. ■

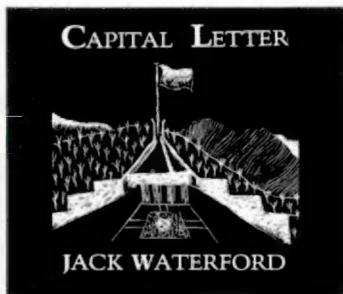
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*The union buried the bosses' dead, too.*

*Ironically, governments that have called for an end to compulsory unionism because it is an infringement of individual freedom have not seen a problem in supporting conscription to the armed forces.*





## Matters beyond measure

*If you can't count it, it doesn't count*—A Commonwealth public service permanent head, objecting to a suggestion that it is not always easy to plot fairness on graphs and bar charts.

**W**HEN LABOR CAME TO OFFICE in 1972, it was highly suspicious of the federal public service. After 23 years of conservative government, it suspected that public servants might not want to do its will. It was wrong. Whatever problems the Whitlam government had did not flow from bureaucratic resistance. Nor did a service somewhat revitalised by the Whitlam years have much trouble adapting to the more austere style of Malcolm Fraser, or to that of Bob Hawke. Most criticisms of the public service were managerial ones: that it was resistant to outsiders and fresh ideas, and that its hierarchies and accounting systems were out of date.

A decade of reviews, reorganisations and reforms has changed that. A public service balance sheet now tells one a lot more about what is going on, and senior public servants are used to continual scrutiny of their programs. But something is wrong. Managerialism has stripped administration of the notion of *service*—the ideal of advancing the public interest has been lost in all the flow charts and strategy statements. The public service is slowly becoming just another job, without the feeling of worth it once enjoyed. This is a considerable loss, since the service can never hope to compete with the material rewards that the best of the private sector can offer.

One sign of discontent is that, until the recession bit, scores of officers were leaving departments such as Treasury to work for banks and other financial institutions. Why were they going? In some cases, they were being paid several times what they had earned in the public service. But the salary disparities had always been there, without the same sort of rush to quit the public payroll. Nor can they have felt that they lacked power and responsibility. It would be hard to think of a time when senior public servants have had more power.

A few years ago, the Commonwealth announced that it wanted to get rid of 'dead wood' in the service—people in middling positions who were thought to be blocking the career paths of bright young things below them. But the ideal public servant is not necessarily a highly mobile, ambitious person. There are plenty of public servants who are happy where they are, acquiring expertise and experience, and not necessarily anxious to uproot themselves and their families for something slightly better paid somewhere else. A person who is loyal to the service of the public interest has a reasonable expectation that there is a place for him or her. In the past that expectation has helped to provide a proper

impartiality when dealing with vested interests, and has dispelled fears of a threat to career prospects if one does not exactly suit one's minister.

The winners have been the bright young things. Never sitting in the one job long enough to absorb experience, they have usually moved on by the time their whiz-bang solutions to problems begin to cause problems. In the process, many departments have been doomed to repeat old mistakes. A senior public servant once said at a conference that he was simply an empty vessel into which government policy was poured. His former permanent head boasted at the same conference that he did not think that a significant policy initiative had ever come out of his department.

He was probably right, but he was not typical of the old public service. One of my annual pleasures is reading through the 30-year-old Cabinet and public service documents that are released by the archives on New Year's Day. It is fashionable to decry the Menzies era as a time when nothing much happened and everyone was asleep. But when reading through those old papers I am continually struck by the integrity and openness to change of Menzies and his administrators. My view of some of them, men like Arthur Tange, Fred Wheeler, John Bunting, Ron Mendelshon and Alan Brown, has changed considerably. It is clear that they were respected by their ministers, who usually took their advice. But many public servants of their generation were not particularly in tune with the government of the day. They had entered the service during or soon after the war, and were inspired by a belief that government could and should solve problems. To his credit, Menzies gave rewards for achievement, not for adherence to his views, and able men of different ideas, the Nugget Coombes of this world, flourished under him.

Under the present Government, the economic rationalists have had a dream run, and they have persuaded it to do things that previous governments would never have done. But their bar charts, graphs and other accounting tricks cannot easily be applied to the provision of service to the public. Some outcomes can be measured, but an obsession with measuring them often means that unquantifiable things, like fairness, go out the window. This does not mean that one should not have to front up to expenditure review committees to justify one's programs. That is of the essence of accountability. At the end of the day, however, whether things work does not depend on accounting tricks and slick management techniques. It depends on the calibre of the people in the service, on their commitment, sense of responsibility and idealism. But a decade of change may have knocked the stuffing out of that. ■

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# On the wing without a prayer



*Suddenly an elderly man stood and addressed the players in a trembling voice. 'I've been supporting Fitzroy for 74 years,' he told them, 'For God's sake, don't let us die.' His glasses hid the tears, but the words failed to hide his emotion.—The Age, 10 April 1991.*

**T**HE PASSION FOR Australian rules football is inexplicable to many, even if they are aware of its tradition. But, as Louis Armstrong said when asked to define the blues, if you can't feel it, I can't explain it. The line between footy's believers and its converts is also clear. Consider the two escapees last year from the Barwon prison, near Geelong, who were caught trying to get into the Melbourne Cricket Ground to see a game between Essendon and Collingwood. One barracked for the Dons and the other for the Magpies, and the footy was their first stop. Alas, they didn't get to see much of the game.

Then take a scene at the Sydney Cricket Ground, shortly after the departure of Dr Geoffrey Edelsten as supremo of the Sydney Swans. The Swans had been providing lavish parades, dancing girls and other hoopla as entertainment during the breaks, but a couple of newish Swans supporters were aghast when confronted with the game's traditional half-time entertainment, the Little League. Gazing at 40 small boys slugging it out in oversize jumpers and boots, one fan asked: 'Is that all the entertainment we get?'

To be fair, Sydney only began playing footy in 1982, in the first giant stride towards making Australian rules football a national code and competition. They took over the colours of South Melbourne, established in 1897, and those controlling the team lamely tried to argue they were a continuation of that historic club, when the only real link was that a few old Souths players moved up to Sydney. South Melbourne disappeared, except in the memories of diehard fans who recall the

old days at the Lakeside Oval. The push for a national competition has continued, with the West Coast Eagles and the Brisbane Bears joining in 1987. This year the Adelaide Crows joined what is now called the Australian Football League, and six regular AFL matches will be played in Hobart.

Yet it is not quite a success story. The Swans and the Bears have been flops in states where rugby league is king, while Victorians see the Eagles and the Crows, which come from traditional football states, as being potentially too strong. Some of the 11 clubs based in Victoria are still shaky and the Fitzroy Lions have to raise \$800,000 by the end of the financial year or face extinction. The Melbourne writer and confirmed 'Roy Boy', Barry Dickins, has bemoaned a possible relocation of Fitzroy to Tasmania if the club does indeed hit the fence. Dickins opined that Hobart only has one goal post and no pies.

**B**UT THE OLD DAYS of clubs gamely struggling along and fighting local feuds have gone the way of the dodo and the drop kick. It is only the interstate clubs that have rescued those based in Melbourne, which collectively lost about \$3 million in 1986. The Victorian clubs have since earned about \$1 million each from the \$4 million 'joining fee' paid by each of the interstate clubs. Clubs such as Footscray and Richmond have successfully fought off the forces of footballing Darwinism, while Fitzroy's part in this evolution is still being determined. The struggle is allayed by clubs having 'salary caps' that limit the amount they can pay players to about \$1 million, and by a national draft for selecting players, shared home grounds and the planned scrapping of the under-19s competition and revamping of the reserve grade. But these measures also distance the clubs from their grass roots. Clubs such as Fitzroy have seen the 19th century demographics of their home turf upended as a once unfancy inner-city suburb gets gentrified.

The national competition means that fans can watch more games on television, but the expanded 15-team league has also brought regular byes to the fixtures. A footy follower whose team has the week off is like a dog without a bone to chew on. And with clubs no longer playing each other at least twice a season in an assured sequence of home-and-away games, the once-regular pulse of Saturday afternoon at the footy is now only an irregular beat. The question of rhythm is important because football seasons come in bite-sized pieces: quarters, halves, time-on, games, rounds and finals. Time gives shape to the character of players, teams and clubs, and sustains ancient and new likes and dislikes.

Old-style football had deep roots, stretching from country zones, through junior grades and the rule that sons could play for the same clubs as their fathers. The appeal of mass-televised, franchised sports such as American football is wide, but not necessarily deep—you can buy a Miami Dolphins T-shirt anywhere in the world, but nowhere, apart from Derby in WA's Kimberley region, can you gather at a pub on Christmas Day to play Aussie rules in a man-made mud heap.

The demands of modern football means that its players have to be brisk and more businesslike than in the past. They are familiar through television, but the star players are no longer the old neighbourhood celebrities, and the larrikin whose antics are tolerated because he can play a bit is an endangered species. Footy's push across Australia coincided with the creation of Australia's first national television networks in the 1980s, which brought the promise of big advertising bucks for sports that could be shown in different time zones across the country. Australian rules was largely competing with rugby league—not for spectators but for sponsorship and advertising. The NSW Rugby League is now sponsored by a tobacco company and the AFL by a brewer, while Channel 7 reportedly has a three-year \$35 million deal with the AFL ending in 1993.

Carlton and United Breweries renewed its role as the AFL's major corporate sponsor in December 1990, in a deal thought to be worth more than \$10 million over five years. The Foster's Cup summer competition,

the CUB AFL premiership season, the Foster's state-of-origin matches and the Foster's AFL finals series all feature the sponsor prominently and leave no doubt as to who is giving out the prizes. The chairman of the AFL commission, Ross Oakley, explained: 'With the advent of the Adelaide football club, and Fitzroy playing some games in Tasmania next season, CUB is ideally placed as Australia's leading brewer to extend its involvement.' Now a lot of footy fans drink beer, some almost swim in it, but do they care that CUB is Australia's leading brewer?

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*The contradictions of running a passionate pursuit as a business were summed up by the AFL's Ross Oakley, when he told a newspaper: 'This business is not about selling hamburgers or nuts and bolts. This is selling emotion, selling tradition, selling passion.'*

*It is yet to be seen what you have left over if you sell emotion, tradition and passion.*

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On the weekend of April 11-13, a fan in Melbourne could have watched a game televised live from Perth on Friday night, one-and-a-half hours of highlights from games in Melbourne on Saturday evening and a game live from Brisbane on Sunday. In Perth and Adelaide, home games start early to accommodate east-coast programming, and local followers have to scurry from work on a Friday night or put the Sunday roast on hold if they are to catch the start of these oddly-timed fixtures. Meanwhile, the state football competitions in WA and SA can only stand by, wondering how to combat the glamour, rising attendances and gate receipts, and the higher standards offered by the AFL.

Like Australian cricket, which is bloated by the omnipresent sponsorship of Benson and Hedges and the blanket coverage by Channel Nine, football is mostly reported by hacks who don't

stand in the outer. They often get the free food and drink dished up to sponsors and others in the mushrooming number of corporate 'super boxes'. Football writers have to stay onside with the AFL and club hierarchies, and are generally loathe to bite the hand that feeds them. Mundane matters, such as the cost of a pie and sauce in the outer, get scant coverage.

There is big money in pies. The caterer to the AFL in Melbourne, O'Brien, reportedly sells 55,000 pies, 2400 kilograms of hot dogs, 10 tonnes of chips, 70,000 litres of beer and up to 50,000 cans of soft drink at an average round attended by about 130,000 people. It also supplies meals on plates and thousands of hampers to those in the super boxes and function rooms.

The crackdown in club boardrooms has been matched by greater professionalism among players and



coaches. Player fitness, coaching tactics and umpiring policies have combined to ensure that even the hardest old salts will concede that the modern game is faster than the game of their youth. But increased speed has also brought more injuries, particularly serious knee damage that often requires complex surgery and up to a year out of the game. (Barry Dickins has helpfully suggested that supporters could pray to 'Our Lady of the Cruciate Ligament' when star players come down with a bad knee.) The rising rate of serious injuries means that in 1991 the premiership will, more than in any previous season, probably be decided by the team that has most of its best players still standing in September. The injury rate has also brought calls from coaches for the AFL to allow another interchange player, but players and supporters seem united on not wanting any big changes to the rules. What the AFL decides, of course, is another matter.

ONE OF THE perceived changes in modern football is a greater number of Aborigines making the big league. A star St Kilda recruit, Gilbert McAdam, recently recalled his job working for an Aboriginal development program in South Australia: 'Because the kids knew who I was, it helped too. We'd say to them, "You can make it too." ... they (Aborigines) are seeing more footy now. You're going to see more good Aboriginal players in the AFL.' The long-time coach of Essendon, Kevin Sheedy, has picked a hypothetical team of Aboriginal players, something McAdam says would have been impossible 10 years ago. But players such as Polly Farmer, Sid Jackson and Maurice Rioli should not be forgotten, along with more recent stars such as Jim and Phil Krakouer.

It is worth noting that racism still lurks in the outer. Last year some red-neck Collingwood supporters screamed at Aboriginal players in the West Coast Eagles to 'get a sock and hang yourself in a cell.' It is up to supporters of all teams to ask why these Neanderthals aren't wearing white sheets with the eye holes cut out. Such supporters are mostly found in clubs that have no history of good black players. It seems even the most grudging whitey changes his or her tune if an Aborigine plays for their team *and* is good.

The contradictions of running a passionate pursuit as a business were summed up by the AFL's Ross Oakley when he told a newspaper: 'This business is not about selling hamburgers or nuts and bolts. This is selling emotion, selling tradition, selling passion.' It is yet to be seen what you have left over if you sell emotion, tradition and passion. ■

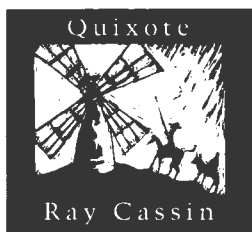
**Mark Skulley** played for Ports, the 1978 premiers in the Esperance Football League in Western Australia. The league had four teams and a final four.



