

EUREKA STREET

Vol. 3 No. 2 March 1993

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Fields of vision

John Clarke, interviewed by Mark Skulley, looks at the way we elect governments, and asks why

Margaret Simons looks at moves to save the Murray, and asks why not

Greg O'Kelly looks at kids looking at the media, and asks how

SBS
TV Guide

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EUREKA STREET

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A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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A little list

IN THE FIRST WEEK of the federal election campaign one metropolitan daily ran a story about the acute shortage of physics teachers in Australian schools. No one else picked up the story; the media and political circus rolled on, and soon most of us were fixated on an electronically extruded worm wriggling across the faces of the Incumbent and the Aspirant. Priorities.

Now it doesn't take Einstein's dog to understand that from a shortage of physics teachers will flow a matching shortage of students, a decrease in science graduates and, eventually, an even more acute shortage of science teachers, thereby completing a circle of stupidity and shortsighted planning. And this in a country that is moving rapidly, and with some small but significant success, into science-based enterprises in the region: telecommunications in Vietnam, television in Indonesia, engineering projects in other parts of Asia. Maybe we think we can do without physics. Feed them tax cuts.

If you have been preoccupied with the election and current affairs broadcasting, you may not have noticed that the ABC has banished books from Radio National. You can hunt for the word on ABC FM, or maybe find it on a Sunday, but don't look for the usual dose of literary delight at 8.30am on Thursdays, because *The Book Report* has gone. The managers have decreed that 'media' are better for you. Nothing wrong with a media program, and the new one is excellently prepared and presented by Andrew Dodd. But you won't, anymore, hear the like of interviews with Michael Ondaatje, author of *The English Patient*, or with Columbus' long-sighted biographer, Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, or enjoy Barry Humphries' bile and high humour as you eat your Weeties or crawl down the freeway. Priorities.

During the first of February's television debates you might have caught an apparently jocular exchange between John Hewson and the moderator, Kerry O'Brien. It was one of the debate's few lively moments, but there was a declaration of hostilities behind the urbane jollity. The guts of Hewson's message was: 'Boy, are we going to cut you.' The coalition's proposed reduction in the ABC budget has been public for ages. But how many people realise that the cut is about equivalent to the running costs of one ABC radio network? The ABC has already been pruned by Labor. Under a coalition government, it faces lopping.

In the course of the byzantine negotiations over pay television in Australia, 'choice' has been dangled as the carrot for consumers. There is a confusion between a simple multiplication of available programs and *real* choice in most of the discussion. But the arguments also largely ignore the enormous social value to Australia of communally watched, high quality,

free-to-air programs. The ABC has no monopoly on such material, but historically, along with SBS, it has been the broadcasting body most willing and likely to experiment, to promote Australian talent and to provide high-quality programs (which the other networks then buy up after the test drive has proved successful). It also services the whole country—and areas in the region—with news and current affairs programs that the commercial networks, for financial and political reasons, can't afford to run.

Take *The Civil War* series, re-run on SBS during February, as an example of programming that can become a reference point for a community, and enter the common language. It has been widely discussed and has altered or extended many people's views of American history and racial politics. And what we learn about the US has application here. Tim Colebatch, in *The Age*, invoked the series to illuminate the social and economic mess we find ourselves in. The generals did not calculate the consequences, says Colebatch. We know what he means. But we won't be able to share that awareness, or the common language he exploits, if we are all closeted away watching our own 'choice' of specialist microwave or satellite channel while the national broadcaster goes bust, or declines in genteel poverty and faded repeats. Clive James' Telecom ads said the last word on bogus choice. Do we never learn?

'CHOICE' IS ALSO THE WORD being brandished during this election campaign in the context of proposed radical changes to the industrial-relations system. This huge and complex social structure has been hammered out in the Australian workplace since the time of Justice Higgins' *Sunshine Harvester* judgment in 1907. No one argues that the system is perfect. It has been rorted and abused, and it is often intensely conservative, relinquishing traditions and practices only when cornered. But it has also shown itself capable of adaptation to changing circumstances, and over the years it has guaranteed a measure of safety, security and dignity to Australian workers. Try a spell as a waitress in Boston if you want to know what pay and conditions are like in the choice-laden world of opportunity and free-wheel-

ing competition. A spell as a non-unionised waiter in Australia at any time during the past four years wouldn't have been a bad tutor either.

This election requires that Australians think hard about the way in which ginger words like 'choice' are used, because we are the ones who will have to cope with the long-term social consequences of opting for what slogans offer.



Old skills, new country: Maurice Kadamani came to Australia from Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. He bakes traditional Lebanese bread, and finds that Australians enjoy his bread as much as the Lebanese do.

PHOTO: MICHAEL COYNE, FROM *A WORLD OF AUSTRALIANS*, DAVID LOVELL PUBLISHING, MELBOURNE 1992.

At election time, when words are cheap and thoughtful analysis hard to come by, it is all the more depressing to note the end of yet another small publishing venture. *ALR* (formerly the *Australian Left Review*) is putting out its final edition in March, and with its closure the spectrum of expressed opinion will become all the narrower. The traditional left and right have had a habit of reading one another in Australia, if for no nobler motive than to keep an eye on the enemy. Now there is even less to scrutinise. God forbid that we should all end up cramped in our private centres, wordless, watching sitcom re-runs on satellite.

Happy voting. ■

—Morag Fraser

Note: In February's *Eureka Street* we reported, on p4, that 8 per cent of our readers were professionally involved in education. The figure should have been 18 per cent.

Image breaker

From Chris McGillion, Sydney Morning Herald.

Fred Hollows was an iconoclast, not a saint, and it is his iconoclasm that we shall miss most about him. Other people (either encouraged or empowered by him) will carry on Fred's work against blindness born of poverty. But who will shake us out of our complacency, challenge our prejudices, confront us with uncomfortable truths, and in the process inspire us to imagine and accomplish new things?

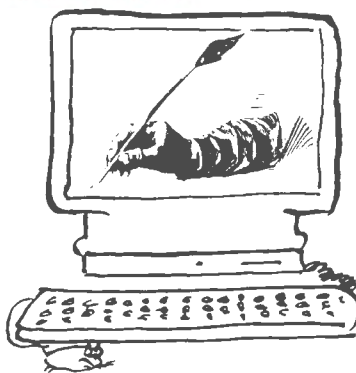
And yet Fred has been eulogised in saintly terms. This strikes me as ironic, but also as a possible insight into the Australian psyche. Ironic because Fred was no saint. Anyone who sat, and drank, and argued into the night with him knew that. Saintliness, of course, is a Christian concept. But as Fred wrote in his autobiography: 'Sex, alcohol and secular goodness are pretty keen instruments, and they surgically removed my Christianity, leaving no scars.'

Fred was raised in the Church of Christ and studied to become a minister before becoming an agnostic and dying an atheist. But the fact that he sent his kids to a Catholic school, and that his funeral was held in Saint Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, will give the church apologists great heart. He never strayed too far from the Gospel message, some will say. But that is not the point. Fred was always quoting the Bible but I suspect he believed that the church, not he, had done the straying. Others will argue that Christianity was the original source of his thirst for