*Not quite a super box: there was a time when watching the game in luxury meant paying sixpence for a cushion.*

### So where's the ball?

*The photo on p.17 shows the 1910 grand final, played between South Melbourne and Carlton at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (Carlton won). In the finest tradition of sports journalism, Eureka Street challenges its readers to find the ball in the original photograph. Tear out or photocopy the page, mark the location of the ball with an 'x', and send your entry to Find the Ball, Jesuit Publications, PO Box 553, Richmond, Victoria 3121. The first correct entry to be opened will win a year's subscription to Eureka Street—plus two free tickets to the 1991 grand final.*



# Unclean, unclean, unclean

**I**N THE HIGH COURT building in Canberra, there is a leper's squint. A squint, for those like me who are neophytes in the mysteries of legal architecture, is a small window that allows persons of contagious disposition to view court proceedings from outside the room in which the said proceedings are taking place. The point of this quaint medievalism is not that the legal profession has finally succumbed to AIDS paranoia. Lawyers just happen to *like* quaint medievalisms. So do I, and this particular bit of quaintness is something that could profitably be adapted to other circumstances.

Lurking in our society, we are told, there are unclean ones who must be kept away from the rest of us. They are to be found everywhere—in shops, offices and factories, in schools and universities, on the streets and even in our own homes. They have the haunted, guilty look of those who practise secret rites shunned by the healthy and wholesome. They have the furtive air of those used to creeping instead of walking. They are fugitives from justice, for our upright legislators are steadily whittling away the number of human environments in which they can legally be present.

They are smokers, the modern lepers. And just as the lepers once had their squint, so public buildings may soon need a smokers' *puff*—for blowing out of instead of looking in.

Soon, there will be nowhere on the face of the Earth where people can practise with impunity the ritual inhalation of tobacco. The matter has long gone past the civil libertarian approach of go-puff-in-private-but-not-in-my-face-mate. Modern workplaces, atmospherically regulated by air-conditioning systems, cannot tolerate even one smoker in one cubicle of the most remote, least-used lavatory. Smokers are unclean, unclean, unclean; they must be expelled into streets already fouled by other pollutants such as a million internal-combustion engine and a thousand stray dogs.

And there you can see them, on any day of the working week, huddled together in office doorways for five or ten minutes every few hours. It is a strange, makeshift democracy, where the managing director rubs shoulders with the telephonist and the tea lady, all united by their need to puff without being punished. And not only is there a collapsing of hierarchies, there is an infantile reversion as well. Have you noticed the way people behave in these huddled masses, clutching their guilty secret behind their backs and casually waving away the billowing clouds that betray them? They are remembering what they learned to do many years ago at school, behind the toilets or the bicycle sheds.

Just as the leper colonies of the past developed their own social practices, so too there are learned forms of behaviour among smokers that have nothing to do with physical affliction or addiction. In the days of innocence,

when not even the primmest of public hygienists would blink at a love song like *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*, people could convey a whole world of meaning by the way they offered, accepted or refused a cigarette. Bogart and Bacall built careers on it.

Some of these smokers' rituals and codes remain, of course. Most pubs and clubs, and most cafés and restaurants, have yet to exclude smokers from normal social intercourse. But the day will come when tobacco smoke is about as popular in places where people eat and drink as a chef who wrings out his T-shirt in the soup.

Perhaps the rituals associated with other kinds of smoking will take over. Just as people learned how to loiter outside offices by loitering behind the bicycle sheds at school, so too there is a precedent for the shared inhalation of smoke from illicit weeds. Not everything that people like to smoke contains tobacco. There are other illicit weeds, and some of the rituals involved in smoking them can be quite complicated. Some people put as many strictures on the correct way of passing around a cigarette made from illegal substances as the officers in British regiments do on the correct way of passing the port after dinner. It enhances the thrill of complicity, the sense of sharing an activity from which other people are excluded.

**W**ILL THAT CLANDESTINE THRILL be the smokers' only compensation for exclusion from the world of the pure? The mature smoker, and the mature non-smoker, may prefer it this way. It gives the non-smokers a chance to feel superior, and allows the smokers a little more dignity than can be found in huddling outside their places of work, trying not to notice the sneers on the faces of the pure who pass by. But it may not be that simple. There is a hidden flaw in the legislation that public-hygiene zealots hope will gradually remove smokers from among us. It is something so simple, so universal that legislation cannot abolish it. It is called adolescence.

As anyone who has ever been an adolescent should know, young people have an innate resistance to doing anything that they are solemnly told is good for them, and a delight in doing anything that they are told is bad for them. The stronger the case that can be made against smoking, the more likely they are to smoke. So there is one image that may give hope to the managing director and the tea lady huddled outside the lobby of their office tower. It is the schoolgirl waiting at the bus stop across the street. Like them, she clutches a cigarette behind her back. But instead of gazing shame-facedly at the ground, her head is held high with defiance. Smoking bans or not, she still believes tomorrow is hers. ■

**Ray Cassin** is production editor of *Eureka Street*. He does not smoke but is glad Jerome Kern got the chance to write *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*.



## In the ranks again



Photo Courtesy A.A.P.

*China's rebellious students of 1989 are now practising military drill and studying Marxism. But this report from China News Analysis, a media monitoring group in Hong Kong, suggests that the students may not be as much in step as Communist Party leaders would like them to be*

**S**TUDENTS HAVEN'T EXACTLY DISAPPEARED from China's press since the tanks rolled into Tien'anmen Square in June 1989. It is just that when they do appear, they speak with such convincing orthodoxy that one is left wondering what happened to the voices of the Beijing Spring. Sometimes one can hear an echo of those days in reports of the students' self-assessments, given from their newly 'reformed' point of view. From these we get a picture of a student body that in 1989 was fed up with socialism, scornful of the army and supposedly ignorant of the works of Marx. To believe that this attitude has been totally transformed in two years requires a rare degree of imagination.

The official line is that students, as a group, have not been punished for their involvement in the pro-democracy movement. Where new measures have been adopted, such as the year's military training now compulsory for students at Beijing University, they are presented as part of a deliberate trend towards involvement in 'real' society. The changes affect the size of the student intake at various institutions, the circumstances under

which they will graduate and, ultimately, the very purpose of tertiary studies. Are studies now to be wholly devoted to the immediate needs of society, i.e. to increasing industrial and agricultural production?

One answer to that question is contained in the departure for the US last year of China's best-known dissident, the physicist Fang Lizhi. Fang's exile symbolises the plight of China's intellectuals, who must be asking themselves if they are really welcome in a country that is suspicious of its halls of learning. In a speech reported in late December 1989, Deng Xiaoping said that students should consider 'rethinking' as more important than whatever books they had to study. In practice, this has meant a growing acceptance of the party line and the mushrooming of Marxist study groups on campuses. The groups study both classic texts and speeches by the leadership, with pride of place going to Marx, Mao and Deng. Engels also gets some attention but Lenin, although not absent from the spirit of the party, seems to merit little specific study.

Speeches by government and party officials stress two themes: that 'patriotism' is necessarily bound up with the amalgam of German, Russian and Chinese thought which is the party's version of socialism, and that students should learn from the workers and peasants. An example of the first theme is a speech by the general secretary of the party, Jiang Zemin, commemorating the 'May 4th movement' of the 1920s. After hearing it, some students declared that they had never before realised that the main point of the movement, which is usually billed as advocating science and democracy, was in fact patriotism. The second theme may be illustrated by some students who reportedly were so touched by the thrift of the peasants that they resolved

to give up smoking in order to save money. How much time is spent in political activities on campus is not usually reported, but during military training we find that 40 per cent of class time is devoted to political education, 26 per cent to 'culture' and only 29 per cent to military training proper. (Seven per cent of the time is unaccounted for). The aim of these classes is not solely to achieve 'right thought' but 'right belief'. As one student is reported as saying: 'We must allow Marxism to become our sincere faith'.

After three months military service, some students from Beijing University wrote a letter to the head of the State Education Commission, Li Tieying, to say how much their thought had changed. In making this confession they reveal the supposed errors

for which they have to repent. The students admit to having been unclear about the 'true' account of the 'counter-revolutionary' troubles in June 1989, and confess to having denounced Marxism as a thing of the past. In fact, they said, they had not properly studied Marxism-Leninism and did not have a detailed grasp of what socialism is. They attribute their 'errors' to the influence of currents of thought hostile to socialism. Soldiers had been regarded as stupid people—a soldier was 'a straight line with a box on top, a head stuck on four limbs'.

Before beginning military service, the students were not clear about the purpose of this training and many saw it as a waste of study time. A group of postgraduate students voiced their opposition at meal times, by banging their bowls with chopsticks. The soldiers are said to have been surprised that

people of superior intelligence could have such bad manners.

In commenting on two weeks spent working at the grassroots level during the summer holidays, students again reveal their 'previous' thoughts. One group from Beijing Normal University said that they had been influenced by capitalism and liberalism. In a more specific reference, the bugbears are said to be a craze for Freud and existentialism. Sichuan University's 150,000 students claim to have undergone four great changes in their way of thinking: from doubting that socialism is the road China must travel to affirming that it is; from disbelief in the party to belief in it; from judging their studies in terms of personal achievement and growth in understanding to judging that only what one does for the masses is important.

By looking at the entrance requirements for tertiary education, one can see what type of candidates are being sought, and for what courses. In a typical case, Anhui University, the minimum marks required for entrance are divided into five categories, and the figures for each category reflect the status of the school in the

educational system. The lowest marks, 221 to 294, are required for fine arts. Physical education requires from 304 to 354, foreign languages 453, humanities 453 to 467. Engineering, agriculture, science and medicine all require between 506 and 526. These categories attract the greatest number of students and so can afford to be selective.

There is a general preference for politically correct, as opposed to academically suitable, candidates. In Shanghai, regulations were issued allowing workers to study at tertiary level if they have made a special contribution to 'putting political thought into practice'. An example of the type of person suggested by this appellation is a candidate for the Northwestern Agricultural College, whose 'experience' consisted in taking slops to feed the ducks. This familiarity with real life concerns is favourably contrasted with the lack of knowledge of the wide world of youngsters who had gone straight from secondary school into tertiary institutions.

**E**VERY YEAR STUDENTS ARE SENT OUT during the summer to gain experience in their future domain of work, and last summer saw a vast increase in the number of students sent out for 'learning from the workers and peasants'. This was not simply a matter of testing them in their own disciplines, but of testing their allegiance to orthodoxy. Shandong's three types of camp are typical: road building, work in key industries and social surveys. The surveys, often conducted among the peasants, included help to poor areas, such as distributing tools and medicine.

Many articles describe the students' satisfaction with their two week stint. Presumably, these comments are based on the reports that the students were obliged to write. Local party cadres were also required to express their opinion of each student. Few articles refer to the cost of the work, although one mentions that Sichuan University spent 100,000 yuan on 20 small groups conducting social surveys in poor areas. On the other hand, the province's students earned 4,600,000 yuan for the industries to which they were assigned.

A policy of 'revolutionary' assignment of jobs was inaugurated in 1988. It means, in effect, that graduates are sent to poor areas for one to two years. Billed by the leadership as a noble route for true patriots, it does not seem to be as attractive as its prominence in the headlines might suggest. There were more than 32,000 graduates from Beijing University in 1990 but only 2595 are said to have been sent to remote areas. Of the rest, 16,000 stayed in Beijing, 10,793 were assigned to provincial cities and 26,000 remain unaccounted for. In January this year, the Hong Kong press reported that students who found a job themselves could present their case to the school authorities, who might then grant them permission to take their preferred job rather than the one provided by the state.

Officially, China's policy of sending students abroad has not changed since 1989. The emphasis, however, is

*Women students are often described as unsuitable for doing proper work, especially under the 'revolutionary' assignment system.*

*Graduate women are said to be liable to fall in love, to get married and have children*



now on sending students for shorter periods of time. Out of a planned 3000 students sent abroad in 1990, half were to be on courses lasting one or two semesters. In November last year, it was reported that of the 90,000 students sent abroad since 1978, 50,000 had returned. Even allowing for the fact that the time of return depends on the time of graduation, there is clearly a problem in the numbers returning.

In 1989, the rate of return fell dramatically. On the basis of the 1988 total of 6073, one might have expected about 7000 students to return in 1989 but only 4997 did so. Among the returnees, students who have earned doctorates abroad face particular problems. Although foreign doctorates are more respected than those granted by domestic universities, they are also more feared, as their holders may be unorthodox in their thought. Hence several press reports stress the merits of the local product and its equality with its foreign counterpart.

Women students are often described as unsuitable for doing proper work, especially under the 'revolutionary' assignment system. Graduate women are said to be liable to fall in love, to get married and have children. In Guangzhou, some businesses were taking on women provided they agreed not to get married or become pregnant in the first two years of their contract.

In June last year, a Hong Kong paper published the results of a survey made of eight major institutions of higher education in Beijing, comparing contemporary student attitudes with those of students today. The results were confusing and contradictory. To some degree this might be attributed to a fear of expressing one's real feelings on paper, but it is also a reflection of how confused the students in fact are. A student from the People's University of China wrote: 'My replies are muddled, in places contradictory. This reflects my present state of mind. On the one hand, I do not believe that a free market economy is the way to resolve China's problems. On the other, I don't accept that power has to be retained in the hands of a few'. For many, especially those who entered university in 1987 and 1988, the answer has been to bury themselves in China's ancient culture, resulting in a craze for Taoist philosophy and the *I Ching*.

**W**HETHER THEY ARE drawn to the past, to the chance of going abroad or merely to a desire for personal security and happiness, students can be seen to be opting out of Chinese society, with the greater issues of democracy and social change left to slumber. But the authorities have no grounds for complacency. Before the events of Spring 1989, similar tendencies were found on many campuses. It may only take another spark before the flame in the hands of the Goddess of Democracy is held aloft again. Opting out is the result of weariness and despair, not a conscious choice in a free society. ■

**China News Analysis**, established in 1953, publishes a fortnightly survey of reports in the Chinese press.



## Theories and things

**T**HE ANCIENT PYTHAGOREANS were the first known sect to propound the theory that numbers are the key to our universe. The true and the real, for them, were matters of harmony. Every single thing could be counted and every single thing had a specific number. Pythagoras in his old age is said to have visited Socrates in Athens. Inscribed above the entrance to the Academy, which Socrates inspired, were words to this effect: 'If you know no geometry, then do not enter here.'

Archimedes knew his geometry. He used it to invent the arenarius or 'sand-reckoner', enabling him to estimate the number of grains of sand in the universe. His calculations were based on the theory that the diameter of the universe is in the same ratio to the diameter of the sun's orbit as the diameter of the sun's orbit is to the diameter of the earth. In modern terms, he came up with 1063 as his answer.

Such huge numbers would take many aeons to count and more pages than we have room for in our universe to inscribe. These are not practical numbers that can be checked off on our fingers—they belong to the realm of theory. Such large numbers are used both to fill us with wonder and to persuade us of our hold on reality. For example, our own galaxy is said to contain about a 100,000 million stars, and we suspect the existence of at least another 3000 million other galaxies in the observable universe. And a teaspoon of a neutron star is said to weigh as much as our entire planet Earth. The wonder of it!


The April 1991 issue of the *Astrophysical Journal* announced the discovery by a group of astronomers in Hawaii of a 'mysterious object', hidden in a galaxy (nicely numbered NGC 6240) and possibly more dense than a neutron star. While extremely heavy, somewhere between 40 and 200 billion times the mass of our sun, it may be a candidate for a large 'black hole', offering clues to support a theory about the way the world may have begun. A new theory is always a piece of wonderment. Our word 'theory' comes from the Greek 'to behold' or 'to wonder'. Gregory of Nyssa said that God was called 'Theos' because God kept all things in existence by 'beholding' them. A *theor*, certainly, was a messenger of the gods.

The modern development of chaos theory suggests that most of our efforts in physics deal with the few observations that can be easily 'tamed' by mathematical order. In Karl Popper's phrase, there are more clouds than clocks. Counting all the grains of sand and numbering all the galaxies may not, in itself, count for very much in the end, but wonder will always bring us a little closer to the divine.

— John Honner SJ

# The vision splendid

*The paths of European settlement in Australia can be traced along the Murray River and its tributaries. But the river's fate testifies to the uneasy European relationship with this land.*



**I**T HAS BEEN DRY HERE LATELY, and my lawn is a series of green circles where the water from the sprinklers falls. At the edge of the spray's reach, the grass goes from green to grey in the width of a pencil, as if someone had drawn round it with a compass. This lawn is at the top of a limestone cliff overlooking the River Murray, at Waikerie in South Australia. From my patch of European growth, I can see the gentle curve of the earth against the sky. The pea-soup river sweeps across in indolent curves, waters still and warm. The gums are grey and the soil is pink or rusty red, and dry, dry, dry.

Near the horizon, on the rise of a sand hill, I can see another patch of deep green where the orange trees and the grapes and the stone fruit are grown; irrigated, like my lawn, with the warm, rank water of the river. When the river is low, that water can be salty enough to wither the leaves on the vines. No one drinks it. It has, after all, already drained and watered a fifth of the continent.

I spoke to a friend in the city about my new home here. I told him that I had two taps in my kitchen—one for the river water, and one for rainwater, which you can drink. He was horrified. 'That's awful,' he said, and when I asked why, he said 'I would worry. What would happen if it didn't rain?' And it doesn't rain, much. Which is why these deep greens are a paradox, testimony to the power of our manipulation of the land.

The story of the Murray River, named more than 150 years ago for some otherwise long-forgotten Colonial Secretary, is a fair metaphor for Europeans in this foreign, bright land, and our uneasiness with it. These river towns would not exist were it not for Victorian engineering, and the pride people took in turning the dry 'waste' of this continent to a use they could understand. It was a time of hope and confidence in a new yet ancient land. Yet today the engineering feats to which we are wedded seem not so much a testimony to our power as to our continued foreignness. In a land where water is everything, the Murray River is our only major watercourse. It is in fact many rivers, draining a vast basin that covers most of the fertile parts of the continent.

There is a history of the river, written by Ernestine Hill in 1958. It is called *Water into Gold*. She begins her book thus: 'Here is the beginning of a great story, the transfiguration of a continent by irrigation science ... the radiant twin cities of Mildura and Renmark, the



Garden Colony in that lucky horseshoe of Murray River that unites two Australian States, will always be our first national shrine to irrigation science.'

A shrine to science. Miss Hill goes on to describe the Chaffey brothers, who developed Mildura and Renmark, as 'apostles of irrigation'. The water they pumped on to the land was a benediction, bringing civilisation to the dusty and hostile Mallee wastes. Today, the Murray is a harnessed beast, its flow regulated by locks and weirs. But for the flip side of our grasp on this seemingly indifferent continent, you must look under the soil. There you will find another mute and insidious testimony to our manipulation of the landscape. The holy water is rising to meet us, and it threatens to drown us.

I have over my desk a contour map. It shows, not the rises and falls of this flat landscape, but fluctuations of the salty ground water under our feet. The irrigated areas and the towns they surround are resting on man-made water mountains, built out of the water that drains off the orchards and down the gutters of the main street. Ground water underlies much of this continent. It is, in fact, the inland sea that the explorers searched for, but like so much about this country, it is hidden. Before European settlement, it lay at least 25 metres below the surface. Now, thanks to the clearing of trees, even in non-irrigated areas it rises to within a few metres of the surface, bringing with it the salts that lie in the ancient landscape. Once the water is within two metres of the surface, crops suffer and the trees begin to die.

In the east, under Gippsland and the fertile belt of New South Wales, the underground water is sweet enough to drink. But as it moves west, it picks up salt. There are places in the Mallee where it breaks through the surface, flooding the cellars of hotels. Even in the driest of places, it can be impossible to dig a grave without a pump to get rid of the sludge, and the water is saltier than the sea. If you know what to look for, you can see the scars on the land. Driving between the sand dunes as you come towards the river, you will sometimes hit a dip, the trees will give way and there will be a flat acne scar, where nothing will grow except salt bush.

We have no way to express the loss except in figures, and they are graphic enough. If salinity is not tackled, within our lifetimes it could reduce as much as half the fertile land in the Murray-Darling Basin to waste. The economic implications are enormous. Already large chunks of New South Wales and Victoria have been virtually abandoned, left to 'saline agriculture'. The scientists are still trying to work out what that means. The irony is immense. Just as our grasp on this foreign land seemed firmest, we find the water turning upon us, and the agriculture and economics that bind us to the land thrown into disarray.

In one of the many government publications on salinity, mention is made of

the effect this insidious menace has on farmers, when they first notice the leprosy like scars and the crop losses. 'The social effects of salinity ... are reinforced by anxiety associated with a problem that is not often easily explained, is inequitably distributed in the community, and appears to be inexorably growing ...'

The salinity issue attracts a lunatic fringe, who attribute the cause to everything from chemical companies to secret gases from outer space. Once, after writing an article about salinity, I had a letter from a man who attributed the Grafton bus crash to gases emanating from nearby salinised land. These gases, he said, caused sleepiness and we were all at risk. No accident, I am sure, that after living under this unfriendly sky, we need superstitions to explain the mute kickback of the land we had for so long assumed to be either conquered or indifferent.

Waikerie is at the apex of many conundrums, and many contradictions. Downstream, at the tiny town of Morgan, is the pipeline that carries water to Whyalla. It is therefore at Mannum that the saltiness of the water is measured, and the success or otherwise of the attempts to reduce salinity along the entire course of the river are judged. Upstream, on the stretch of river between here and the next cluster of towns, saline ground water makes its way into the river along ancient underground water courses. That water is saltier than the sea, and has been that way long before Europeans arrived. Further upstream again are the Murray's oldest irrigation settlements, Renmark and Mildura, where water was first pumped from the river to create our green geometries.

The town is centered on a roundabout that is three times the size needed, and is given over entirely to grass. At noon in summer, when the heat is so severe that it takes an act of will to step out into it, the sprinklers are watering the grass. The water rolls off the lawn and into the gutter, and down the hill through the town, flowing freely through the heat of the day in land that ought to be desert.

**W**AIKERIE ALSO HAS A TOWN CRIER. He was appointed this year, in the hope that he would attract tourists to this incongruous town. He has a cocked hat and a ruffle and a bell. It remains to be seen whether anyone will drive across the waterless plain from Adelaide to hear him. It is almost too easy to point out that while we grab at the traditions of another place, the **A b o r i g i n e s**, whose words provided

*Even in the driest of places, it can be impossible to dig a grave without a pump to get rid of the sludge, and the water is saltier than the sea.*





the names for our European towns (Waikerie means wing, Mildura red rock) are nowhere in sight. Their homes are nearby, off the beaten track, but are not the sorts of things you show tourists.

And Waikerie is home to another contradiction, more expensive but no less ironic than its town crier. The landscape under the quiet gums and the endless blue sky is, quite literally, being plumbed. It is a feat in the tradition of heroic engineering, rivalled only by the Snowy Mountains scheme in its ambition, scale and cost, but it is not trumpeted as much.

The Woolpunda Ground Water Interception Scheme consists of 47 bores sunk deep into the ground. Water flows in from both sides of the river for a distance of 30 kilometres. When the pumps were switched on late last year, each acted like a plug hole, creating a funnel of sucked-away water. The funnels intersected in a giant underground daisy chain, and the centuries-old progress of the water to the Murray was stopped. The water is pumped underground to a patch of degraded land high on the plain south-west of Waikerie. There, glistening in the sun, invisible except from the air, is a huge, artificial salt lake, testimony to our power and to our foreignness.

By intercepting the natural flows of salt ground water, the Woolpunda scheme buys us a licence to continue putting salt into the water further upstream, in the irrigation areas of Victoria and New South Wales. By stopping a natural process, we buy time to continue an unnatural one. It is true, the engineers admit, that eventually the salt water in the lake will seep back into the Murray. But they say this will not happen for many

hundreds of years. And by then, who knows where we will be?

**T**HE WOOLPUNDA SCHEME is in the tradition of heroic engineering that built these awkward settlements. The Chaffey brothers, not so much apostles as land developers, were Canadians. They were discovered by Alfred Deakin, then a Cabinet minister, while he was on a tour of California in 1884. There, the Chaffey brothers had already used irrigation to create the orchard city of Ontario, named after their home town.

The government offered the Chaffey brothers 250,000 acres near Mildura, but as soon as Deakin took the matter to Parliament there was an uproar at the 'Yankee land grab' and, much to the Chaffey brothers' umbrage, the government was forced to put the land up for tender. Meanwhile, South Australia had been watching with interest, and invited the Chaffey brothers to establish their colony there instead. The brothers secured 250,000 acres between

Spring Cart Gully, near present-day Renmark, and the Victorian border. When the two months allowed for the Mildura tender had elapsed with no applications the Victorian government invited the Chaffey brothers to resubmit, and by the end of 1887 the two Canadians controlled half a million empty acres, with a contract to conjure up two garden cities.

Within a week, the mighty pumps—the finest English engineering could provide—had been ordered and the tractors and chain gangs were clearing the Mallee. Settlers were not slow in buying blocks. Mildura became famous throughout the empire; water had been brought to the desert, an engineering feat made to appeal to the Victorian mentality. In 1890, the travelling pressman Julian Thomas described Renmark thus: 'The bank that skirts the broad reach of the Murray at Renmark is a public reserve, where dogs fight and children play, and loafers sit on the fallen logs and dangle their legs on the brink. Boats are tied up to the tall gum trees. The river frontage, where not so long ago black fellows camped and beat their gins, is now a long avenue with pleasant houses, and paths bordered by the Indian pepper trees.'

But the first fruits were bitter. The Victorian bank crash, too-fast expansion, problems transporting the crop, and the first signs of salinity all but felled the new settlements. The Chaffey brothers went broke, and early in the century Mildura was at risk of becoming a ghost town. Renmark, which had expanded more slowly, fared slightly better.

Meanwhile, South Australia was giving the Murray away in a little-recorded Australian experiment in socialism. With a rising population of slum dwellers, and insufficient work in the city, it was decided to open crown lands for selection by socialist communities. Ten settlement sites, including Waikerie, were chosen, and special boats and trains commissioned. In February 1894, the first train deposited 350 men, women and children at Morgan, where they were packed like cattle on to steamers and taken upriver, to be deposited at the chosen spots with a few sacks of supplies and some rudimentary building materials.

Among them were some genuine socialists, idealistic and determined to give the experiment everything they had. But they were outnumbered by the desperate poor, the remittance men and the ne'er-do-wells. Each settlement was to run itself. Money and individual ownership was outlawed. The Government provided the pumps, and was to sustain the camps until they were





*'Evening Shadows' by H. J. Johnstone.*

*Courtesy of the Art Gallery of South Australia*

*It may be that this semi-desert country should never have been settled, as some radical conservationists now suggest, yet it would be wrong to say that the people do not belong here.*

self-sufficient.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the rag-tag make-up of the communities, their ignorance of agriculture and the unforgiving conditions, socialism was not a success. By November 1895, four of the settlements had disappeared. The government wrote off the bad debt, divided the settlements into 10-acre blocks and allowed the settlers who were left to ballot for them, with payments extended over 42 years.

**S**OLDIER SETTLERS, some of them coming to the Riverland straight off the troop ships after World War I, were the next big influx. They swelled the population of towns like Waikerie, and established new irrigation settlements. But the blocks they were given were small. And so the desert had been transformed, but inside the 'charmed circle' life was often hard. The blocks were small—barely a living even in a good year, and it was a hard life. Very few people ever got rich from a Riverland fruit block.

It may be that this semi-desert country should never have been settled, as some radical conservationists now

suggest, yet it would be wrong to say that the people do not belong here. Until the last decade, there were still old people in these towns who remembered George Chaffey arriving in a cloud of dust, or who recalled the long boat trip up from Morgan with their sheets of corrugated iron. There are stories of struggle, of carrying on in spite of fruit that didn't sell or couldn't be transported, of grandmothers and women in labor being rescued from floods, and of the days when a trip to Adelaide took a week over a dirt road delineated with pot holes. Hard to say these people don't belong, and too easy from the city to be self-righteous and simplistic about the heritage of the engineers, when we all rely on the food basket they have brought forth.

We cannot retreat. Our ties to the land may be recent, expressed in terms of dollars and engineering and full of crime and paradox, but nevertheless we are bonded. And so we stand under this blue sky, within our green circles, struggling with the rising tide. ■

**Margaret Simons** is a freelance journalist who writes regularly for *Eureka Street*.

# Sparks in Peter's Bark

*A statement by theologians has given a new edge to the already tense relationship between the Vatican and the church in North America.*

**A**CCORDING TO CARDINAL RATZINGER'S instruction on my calling, we theologians are not to be seen or heard in the public media. We are to carry out our squabbles in code, in the pages of esoteric journals. If we have any complaints with official doctrine, we are to communicate them to the proper authorities behind closed doors, in secret. That's the theory. But last December, and for the second time this past year, members of my professional group, the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA), spoke out, inevitably on the airwaves, criticizing Vatican actions and procedures in four areas of concern—the collegiality of bishops, the relations between the magisterium and theologians, women in the church, and ecumenism.

The CTSA action was provoked by two events in the US. First, Rome's treatment of Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Portland, Oregon, who was temporarily deprived of some of his episcopal powers and made the subject of a Roman investigation—an investigation which ultimately cleared him. Then there was the case of Fr Charles Curran, a professor of moral theology at the Catholic University of America in Washington DC, who was removed from his post at Rome's insistence.

These concerns in the US arose against a background of stirring amongst theologians in Germany, France, Belgium, Spain, and Italy; and statements protesting against Roman centralisation, Pope John Paul's alleged authoritarian style of leadership and more general claims that Rome has violated the spirit and letter of the Second Vatican Council. The CTSA directed its national board to draw up a document which spoke from the distinctive experience of the North American Church. Members could then sign, or not, as they chose. Of the 1400 members, 544 cast their vote. 431 approved the document, 91 rejected it and 22 abstained. It was then sent to the US bishops' conference.

As intrachurch memos go, this one is not windy. In fact, it is little more than a check-list of problems of church order calling for resolution, sooner rather than later. It opens by invoking Pope John XXIII's hope that the council would mean a 'new Pentecost' for the

church. We theologians think it has meant that, the document says. Yes, our North American culture suffers from an excessive individualism, a consumerist lifestyle and ugly racism, but the renewal of the church 'has taken hold among our people'. The church here is 'in many respects healthy and vital'; and relations between bishops and theologians in our countries are 'generally good.' The statement confesses the signers' failures ('We theologians have at times fallen short in our duty in these years of renewal'), and then appeals for the Holy See to acknowledge it may be in the same boat.

The trouble—a conflict of cultural styles if not strictly of fundamental doctrine—emerges when the document begins to speak of an immigrant church treasuring religious liberty, pluralism and an 'open and participative style' in social and political life that finds an 'arbitrary and authoritarian style of leadership' repugnant. This leads to the first major issue—the perception that Rome seems to be renegeing on Vatican II's vision of episcopal collegiality. 'We are concerned,' says the statement, 'that the role of the local churches, of their bishops and of the bishops' conference is being diminished'—by the narrow criteria the Curia uses in selecting bishops, by 'humiliating' visitations to dioceses, by impugning the authority of bishops' conferences and by rejecting the pastoral judgments of the local church on religious education and sacramental life.

The footnotes provide instances of these allegations.

**T**HE SECOND POINT of contention has to do with the relation of theologians to the church's teaching office, which Vatican II had envisioned as collaborative. While praising the procedural rules that the US Catholic bishops recently adopted for dealing with conflicts posed by theological malpractice, the statement expresses distress that cooperation has been made more difficult by reckless charges by the Pope and curial officials that theologians are preempting the function of bishops. More, the Curia fails to consult with experts in the prepara-



tion of major church documents, prematurely cuts off discussion on new questions and follows procedures of investigation that 'fail to honor basic human rights ... As a result, many possibilities for cooperation between the magisterium and theologians in keeping with the teaching of the council remain to be realized.'

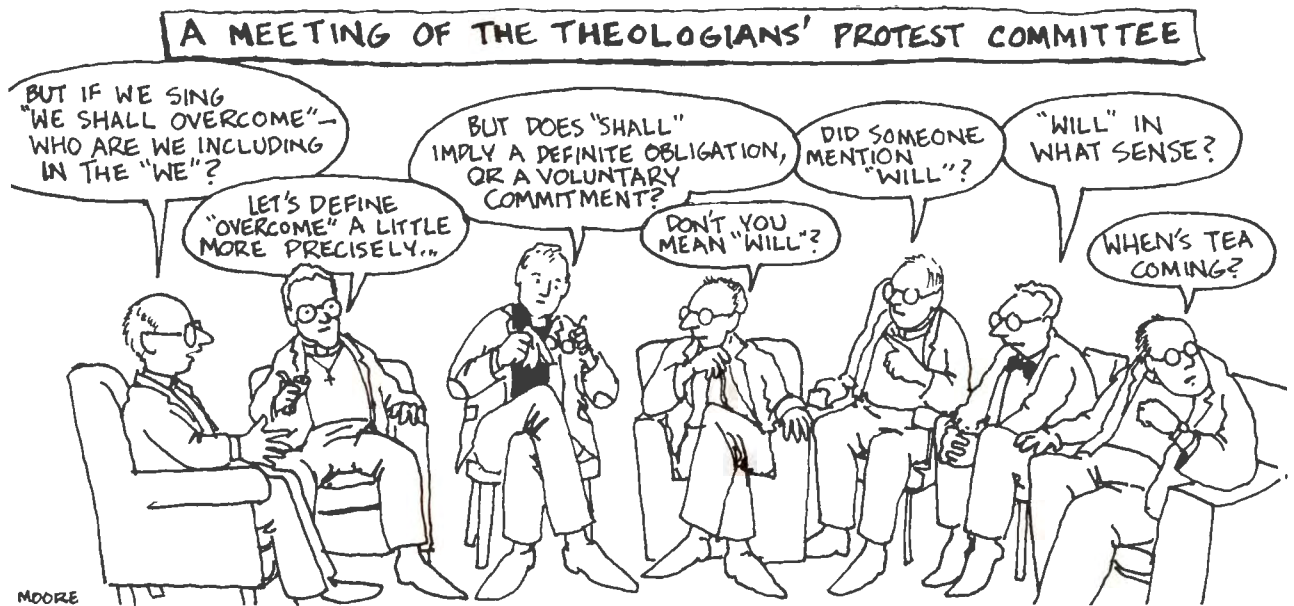
The third point argued concerns 'the increased recognition of the equality of women and their potential for new contributions to public life.' The contrast between the directive and executive roles being assumed by women in North American society and the roles assigned to them by current church teaching and practice, says the statement, is striking. 'Theological reflection,' therefore, 'seeks to explore further the teaching of the Gospel about women and men ... [and] the possibility of ordaining women while remaining faithful to the Lord's intention for the church.' The present atmosphere gives cause for concern. Rome appears to regard feminism with consistent suspicion, to identify women's role almost exclusively with motherhood, urges bishops to withdraw 'support from groups promoting women's ordination as a way to exercise episcopal leadership,' and screens prospective bishops so as to 'insure their unqualified opposition to the ordination of women to the priesthood.' 'In the light of the increasing prominence of women in society and the church,' this section concludes, 'this state of affairs ignores the signs of the times.'

Fourth, the theologians express alarm that the church's commitment to Christian unity, one of the central purposes of Vatican II, seems to have diminished. As evidence, the statement cites the slowness with which authorities have responded to the positive results of ecumenical dialogue, the selection of unecumenical bishops and curial staff, and occasions on which church authorities have acted in ways that fail to embody the council's vision of the church as a communion of local churches. They mention also 'an authoritarian style of acting and inappropriate interventions that do not respect the distinctive traditions of churches already in communion with Rome.' Consequently, fears are rekindled among Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants 'that acceptance of the Petrine ministry would mean the destruction of the distinctive traditions of their churches.'

Much has been accomplished in the 25 years since the council ended. Much remains to do [*ecclesia sem-*

*per reformanda*, 'the church must always be reformed']. The statement concludes by pledging its signers to heed St Paul's admonition not to stifle the Spirit (1 Th. 5:19). So far as I know there has been no reaction from the Holy See to this American statement. But two US prelates did respond. Speaking in his own name, the head of the US bishops' committee on doctrine, Archbishop Oscar Lipscomb of Mobile, Alabama, regretted that we theologians had dragged up matters which, to his mind had been resolved (presumably things like the Hunthausen case), reminded us that bishops alone, and *a fortiori* the Bishop of Rome, have the responsibility for deciding what's best for the church—and welcomed the opportunity to discuss the issues raised.

ARCHBISHOP JOHN QUINN of San Francisco, a longtime member of CTSA himself, observed the notable failure of theologians to criticize one another, particu-



larly the 'erroneous and tendentious views' of some of our better-known colleagues. The CTSA choice to go public as a 'first step' created a 'confrontational atmosphere'; in his view a more effective approach would have been to meet directly with Vatican officials. In two recent cases, the lately published document of the Holy See on Catholic universities and the work of the pontifical commission on religious life, direct dialogue of this kind, he pointed out, had brought positive results. On the other hand, he acknowledged, the question of the style and limits of criticism within the church—especially in a world of instant electronic communication and an ever growing appreciation of free speech—is 'still in early stages of development' and 'remains to be debated further.'

That it will be.

— *America* magazine ■

David Toolan SJ is associate editor of *America*.



**P**OPE JOHN PAUL plans to visit Ukraine, and his visit will throw into sharp focus the contorted ecclesiastical and national rivalries of Eastern Europe. It is not just that by the time this first papal visit to what is now Soviet territory takes place the Soviet Union itself may have disintegrated. It is because of the profound wariness with which the Byzantine-rite Ukrainian Catholics treat the Vatican, and their historic enmity for all things Polish. A Polish pope, especially one who has been careful not to suggest that he wants a Soviet collapse, is cause for alarm among Ukrainian nationalists.

The papal visit will take place within two years. It was announced at Easter by the leader of the five-million strong Ukrainian Catholic Church, Cardinal Myroslav Lubachivsky, who this year returned to Ukraine after 53 years in exile. Speaking in Lviv, the chief city of the strongly Catholic region of Western Ukraine, the Cardinal warmly thanked Pope John Paul and previous pontiffs for 'everything they have done and will surely do for the salvation of the souls of the Ukrainian people.' But many Ukrainian Catholics do not see the popes in quite the same light. They complain that their status as an Eastern-rite church in communion with Rome has not been respected, and that through long years of Soviet repression they have been the pawns of Vatican *Ostpolitik*.

So far, the Vatican has refused to recognise the cardinal as a patriarch, the usual title for heads of the Eastern churches. Rome also continues to appoint the church's bishops, a right Ukrainian Catholics say was not granted under the Treaty of Brest in 1596, by which the church agreed to recognise papal primacy but otherwise maintained its independence. In reply to the request for a patriarchate, a Vatican spokesman said the issue was unimportant, a mere formality in canon law. Cardinal Lubachivsky, however, does not seem to go along with that observation. On Palm Sunday in Lviv, he told the enthusiastic crowds who had assembled to celebrate his return: 'I renew the request of the entire Ukrainian people to the Universal Pontiff to recognize the Patriarchate of the Particular Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, in order to fulfil the teaching of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, that the Eastern churches, like the Western churches, have the right and obligation to organise themselves according to their own characteristic rules.'

A guest at the celebrations was the recently appointed papal nuncio to Moscow, Archbishop Francesco Colasuonno, who won no applause when he offered best wishes not only to the church and all of Ukraine,

## A delicate balance

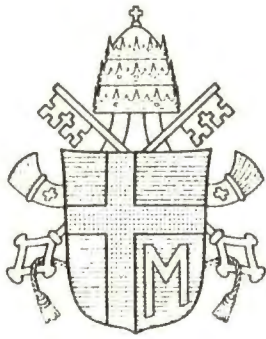
but also to the Soviet Union. A Roman Catholic observer who afterwards spoke to Archbishop Colasuonno said: 'He is a diplomat, and will have had a reason for saying that.' In Ukrainian Catholic circles, it could mean only one thing. The Vatican, for whatever reason, is not keen to see the Soviet Union go under, and wants to make no contribution to its demise by even tacitly recognising Ukrainian moves for sovereignty. Some believe that the Vatican does not want to see Lubachivsky wearing a patriarch's *kamelawka* (headdress) for fear that it will frustrate ecumenical approaches to the largest of the Eastern churches, the Russian Orthodox. Officially, the Vatican's refusal had been based on the fact that Cardinal Lubachivsky did not occupy his see, but that excuse is no longer available.

Western Ukraine has been the engine of Ukrainian separatism, and the persecution of Ukrainian Catholics has been the principal focus for anti-Soviet feeling in the region. Opposition groups continue to seize upon the church as an expression of Ukrainian national consciousness, although Lubachivsky has been at pains to play down the political dimension of his church's revival. The day after Palm Sunday, he declared he would work for the separation of church and state in Ukraine, 'as in any normal democracy'. But his return would hardly have been possible without nationalist agitation, and the nationalist Rukh movement has grown through its association with the church. In Ukraine, politics and religion are inextricably linked.

**O**RIGINALLY THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN province of Galicia, Western Ukraine became part of an independent Poland in 1919. It was annexed from Poland under the terms of the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 and incorporated into the Soviet Republic of Ukraine, and its present tensions reflect these rapid changes of ownership. (Depending on whose map you use, the name of the region's chief city is spelled either Lviv [Ukrainian], Lvov [Russian] or Lwow [Polish]. Those with a nostalgia for the Habsburgs style it Lemberg [German].)

Ukrainian Catholics in Western Ukraine cling to their Byzantine rite, like the Orthodox in the rest of Ukraine, but unlike the Orthodox they acknowledge the same Roman allegiance as the Latin-rite Catholics of Poland. This half-way house means that they have continually rejected Polish ascendancy while themselves remaining suspect to the Orthodox. The Orthodox in





turn are split between the official Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which recognises the primacy of the Patriarch of Moscow, and the Autocephalous (self-governing) Orthodox Church, which after virtually being wiped out during the 1930s has now begun to revive and to draw adherents away from the official Orthodox Church. The 93-year-old head of the Autocephalous Church, Patriarch Mstyslav, last year returned to the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, where he vies for authority with the head of the official Orthodox, Metropolitan Filaret. Filaret's church is regarded by Ukrainian nationalists as being as much an agent of Russian supremacy as the Communist Party.

**A**T THE END OF World War II, Western Ukraine became an especial object of Stalin's desire to crush separatist feeling within the Soviet Union. He decided to exterminate the national identity of the region at its source, which meant that the Ukrainian Catholics had to go. In March 1946, a synod was convened at Lviv by the Orthodox Church, at Stalin's instigation, at which the Ukrainian Catholic Church was declared non-existent and all its property, including several thousand churches, made over to the Orthodox. There followed a bloody repression, and those who continued to adhere to the faith were forced underground. After years in prison camps, Cardinal Josyf Slipyj (Cardinal Lubachivsky's predecessor) went into exile in Rome in 1963. Lubachivsky took the reigns on Slipyj's death in 1984.

The momentum for change that swept across Eastern Europe in 1989 reached Western Ukraine in September, when a quarter of a million people demonstrated in Lviv. Restoration of the church was their chief demand, and when President Gorbachev visited the Vatican in December the church was given permission to register parishes. In the Soviet jargon, it was 'normalised'. But even before that, churches had begun reverting to Catholicism. According to church sources, about 1600 churches have become Catholic again. Before 1939, there were 4500.

Now Cardinal Lubachivsky is home again and, publicly at least, extending a conciliatory hand to all, including Metropolitan Filaret and Patriarch Mstyslav. Neither has rushed to grasp it. Indeed, Metropolitan Filaret regularly accuses the Ukrainian Catholics of aggression against the Orthodox. He claims that at Sambir, not far from Lviv, five Orthodox priests have

barricaded themselves inside the local church with 100 litres of petrol and threatened to torch themselves and the church if the Ukrainian Catholics try to take it over. The situation is tense in Sambir, but the Metropolitan is not beyond a little exaggeration. There is not a drop of petrol to be seen in the church, and some dispute over who makes up the majority in the village.

The problems of the Ukrainian Catholics do not end in Kiev or Moscow. Poland is another source of friction. A residual and mutual antipathy persists between Poles and the 350,000 Ukrainians who live in Poland, and between Ukrainians and the 220,000 Poles who live in Ukraine. Demands for a Ukrainian Catholic bishop in Przemyśl in south-east Poland have only recently been met by the Holy See. The Przemyśl area was once predominantly Ukrainian, but during the insurgency after World War II, which also affected Poland and led to merciless acts of reprisals on both sides, most were deported and spread around the north and west of the country. Ukrainians claim to be the victims of discrimination in Poland, and cite the lack of churches made available to Ukrainian Catholics. There is a deep fear of 'polonisation', and designs by Warsaw on Ukrainian territory. Some members of the two Orthodox churches add to the tension by claiming Ukrainian Catholics are unpatriotic because of their link to a Polish pope.

Another source of difficulty resides within the church itself. The return of the cardinal and a supporting crew from the West has caused some discomfort for his locum tenens in Lviv, Archbishop Volodymyr Sterniuk. He and his flock have done the suffering, and now Ukrainians from the West come to reorganise the church. However bitter a pill that may be to swallow, the Westerners are quick to point out that they have the money and 'know-how' to get it back on to its feet. Cardinal Lubachivsky's conciliatory tone contrasts sharply with Archbishop Sterniuk's forthrightness. The latter has no compunction about naming the Autocephalous Orthodox the greatest enemy of Ukrainian Catholics, and citing attacks on Catholics to rival similar claims by Metropolitan Filaret.

When announcing the papal tour of Ukraine, Cardinal Lubachivsky also said that he would accompany Pope John Paul on his visit to Poland next month. They will have to work very hard indeed to keep everyone happy in Lviv, in Kiev, in Warsaw and in Moscow. ■

**Damien Simonis** is *Eureka Street's* European correspondent.









# Taken as read

*In war reporting, the meaning of events is constructed, not given.*

WHEN I WAS A PLATOON COMMANDER with The Black Watch in West Belfast eight years ago, *The Guardian* ran a story: 'Shooting reinforces theory of tougher Northern Ireland policy'. Soldiers from a company shot and killed Patrick Elliott outside a fish and chip shop in Andersontown road. Said the *The Guardian*: 'The shooting raises questions about whether the security forces have a new "shoot to kill" policy. It is the fourth incident in which the security forces have opened fire on suspects.' The other 'incidents' involved a secret unit of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, later subject to the Stalker enquiry. The RUC unit set ambushes for IRA suspects. They shot several innocent people with no terrorist connections.

*The Guardian* reporter had uncovered a 'conspiracy', linked to Elliott's death. He had not talked to the Lance-Corporal who commanded the brick (four-man detachment) which encountered Elliott. If he had, he would have learned that the shooting was a fatal mistake, due to panic rather than policy. *The Guardian* finished up: 'The Sinn Fein leader, Gerry Adams, said yesterday that the death of Mr Elliott showed again that shoot to kill was now "the practice of the Crown Forces".' This was only one possible version of events. From the inside, the actions linked by *The Guardian* were not connected.

Wars and armies engender their own subcultures. War reporters are like anthropologists translating across cultures. They sometimes forget that the meaning of events is constructed not given. The media's Gulf War was jerry-built. Many truths were paraded. Battles were declared both victories and defeats. Witness Baghdad Radio's 'Gulf victory'. But divergent readings were available in the information battle to those who look with care and scepticism behind and between the lines. Even when the flow of texts is strictly controlled there will be revealing dribbles smudging the 'correct' line.

Rhetoric can reveal its own position. In *Newsweek*, Tony Clifton wrote about accompanying the 'Hounds of Hell' tank unit: '... we rushed ahead wreathed in the smoke from our burning quarry... The advance was like a giant hunt. The Iraqis were driven ahead of us like

animals. 'Dehumanizing the enemy by portraying them as hunted animals to make killing easier is an old tactic: the French were frogs, the Vietnamese were gooks. *Newsweek* assumed that God smiled upon the conqueror, calling the Gulf War 'a triumph of Biblical proportions' and praising Bush who 'recalled World War II, the first great crusade of his life'.

The most telling paragraph in *Newsweek* was headed 'Exorcising Demons': 'After 43 days of fighting and winning, America's troops exorcised the ghosts of Vietnam. US soldiers came away looking like crack troops led by genius-generals Powell and Schwarzkopf. The pain of combat remained, but there was new found glory for those who endured it.' These words overlay a photo caption: 'An injured soldier weeps for his dead friend'. So many questions hang there: Did not Schwarzkopf admit there was little 'fighting'? Was not the 'winner' a United Nations coalition? Were hundreds of thousands of Iraqi deaths needed to resolve American feelings of inadequacy after defeat in Vietnam? What does it mean to use 'exorcism', a religious ritual, to describe this process?

CRACK TROOPS? When I served alongside the Hounds of Hell in Germany, their tank commanders got lost on the autobahns. Schwarzkopf as 'genius-general' like Alexander the Great? The Macedonians defeated the Persians without superior technology. Lastly, who is to say why the soldier is weeping? The *Newsweek* sub-editor in Washington who titles the photo?

James Fenton, who reported the fall of Saigon for *The Washington Post*, discusses a *Newsweek* description of the Khmer Rouge as 'prowling through the humid jungles around Phnom Penh.' (There is no jungle around Phnom Penh.) 'It is likely that, if there had been jungles, they would have been humid and it is possible that the Khmer Rouge, if anybody had been able to watch them, would have been prowling. So, given the jungle, everything else followed, more or less. Without the jungle, things were a little different.' Given that the soldier in the *Newsweek* photograph seems to weep, it must be for a dead friend.

*The face of war:  
Australians at Gallipoli.  
Photo: John Rogers.  
© Campbell Thomson*

The Falls Road,  
Belfast 1983,  
opposite the Sinn  
Fein office. Photo:  
Cambell Thomson.



Fenton also writes: 'It is quite astonishing to me how much interesting material is jettisoned by newspaper reporters because they will not be able to write it up, because to do so would imply they had been present at the events they had been describing. And not only present—alive, conscious and with a point of view'.

The myth of objectivity is sustained to camouflage ideological positions.

Thucydides, the failed and exiled Athenian naval commander who became the first war reporter, wrote about events in the third person even when he was a witness. His history of the Peloponnesian War against Sparta is meant to demonstrate that democracies cannot fight wars. He despairs of Athens 'committing even the conduct of state affairs to the multitude' after the death of the Athenian leader, Pericles. He has the demagogue Cleon debate whether to execute all the inhabitants of the rebellious colony, Mitylene: 'I have often before now been convinced that a democracy is incapable of empire ... However, if, right or wrong, you determine to rule, you must carry out your principle and punish the Mitylenians as your interest requires; or else you must give up your empire and cultivate honesty without danger'. Thucydides regarded expediency as the only constant in politics. His frame of reference applies to the American experience in Vietnam. The talk of justice and new world order with the Gulf War is also undermined by the subtext of expediency.

Fenton discusses the construction of 'news': '*Newsweek* now makes it perfectly clear that the man on the spot is only helping someone in the office, whose name comes first ... in conventional journalism, form is length ... one longs for an elastic magazine, in which content can determine new forms. One longs to get back to reporting ...' Fenton is disingenuous here. All 'reporting' relies on the viewpoint of the reporter. Simple, value-free, transparent description is philosophically impossible. Careful, honest, informed and aware reporting is not.

Fenton found his magazine in *Granta*. Michael Herr, the author of *Despatches*, that resonant, first -

person war report from Vietnam, found it briefly in *Rolling Stone*. Unlike reporters in the Gulf, Herr was able to hang out with the grunts and write pungently of them. He admits he was a fascinated voyeur—'I was there to watch'. He also writes that, rather than covering the war, he was covered by it.

In his rock 'n' roll romanticism, half in love with death, there is also an unacknowledged homoeroticism. He would nod at the words of war photographer Tim

Page: 'Trying to take the glamour out of war is like trying to take the glamour out of sex.'

**F**ENTON WRITES WAR as unsexy as possible. He also acknowledges that, as all scientists are actors in their experiments, the reporter is also a participant. Of the sacking of the US embassy in Saigon he writes: 'Some people gave me suspicious looks, as if I might be a member of the embassy staff, so I began to do a little looting myself.' He takes sides but tells you about it.

Accompanied by press officers, with every movement and interview controlled, it was difficult for Gulf reporters to find unofficial news, especially when majority opinion endorsed war aims. They often became unwitting propagandists. As *Newsweek* put it: 'Schwarzkopf mordantly thanked the American press for exaggerating the speed and size of the US build-up'.

There is more to it than bias. Riding in a tank, it is not in a reporter's immediate interest to report that his hosts have shot up a truck full of civilians. Not if he wants to get back to his satellite link-up. Satellites make informed reporting more difficult. As Fenton wrote about Vietnam: 'For the reporter, there was a choice: one either went out to see what was happening, or one wrote about it... The first two laws of stringing are: 1. The more you file, the more you earn. 2. The more you file, the less you learn.' With satellites, you need to file yesterday to keep up with the flow of images that need explanations. As Tony Walker wrote in *The Age*: 'newspapers, simply by their nature, are trapped in a 24-hour cycle'.

Russell, who covered the Crimean War and many others for *The Times*, faced the same problem when the





In the trenches at Gallipoli. Photo: John Rogers (fifth from left). © Campbell Thomson.

telegraph was invented: 'I cannot describe to you the paralysing effect of sitting down to write a letter after you have sent off the bones of it by lightning!' Radio and television are confined by their instantaneous nature. Walker wrote that 'CNN is the stealth bomber, the Cruise missile of modern journalism'. Both these weapons need to be programmed with target information to be effective. TV images are put in context by editors and reporters doing the voice overs. Russell reported picnickers from Washington setting out in carriages to watch the first battle of the Civil War as if off to the races. Did CNN screen war as a similar consumer spectacle?

The fashionable theory is that America lost the Vietnam war on TV screens in the mid-west, that images of napalmed children changed public opinion. 'Hot' and dangerous images from the Gulf were censored, overtly or covertly, or 'cooled' by context. The war-producers learned how to control media response from the British experience in the Falklands. Only when that conflict was off the front page and no longer 'hot', were unpatriotic stories run. Questions in the House of Commons about the sinking of the *Belgrano* have not really been answered. The Official Secrets Act helped.

During the Gulf War the Pentagon made irrelevant any complaints based on the First Amendment to the US constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech. If reporters have only 'safe' information, they can be as free as they like with it.

The only reporter in English in the Gulf War who asked if the emperor wore clothes was Robert Fisk of *The Independent*. Familiar with Arabic language and culture, he understood messages denied to monolingualists. Only he repudiated allied reports that attacking Iraqis had withdrawn from the Saudi town of Khafji after their only aggressive move of the war. Fisk found that the Iraqis were still in position 12 hours after their supposed retreat.

What are the connotations in Arabic of the phrase 'the mother of all battles'? In western tradition, motherhood is linked to battle in events like the New Testa-

ment Massacre of the Innocents and so the idea 'mother of battle' evokes horror. The mythical female warriors, the Amazons, cut off one breast, supposedly to make it easier to draw a bow but also detaching them from the concept of motherhood. The photograph of the American woman soldier with the button photo of her baby on her helmet overlaps the two disjunctive categories to create a troubling image. It was one of few pictures which did not repeat visual clichés from previous conflicts. Is it a good thing that war is not just 'men's business' anymore? Would female war reporters write any differently? I would like to read Fisk's response but in what forum would I find it?

What will the Gulf War coffee-table books and the Gulf War videos look like? Will they be as jingoistic as the ones produced by British journalists after the Falklands? Who will ask the difficult questions? The satirist and cartoonists? P.J. O'Rourke was funny but as politically sophisticated as Spiro Agnew. Doonesbury had a surprisingly meek and mild war. Leunig despaired without going beyond cliché. Patrick Cook in the *Bulletin* took a very easy anti-ABC line. Knight in the *Sunday Herald* was crass enough to portray Keating as Hussein.

**W**HERE WAS THE SPIRIT OF SWIFT? Where was Hunter S. Thompson? His refreshing paranoia usually upsets preconceptions. Where were the coruscating Ralph Steadman cartoons? I guess more hindsight is needed. Only recently has the Vietnam war been adequately discussed in works like *A Bright Shining Lie*. Cynics claim that our culture of consumer capitalism is able to assimilate such criticism with ease.

I used to think I made a useful contribution in Belfast. We lost no soldiers to IRA attacks. It is difficult to know if the shooting of Patrick Elliott deterred IRA active service units or not. The meaning of his death seems to change each time I consider it. ■

**Campbell Thomson** is a Melbourne writer and photographer.

# Rituals of Surrender

Photo courtesy of Penelope Buckley



Vincent Buckley, *Last Poems*,  
McPhee Gribble, Penguin Books  
Australia Ltd 1991.  
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**O**UT OF THIS WORLD YET OF IT, standing on the periphery of late-found happiness in a rising tide of sadness, Vincent Buckley's rich legacy reminds us simultaneously of just what we have lost and gained by his death. Real poets are few, and the price of their survival is high in the country of the deaf; the humbling evidence of poetic integrity emerges rarely. These last poems, sensitively arranged by his widow and beautifully produced by McPhee Gribble, constitute such evidence. They also bring to mind Keats' words written shortly before his death: 'I have an habitual feeling of my real life having past, and that I am leading a posthumous existence.'

No stranger to the *sunt lacrimae rerum* trope, Buckley grounded his poetic life early in those great lyric staples, memory and mortality. In 'Stroke', the tough, moving elegy for his father pub-



lished in 1963, he questioned the terms of existence beyond self:

*... Who can revive  
A body settled in its final mood?*

*To whom, on what tide, can we move and live!*  
and again, as if armed with premonitory wisdom about his own end, the poet drafted the blossoming delicate contract between parent and child:

*Dying, he grows more tender, learns to teach  
Himself the mysteries I am left to trace.*

Tracing the mysteries meant leaving safe places, reclaiming spiritual territory every bit as harsh as the 'sour land' his grandfather farmed ('you might as well be ploughing a salt lick'). It meant going back 'to the first/ Home, to the savage entry of the heart' ('Late Tutorial' 1961), dispensing with righteous causes, challenging the facility of 'noble language' that can persuade poets of their own divinity, clearing out the rubble of pretension and falsity. Buckley's caustic honesty with himself seldom faltered either as poet—'I give too much in rhetoric/ What should be moulded with a lifetime's care,'—or as a teacher conniving at his own repression—'this short/ Still youthful puppet in academic gown.' ('Late Tutorial').

The key poem in this complex and varied book is 'A Poetry Without Attitudes'. The phrase occurs in the text of the first and as the title of the last poems of the central group, evoking not only Buckley's most pressing creative preoccupation, giving thematic unity to what might otherwise have seemed disparate, but also recalling the heroic venture of Yeats' later years. In fact, what Seamus Heaney had to say about 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' might equally refer to Buckley's poignant metamorphosis: 'Here the great fur coat of attitude is laid aside, the domineering intellect and the equestrian profile ... What we have is a deeply instinctive yet intellectually assented-to idea of nature in her benign and nurturant aspect as the proper first principle of life and living.' Here, then, is the poem:

*A poetry without attitudes*

*that, like a chance at happiness,  
arrives too late, so candid  
it will seem secret  
and will satisfy no-one,*

*be useless in seminars  
and will certainly aggravate critics*

*and force even the publisher  
to speak of a New, a Mature voice*

*while actually you are learning  
to walk with it, to lie against it,*

*your earth-tremor, your vibrato  
turning you slowly into song.*

Unlike Yeats, however, Buckley in this poem not only admits the relinquished will, the setting-aside of intellectual sophistry and the return to instinctual pas-

sivity, but also defensively mocks the potentially uncomprehending reception of his new-found simplicity. This applies not only to future critics and reviewers but also to that part of himself that doesn't give easy intellectual assent to miracles of purgation and transcendence.

**H**AVING WALKED THE ACADEMIC TIGHTROPE FOR MOST OF its working life, the wary mind is always alert to the net's removal: in such an environment 'watchfulness is normal.' This makes matters rather less than innocent, putting him several hops ahead of his reader. It isn't easy to review a book whose author sets about sabotaging the very tools which his formidable intellect used to such effect as both critic and teacher. How can one use well-worn abstractions in the searchlight of such covert satirical self-scrutiny? The following lines from 'Remember Mortality' mark the distinction between glib concept and actuality:

*Too much sweet talk. Remember Mortality,  
that lovechild of the seminar?  
Remember the years we spent  
mulling over it (Mortality,  
the great sub-text of poetry,  
with all those classical subjunctives;  
the big M; the complaint tradition,  
the Praeparatio and Consolatio)  
till it seemed to grow before us  
with noble, sombre gradualism,  
creased and leathery as Picasso,  
but safe as a clutch of aunts and uncles.*

And, in case you start imagining that the poet's intellect has softened with the onset of wise passivity, he lets in a hard bright shaft of anger to remind you of past dues paid towards its advent:

*So, what do you want me to write about?  
The live past, the dead future?  
Shopfront universities  
the criminal zest of institutions  
Satires of circumstance?  
Friends bound in love by envy?  
I will write of the future, which I know  
with carnal clarity.*

That tough-minded clarity, drawn from the mire of experience, has always been Buckley's aim, the effort towards it his greatest achievement, pulled as he was between the urge to public action and the impulsion towards artistic detachment. When he asserts that 'Poetry, Vertu, Soul, are all/ feats of the body', we believe him.

The need to shuck off cant ('each of us has a lost language, to be cherished and built back') coupled with an aversion to the distorting power of words, of systems, of institutions and his own cleverness ('Just as you were learning to be one thing/ You were forced to become another;') infuses the whole collection. Whether it shaped itself in the haiku-like delicacy of poems for his daughters, or in unsentimental but deep-felt acknowledgements of his debt to Ireland as linguistic and emotional catalyst in wonderful poems for Heaney, Kinsella, or the Dublin hunger-strikers, the poetry runs clean. Yeats is also obliquely present in unmistakably but

unselfconsciously Irish cadences, repetitions, inversions, ellipses ('there was nor youth nor age/ but Summer bridling down the avenues ... Summer brimmed up through the weighty cool.') Now and again, flashes of a loopy, desperate humour relieve the elegiac mood. The notion of a native language torn from its moorings and painfully, joyously reclaimed is powerfully present and, like healing dew after the harsh, Australian boyhood summers bitterly remembered, Ireland helped the blood ripen in the vein, feeding 'a great head of blossom' under the heart.

Self-contempt also surfaces in ambivalent images of the poet confronted by war and violence—'how useless poets are, how feeble/ their anecdotes and promises.' Or, 'Poets, with their room-bound acts,/ their room-soft fingers,/ are aimless movers.' Musicians, on the other hand, make few claims, offer no solutions, are indivisible from their instruments, physically and primarily at one with their cadences. In 'Perfect Pitch' we find a rueful wish:

*... In the next life  
I will be a maker of music,  
not bothering with words.*

But the anchor in this life was strong, however rocky the boat. Buckley's haunting readiness to abandon himself so vulnerably to the unknown sea is utterly compelling, as in 'Recovery Suite for Thomas Kinsella':

*... we are  
landed with our bodies,  
earthed there, indeed,  
till even muse memory  
with its known malicious warmth,  
its curled-back tongue,  
its inexplicit mobile eyes,  
learns how to survive us.*

Muse memory, impersonal as an Egyptian fertility goddess, responded amply to her acolyte's summons. In 'Kildare', for example, we find:

*Frighten me awake, good voices,  
till I'm alive with fear.  
Despairing men make bad prophets,  
sleeping men poor soldiers.*

A passionate identification with a suffering world in a group entitled 'Soft War Poems' refutes charges of impotence laid elsewhere. Almost maternally ('soft is the hardest to be'), he hopes against deeper knowledge for human redemption in 'What do you want for this child', the wish sharpened, perhaps, by memories of his appalled ten-year-old self bringing calves to the slaughter from his father's farm:

*(born stark as Jesus Christ, laid on new matting)?  
If he's to be a poet, let him  
not live in a place, or time, of war.*

Surveying the 'usual order of things' under Venus and the rising moon, he is reluctant to speak 'for fear of saying too much.' But he says enough, anticipating our present and future horrors, alive to the best and worst that muse memory can deliver in 'Perfect Pitch':

*... everything that burns with life  
running and dying: the bodies scrawled in Athens,  
tanker on tanker on fire in the gulf,*

*property still theft, all the earth's chemicals  
crawling with death like woodlice, ...*

In the teeth of 20th century barbarism, the universal suppression of freedom, our apathy and destructiveness, Buckley asks 'How will civilisation last?' Frightened awake to 'the monstrous dream prototypes:/ tortured heads, with holes large as faces/ opened in them; a corpse hung at the ford;/ a serf enduring the thousand lashes;' in 'Hunger-Strike', he grants neither himself nor his country immunity from evil. The gulag covers the world, engorging innocence in its creeping fungoid progress:

*a gulag for all climates,  
even those that bind our continent  
so hard, so anciently, so gently.*

More frightening still is the immediacy of a cataclysmic vision at the conclusion of the 'Soft War Poems' sequence:

*When it comes,  
squeezing our souls together in the darkness  
you will not have chosen  
morning or evening for it  
and you will not be able to choose  
whether to die indoors or out,  
whether enfolding your children's bodies  
or shredded, alone on black grass,  
whether by sucking wind or fire,  
by lightning bolt or crushed brainpan,  
you will not even choose  
whether to die as man or as woman.*

This cold, dispassionate artistry with language moving outward from the nucleus of self has always defined Buckley's work as (dare one use the word?) superior. It has sometimes acted as a tourniquet on the voice of true feeling. This has not happened in these poems. He has found that long-desired release, that 'ease of feeling which would allow language to form itself' once envied in American writers. As one of the last pieces says:

*Love, you make and heighten me  
With every subtle breath,  
A new earth and new man, set free  
From the shape of his own death.*

There is scarcely a single poem in this large volume that doesn't compel attention, whether from the poet's innate sensitivity to organic form, or from that naturally refined eloquence that never hectors its audience, never asks for pity or lapses into self-congratulation. Far from rendering the poetry invulnerable, it intensifies the sense of exposure to life's pain and pathos in a way that is fast becoming anachronistic among today's navel-gazers, ranters, and ideologues. Let Vincent Buckley have the last word in the beautiful conclusion to 'An Easy Death':

*But think of your name as something  
burnt up in a moth-flight,  
thrown off by a self which has learned  
to seize its oblivion  
for the sake of memory.*

**Fay Zwicky's** most recent book was *Ask Me* (UQP 1990). She is currently working on short stories.



## Good Friday Seder at Separation Creek

*The moon has a flat face,  
yellow Moses peering over the chine  
of our neighborhood mountain. Growl,  
goes the rough surf. Our backstage mopoke  
may have guessed that we lack  
shinbone and bitter herbs for the occasion  
while nuggety Joshua, gleeful as ever,  
nicks off to his bedroom in order to find  
the tucked-away afikomen. His brother  
is all tricked out in Liverpool strip,  
as red as Karl Marx but much fitter.*

*Braggart moon floats loftier now,  
a white queen dragging the tides along  
like a cloak of crushed velvet.  
No rest for the wicked: surfers are camped,  
or shacked, all the way from Pisgah to Sinai.  
If they read, it is airport novels  
with titles embossed in gold, but not the scriptures,  
not crazy Nietzsche, certainly not Oscar Wilde  
who shrugged and scribbled, 'what comes of all this  
is a curious mixture of ardour and indifference,'  
and believed all art is entirely useless,*

*or said, or thought, or wrote, that he believed it,  
a plump serious chap who lived  
beyond religion on the Plains of Art.  
Now, over a varnished tabletop  
we recite the special dealings that a people  
had with He-who-is while quitting Egypt,  
but it does feel quaint to have this on Good Friday,  
a day whose very name has the kids  
wondering if the language was taken ill  
at its coining. Those big waves barge home  
out of a Matthew Arnold metaphor*

*while the grained beach stands in for Zion,  
offering peace of mind. No sweat  
this evening, with our salt stars sailing  
through the black text of pinetree branches  
and that mopoke murmuring its bafflement  
in the very face of the Torah,  
sitting on the shoulder of mortality.  
It's a gorgeous night. And there we go:  
Diana of the fibros cannot show us that  
history is a polychrome figure,  
thorned, gassed and smeared with blood.*

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

## Tales of an envy culture

MUSING RUEFULLY, in one of his last poems, on a few things that are worthwhile, Vincent Buckley isolated these:

*friend without envy.  
love without bile.  
a life's work without guilt.  
a poetry without attitudes.*

'Friend without envy'? Buckley was dreaming, perhaps, of a culture other than his own. Expert analyst of tactics of social marginalisation, Buckley well understood the workings of the envy culture in Australia, even if he was not so egregious a victim of that culture as some of his contemporaries, Peter Conrad, Thomas Keneally, David Williamson among them.

In a column in *The Australian*, Miriam Dixson argued that the well-known 'tall poppy syndrome' in this country has never been named right. Employed so frequently, talk of cutting down tall poppies has become an overly familiar, hence under-examined aspect of Australian life. Dixson contends that the syndrome is really 'a bland name for envy'. While admitting that envy, usually covert and snide, is common to all cultures, Dixson cites various speculations on its historical entrenchment here.

For Manning Clark, envy and self-doubt were prime features of the 'Botany Bay disease', which especially infected convicts, the Irish and members of a profoundly insecure middle

class. For Peter Ryan, the elevation of Ned Kelly to folk hero signified 'the corrosive envy, the black, defeated nothingness that lies somewhere near the heart of our national culture'. Dixson concluded with the caution that 'the more egalitarian a community, the more cannily it has (we have) to negotiate the dangerous rocks of envy'.

My concern is more with the contemporary guises of envy in Australian cultural life than with its penal and metaphysical origins. Illustrative case studies abound. Let's take first *The Punishment of the Ungrateful Sons*. Revenants seldom receive charitable welcomes back to Australia. There have been exceptions. Robert Hughes, whose departure was perhaps hastened by hostile reactions to his *Art in Australia* (1966), was fêted on his return in the mid 1980s. Researching *The Fatal Shore* he was given privileged access to archives, to the pardonable envy of some local scholars.

AFTER AN ABSENCE of ten years in England, Peter Conrad made the first of his return visits to Tasmania. An important issue of these visits was his work of Romantic autobiography, *Down Home*. That he'd been back more than once to the island where he spent his first twenty years; that he was not interested in writing cheery, boosters' travelogue or fawning to the Tasmanian Greens, was not important to several reviewers.

Cassandra Pybus, editor of the magazine *Island*, wrote in admonitory mode in *Meanjin*: 'Peter Conrad has spent too long in the intellectual eyrie he has constructed from English literature. He would do well to come to ground and actually walk on the earth.'

Much more amusing was the warning by senior *Mercury* journalist Wayne Crawford (who'd later own up to not having laid his hands on the book) that 'It might be safer if expatriate Tasmanian Peter Conrad doesn't show his face in the Midlands or the Derwent Valley for a while'. Another commentary exposed the common and revealing unease with *Down Home* of those—not native-born—who believed that their decision to settle in Tasmania had implicitly been derided in the book. Expatriate Scot Alexander Porteous solemnly judged that 'Conrad isn't indeed a writer at all—he doesn't trust words'.

Most vehement was Mark Thomas in *The Canberra Times*. He pontificated that Conrad 'may be distracted from a small island by a big ego'. Thomas' diatribe perfectly, if unwittingly, exemplified that 'Tasmania' which Conrad had diagnosed and dissected. In all these attacks envy seemed to be generated not so much from resentment at the expatriate's success, nor even centrally by the details of his reminiscent portrayal of Tasmania, but because of Conrad's temerity at pre-empting all the never-



to-be written private estimations, by other Tasmanians, of their home place. This animus, directed—almost—at writing itself, was the subtler aspect of an envy which had cruder, baleful expressions as well.

The second envy case study that I want to present might be titled *The Falling-Away That Was*. Here envy appears in the guise of sorrowing (although invidious) comparisons. These are not now often made with overseas writers. We don't hear that Keneally is no Brian Moore, notwithstanding that such a comparison would be instructive. Rather, writers are likely to find their latest works disparagingly contrasted with the promise of their earlier ones. From his own, and others' experience, David Williamson affirmed 'what the novelist Thomas Keneally had once said about the dangers of being a writer in Australia. You were discovered, given premature canonisation, the artistic hopes of Australia were placed on your shoulders, then if you happened to have a critical reverse you were subjected to savage retribution and you spent the rest of your life wandering from bar to bar wondering why you weren't Dostoevsky.'

After the recent publication of Keneally's novel *Flying Hero Class*, the *Sunday Age* 'Top Shelf' scribe opined that: 'There was a time (20 years or so ago) when he looked like the natural successor to Patrick White. Over the years, however, Thomas Keneally has done his best to turn himself into our one popular international writer.'

**T**HAT 'HOWEVER', which expresses envy as condescension, is more significant than the careless and unjust remark about how many Australian authors enjoy popularity overseas. More of the same follows. Keneally, we're told, is 'one of the slickest and most professional of our writers'. The sly and shifty demeaning of craft competence (professionalism) by association with slickness is a typical envy reaction of the non-productive fantasist author. The targeting of steadily (or in Keneally's case sometimes recklessly) productive writers for critical opprobrium is a shabby commonplace in Australian literary culture. By contrast, minnows and transients with over-praised first novels, sundry re-



cycled short bits and pieces and numerous public readings of works in progress to their credit, are routinely spared astringent attention.

Unfortunately for Keneally's critical reputation, Australian tertiary institutions harbour some envious types. A couple let their disdain for Keneally be voiced, albeit anonymously, in the *Australian* magazine. One, affronted that Keneally dictated into a tape recorder (what does she/he

think of the making of *Paradise Lost*?) sniffed that 'He writes too much'. Another seconded that opinion: 'He is too prolific and the quality has suffered as a result'.

Keneally has given particular affront not only because he writes a lot, lives well from writing, wins big literary prizes, travels widely, features in colour supplements, but because of the conventions that he employs in his fiction. The temper of his work is



melodramatic (in the rehabilitated sense of that term): Keneally deals with predators and victims, with paralyzing threats of dispossession, with extravagant language and gestures. The villains of melodrama, of course, subsist in envy their many other vices.

Keneally's habit of engorging with relish so much of the world for his fiction (in the present and at many past times, in Australia and in numerous other countries) doesn't delight the fastidious either. His kind of prodigality, even greediness, is particularly bound to inflame the envy of purse-lipped critics, and it has often done so in Australia.

Thus his earlier work—*Bring Larks and Heroes* in particular—written before he'd been able to gain the financial freedom to write full time, is frequently preferred to the later instalments of a now flourishing career. David Williamson has seen an analogous pattern of judgment of his earlier and recent plays. Envious onlookers pronounce such authors' public success as evidence of their artistic failure.

The season of literary prize-winning in Australia is probably over for Keneally, and perhaps for David Malouf as well. Authorities seem not to believe that 'unto every one that hath shall be given'. Large prizes now often are presented to minor talents whose promise proves ephemeral.

Indeed a third guise of envy in Australian culture is the tendency to bestow awards on writers of lesser abilities as a way, it would seem, of reproving the sustained achievements of established authors. That this process may be unconscious and unacknowledged reveals envy rather than benign consideration for the young.

The jobbing and log-rolling involved here creates an award rather than a reward culture; consolidates a fetishism of prizes; encourages the no longer shamefaced collaboration of publishers in inveterate and irresponsible puffing of mediocrity. Who has seriously asked where are the award-

winner of last year? Or wondered how much harm was done to fragile talents and bolstered egos by the festive handouts of prizes?

There is still another manifestation of envy in Australian culture which is in many respects the most insidious. This is envy-manipulation by the purported victims of envy. Since the early days of Australian literature, from the time of Charles Harpur at least, Australian writers have taken a measure of painful pleasure in discov-

*You were discovered, given  
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artistic hopes of Australia were  
placed on your shoulders, then  
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critical reverse you were  
subjected to savage retribution  
and spent the rest of your life  
wandering from bar to bar  
wondering why you weren't  
Dostoevsky.*

ering and declaring themselves both envied and misunderstood. The envy of others has been a theme of many Australian writers' lives and works, another facet of the dichotomising, adversarial habits that are near the centre of our cultural life. Famously Patrick White complained of the injustice meted out to him by envious, provincial Australian critics (an issue explored and a claim contested in Alan Lawson's *Meanjin* essay, 'Unmerciful Dingoes').

But the assumption that the writer operates in an envy-drenched atmosphere in Australia can provide a significant means of self-exculpation. 'Envy'

became part of many expatriates' kit-bags of explanation for their departure from this country after the Second World War, together with Menzies, censorship, six o'clock closing, the literary trials of Max Harris and Robert Close. Envy's existence could prove a convenient blanket excuse for defection. Thus subtly the envy culture in Australia could corrupt those whose provoking abilities otherwise held that culture up to scorn.

The guises of envy, traced here, are so various that they make it difficult to focus on the essential question of what it is that is being envied, knocked, cut down to size in Australia, and notably in its literary circles. Are we considering principally envy of worldly success or is it envy of authors who refuse the enticements of intellectual fashion, or even, and fundamentally, is it envy of those who prefer speech before silence and take the risk of publication rather than carping safely from the sidelines?

Singly and in combination, these motives are evidently tawdry and self-tormenting. The envious—whether critics, academics, other writers, merely acquaintances—are responding out of proportion to whatever presumed provocation they have received.

The envy culture in Australia lacks that 'mixture of the love of justice in it' which the political scientist Alan Davies hypothesised as one of the ingredients of envy. Instead its guises and practices speak of a condition of mind and spirit from which any form of love (including, perhaps especially, self-love) is absent.

The envious mood that afflicts Australian culture discloses the death wish of numbers of the operators and publicists of that culture, who long perversely for the demise of the people, the heritage and the institutions that they profess to sponsor. ■

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## A heart upside down

IT IS SAID that biographies are often as revealing of the biographer as of the subject. This is so of *Tartar City Woman* in a specially piquant sense. Trevor Hay tells the story of a generation of Australian China specialists at the same time as he gives us the story of Wang Hsin-ping. It is a tale of disillusionment; but it is also an encouraging tale. As the scales drop from the protagonist's eyes, her compassion and commitment grow.

Wang Hsin-ping is hardly a typical modern Chinese figure. She was cursed throughout her life in the People's Republic by the fact that her father was living in Melbourne, Australia, not only far off but dangerously foreign. Eventually, at the point where Trevor Hay's account of her life ends (except for a fascinating epilogue in the form of a return trip to China in 1987) she herself comes to Melbourne to settle.

A further black mark against her was that her grandfather, dead long before her birth, had been an official in the pre-1911 imperial government and the adopted son of a wealthy landlord. This bad class background, a Maoist original sin, served to deny her educational and employment opportunities and make her a prime target in the recurrent campaigns and policy reversals that punctuated, and still do to some extent, the lives of the people of China.

On the other hand, her privileged upbringing in the Tartar City of Peking, the home of the old ruling class, gave her not only an inheritance of old culture and old opulence, but an independence and resilience of character that brought her through the experiences that destroyed so many of her contemporaries.

The story is told on two levels: Hsin-ping's family life and the drama

of Chinese history being played out before her eyes and frequently impinging on the lives of her grandmother, her husband, child and friends; and her own daily existence. In fact it is precisely the inseparability of the two levels, the impossibility of an apolitical, strictly personal life in revolutionary China, that is the main theme of the book. Hsin-ping's brief interlude of tranquillity in Xiamen during the Cultural Revolution, her Peach Blossom Spring, forms a kind of emotional core to the story.

It would be very hard to find a more lively, concise history of China from 1949 to 1975 than Wang Hsin-ping's reminiscences of her life in Peking and elsewhere as told to Trevor Hay. We follow the early period of revolutionary adjustment, the traumas of the anti-Rightist campaigns of the late fifties when Hsin-ping was at university, the senseless cruelty and chaos of the Cultural Revolution seen from a Peking secondary school, and the cynicism and despair of the period of leadership struggles in the seventies. All is told with verve, unmistakably authentic detail and a sense of historical perspective.

It is, however, this last that raises some big issues of biographical method. I felt, as I read, a growing sense of unease at the extent of the hindsight displayed, at the western perceptions and consciousness revealed in the narrative. Partly, it is a question of language. The book is the fruit of innumerable conversations and many hours of taped reminiscences in Chi-

nese. The sensibility and structures of the resultant text, however, are necessarily those of an alien tongue. The mention of 'witches', the expletives and scatological humour, raise too many false echoes.

More seriously, there are very long passages of dialogue and conversation, some from forty years ago. Hay is aware of this problem and admits in the preface that 'for the sake of the narrative, I have sometimes reconstructed coherent discourse from fragments; but in general the text reflects what Hsin-ping told me. I have noticed that Chinese people frequently do remember conversations in remarkable detail, perhaps because so much of modern Chinese political culture is a kind of polemic routine.'

PERHAPS SO; nevertheless, either Hay or Hsin-ping appears to display an astounding prescience and detachment at times. Some examples of such anachronisms, however justified by the thrust of the narrative and imperatives of analysis, are the 13-year-old Hsin-ping criticising Soviet economic exploitation of China in 1950; her suspicion of Lin Biao's ambition in 1968, and her all too apposite recalling of the Tang dynasty poet Du Fu's lines about military conscription while farewelling a young relative during the 'down to the countryside' movement of the early seventies.

And did normal classes in Peking schools come to a standstill for six months in 1971-2 during the prepara-

Trevor Hay, *Tartar City Woman: Scenes from the life of Wang Hsin-ping, former citizen of China*, Melbourne University Press, 1990. ISBN 0 522 84434 0. RRP \$24.95.

tion for President Nixon's visit? This very well told story is a cautionary tale about the possibilities of deception by foreign visitors in totalitarian societies. But what Chinese child, or adult for that matter, needed to be warned not to talk to foreign journalists? And the routines for greeting visiting foreign 'aunties' and 'uncles' were all too familiar (and wearisome to both parties) to require half a year's rehearsal.

Even if these reservations have substance—and it may well be that I am being hypersensitive and imposing my China on Trevor Hay's and/or Hsin-ping's—the book remains a compelling account of the life of a vital and fascinating woman.

*Tartar City Woman* belongs to an important genre of English-language writing about China which includes Lady Hosié's *A Chinese Lady* and Ida Pruitt's *Daughter of Han*. Trevor Hay's contribution to the list of semi-autobiographies of Chinese women has an assured place in this distinguished company. We must be grateful to their amanuenses for revealing to us the texture of their lives and the problems of being Chinese and female in the twentieth century.

Hay's comments in the prologue on his involvement with China since his first visit in May 1975 will trigger recollections for many readers. They certainly did for the present writer who was one of the party. But the most interesting difference between the neophyte China expert and the mature author of *Tartar City Woman* is not some loss of Maoist innocence; rather it is the recognition that beneath the cultural differences and the chasm between Australian and Chinese experience there lies a common humanity. Hsin-ping and her friends Tang Ling and Xun Linglai, her cousin Fan Yuzhong and numerous relatives and colleagues help us to escape our particularisms and see China as ours as well as theirs. ■

## 回光返照

**Paul Rule** teaches in the department of religious studies at La Trobe University. His books include *K'ung-tzu as Confucius* and *Mao Zedong*.

# Courting the powerful

Derek Parker, *The Courtesans: The Press Gallery in the Hawke Era*, Allen and Unwin, North Sydney 1991. ISBN 004 442343 8. RRP \$16.95. Reviewed by MARGARET SIMONS. Fia Cumming, *Mates: Five Champions of the Labor Right*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1991. ISBN 1 86373 021 4. RRP \$29.95. Reviewed by PAUL MEES.

I HAVE BEEN TOLD by a friend who works in the Canberra press gallery that just before Christmas 'the gallery went feral'. Resisting the temptation to reply 'How could you tell?', I asked what she meant. She told lurid tales of late-night parties, of female journalists dancing the lambada with the Treasurer, and of greenie lobbyists having passionate affairs with other lobbyists, who were married to journalists, who were in turn dancing the lambada ... but never mind. It should come as no revelation that journalism is as affected by fashion as any other occupation, and that the press gallery is a hot house. What might surprise people outside the club is the extent to which this affects the news you read and, more importantly, the news you never get to read.

Derek Parker is described on the dust jacket of *The Courtesans* as a former public servant. In fact, he was on the staff of both John Howard and Andrew Peacock. His failure to declare this affiliation in the book is unfortunate, given the points he makes about journalists failing to declare their former positions on the staff of politicians. The book is a mixture of penetrating, though not particularly original, political analysis backed up by gossip and marred by an excess of sour grapes.

For insiders, the gossip will be the attraction. Parker makes devastating criticisms of some prominent journalists, most notably Alan Ramsey of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Paul Kelly

of the *Australian* and Gregory Hywood of the *Australian Financial Review*. Parker also displays a perceptive grasp of the atmosphere of the press gallery. 'It is unwise,' he says, 'to mistake frantic activity for substantive diversity ... the gallery functions, to a large degree, as a closed social system. ... Now that women make up about one quarter of the membership, there are even cases of gallery members marrying each other, although less formal liaisons are much more common.'

Appealing to dictionary definitions, the book describes a courtesan as a person 'of dubious virtue who cultivates a high-class clientele'. The term, Parker says, implies a connection with a court, bringing power but little or no responsibility. 'The courtesan offers to the powerful advice, favours, or advantage ... to the Courtesans the game is all. This is not to say that they do not care who wins or loses, for even courtesans have favorites. It is only to say that their concern is with the mechanics of power, ... To the Courtesans, policies are means; the political contest itself is the end.'

PARKER ARGUES that the press gallery has become harnessed to the corporatist methods of the Hawke government. This has been aided by the fact that the gallery is a tight-knit group, with its members having more in common with each other than with the other employees of their respec-



tive media organisations. Due to their insularity, their relative youth and comparatively poor education, gallery members have little understanding of the wider public, and in many cases, have contempt for it. Copy is written largely for the audience within Parliament House. Parker argues that the gallery's institutional culture has been manipulated by the government, leading to a mentality that either discounts the government's faults or is blind to them.

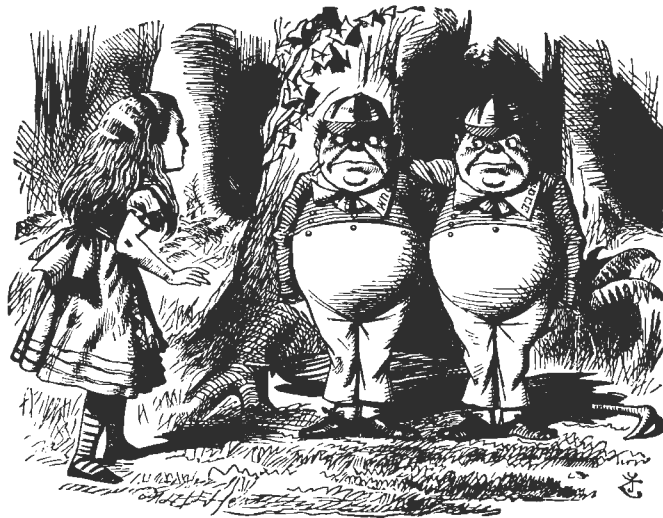
Why, for example, was the 'born to rule' attitude of former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser criticised, whereas the Treasurer, Paul Keating, has been able to make a speech that said, in part, 'It has been ingrained in me from childhood to think that my mission in life is to run you, and the Prime Minister thinks that his mission in life is to run you'. This was applauded by a gallery member as 'a leader's speech ... a stunning piece of political theatre'. (Alan Ramsey, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May 1988). Parker remarks: 'A different interpretation might have been made, of course, that it was the rantings of a deranged mind.'

Because of the mentality of the press gallery, Parker says, even gross errors by the government are forgiven, or seen as mistakes in tactics rather than in fundamental policy. Sharp practice and even corruption can flourish unchecked. Parker claims the gallery has come to practice biased, dishonest and incompetent journalism, focusing largely on process and hardly at all on substance.

I happen to agree with most of this. No honest observer of the Canberra press gallery could fail to acknowledge that it is at least partly true. But, having said that, one must allow that Parker's analysis is flawed. He overstates some things and understates others. For example, he rejects the impact of media ownership in a section called 'The Myth of the Proprietor', saying that concentration of media ownership, and the dominance of Rupert Murdoch in particu-

lar, is irrelevant to political commentary in the media of the 1980s and 1990s.

Certainly it is true that the media has many faults that are not a product of ownership, and that the culture of journalism can be a biased and destructive one. But it is making too strong a case to say that ownership is irrelevant to political journalism.



*Tweedledum and Tweedledee  
Agreed to have a battle  
For Tweedledum said Tweedledee  
had spoiled his nice new rattle*

Anyone who has watched the extraordinary bias and malevolence towards everything left-wing displayed by the Melbourne *Herald-Sun* knows how Murdoch's style of management, especially in his choice of editors, can affect the product offered to the public.

Parker's sour grapes also spoil his analysis in the sections on polling and election campaigns. Although he makes some perceptive criticisms of both the government and the press gallery, some of his points come down to little more than a complaint that the Hawke government has played a dirty game better than the coalition. Similarly, Parker criticizes the decline in the relevance of Parliament, and in particular of question time. He sees the media's failure to address this as part of the press gallery's cozy relationship with the government, whereas in fact it is probably part of a much broader inability of the media

to deal consistently and seriously with any issue that cannot be depicted as a conflict between individuals. Finally, Parker makes the alarming suggestion that the way to amend the culture of the press gallery would be to exclude journalists from Parliament House, forcing them to rent office space in Canberra and thus associate more with ordinary people. He also suggests they should be made to share the public gallery rather than having their own space. This is hardly a carefully considered solution, or a democratically desirable one.

Nevertheless, for the *Courtesans* Parker's book should be a challenge—though unfortunately his own bias and occasional lack of rigour will make it easy to dismiss without upsetting the prevailing mentality. For those outside the club, the book will increase scepticism about the way journalism is practised, and help explain the mental gymnastics and impenetrable circumlocutions that make up much of the political analysis emanating from the Canberra press gallery, now that

the Hawke Government is facing its most testing time.

— Margaret Simons

**F**IA CUMMING'S *Mates* promises to reveal the truth behind the 'cardboard cut-out' image of the ALP's notorious 'NSW Right', through conversations between this Canberra journalist and her subjects: Graham Richardson, Laurie Brereton, Paul Keating, Federal Speaker Leo McLeay and NSW Opposition Leader, Bob Carr. The dust jacket's spectacular claim is that the five 'mates' emerge as sensitive and idealistic, as well as ruthless and power hungry.

There is very little evidence inside the covers of sensitivity or idealism from any of the five interviewees. Far more commonly, we see untidy notions like idealism subordinated to the quest for personal power and polit-

ical success, and the vital task of waging war on the enemy.

The enemy, of course, is the Left, not, as some innocents might imagine, the conservative parties or big business. So all game plans and means of attack are seen as fair: branch stacking, rule bending and verbal abuse are recounted nostalgically by participants.

All agree that the brutal bashing of left-wing MP Peter Baldwin in 1980 went a little too far. Yet, Keating and Brereton describe with evident amusement how 'their' faction of Young Labor beat up an opponent a decade previously, and subsequently had the victim censured for the incident.

Of all the 'mates', noted head-kicker Graham Richardson comes closest to the promised frankness, making little pretence of high motivation. Keating, at the other extreme, offers no real self-examination or vestige of self-doubt. He remains, throughout, the self-styled Placido Domingo of Australian politics.

Leo McLeay is perhaps most profound in describing NSW right wing Labor politics as 'a feudal system'. But we are to take this, apparently, as testimony to its ideological purity; 'our machine was probably more similar to the sort of Democratic Party machines in the US, because it was about looking after its own people'. The best of those US machines, one might note, was run by those good, working-class Irish chaps at Tammany Hall.

**T**HE FAULTS of the 'tribe', we are to understand, are excusable because only the NSW Right understood how to make Labor modern and successful. Thus, with the Wran win in 1976, 'there was once again a Labor government in Australia'. ALP members from other states in the early 70s 'ran jerky little political organisations in Western Australia or South Australia or the Northern Territory ... they were nothing!' People like Don Dunstan may feel a little peeved to be dismissed as having played no part in the emergence of the modern election-winning ALP.

Another theme of *Mates* is the Catholic background of most of the participants. But Catholicism, like

party politics, is to be understood in a tribal, rather than religious sense. Tribal Catholicism gave the Right a fertile recruiting ground, and furnished the Left with another reason for hating the Right. But the analysis of heritage is thin: some very vague talk about the De La Salle Brothers' notion of social justice seems to comprise the Catholic contribution to the mates' worldviews.

**G**IVEN THE mates' insularity and lack of self-scrutiny, one might have expected some stringent questioning from the interviewer. Fia Cumming's speciality is said to be 'probing behind the daily headlines'. Yet when the former NSW Labor boss, John Ducker, describes his five protégés as representing 'the traditional values of the Labor Party', the apotheosis goes unchallenged.

The book shows other signs of sloppiness: former ALP federal secretary David Combe spends most, though not all, of the book as 'Coombe'. Some of the prose is embarrassingly purple: 'The eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1975 was the historic and tragic day for the Labor Party when the unfolding farce in Canberra came to its finale.'

Changing events have added an unintended irony to some stories: in the light of recent revelations in Western Australia, there is more bite than she bargained for in Cumming's praise for Graham Richardson's 'daring departure from tradition' in soliciting large campaign donations from wealthy businessmen.

Cynics about right-wing Labor politics will find their prejudices vindicated by *Mates*, while those who, like me, bemoan the lack of critical acumen in the Canberra press gallery will be provided with additional ammunition. Readers seeking to be informed about these magnificent men and their power 'machine' may be less satisfied.

— Paul Mees



#### THE WOLF WITHIN

We've all been led into a trap, a mental trap, by our civilization. We've all been told by our mother, or nurse, or someone, that life ought to be good, that man is good, that good triumphs over evil, that the big grey wolf never comes. So when we're confronted by something nasty, our initial response is that there must be some mistake—either we've made it, or better still someone else. It would be much better for mothers to tell their children that there's 50 per cent chance of a big grey wolf coming—and that he looks like us.

—Joseph Brodsky, *A Poet For Our Time*, Valentinia Polukhina, CUP Melbourne 1989.

#### THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

Lewis Lapham in *Money and Class in America: notes and observations on our civil religion*, comments on a series of advertisements, published in *Architectural Digest*, entitled 'Affluence, America'. The journal described the common characteristics of one suburb which reflected its subscribers' level of achievement: average household income of \$114,000 per annum; 8 out of 10 buy fine arts and antiques; an average home entertains 65 guests per month; 5 out of 10 households own two or more cars; 1 out of 5 is worth at least \$1 million; an average house is worth \$250,000; 3 out of 4 go abroad every 3 years and 2 out of 5 buy wine by the case. This is a portrait of success, of having *made it*. However, Lapham adds in a telling footnote, 'The advertisement quite properly omits any reference to the less flattering aspects of Affluence, America. The apologist doesn't seek out corollary statistics—for example, 2 of 5 are in the hands of psychoanalysts; 1 of 2 are divorced; 8 of 10 are estranged from their children; 3 of 4 complain of chronic depression; 4 of 8 addicted to cocaine; 1 of 5 under indictment for theft or fraud.'

—*The Way*, December 1989.



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**VITOR, aged 10**

*I want to know how God  
made the world and people  
and where Jesus was born.  
That is why I am writing to  
you to ask you for your help.  
We haven't got any religious  
books at all. So I'm asking  
you to make me a little  
present of religious books. I  
hope you won't say no.*



photo: Bill Thomas

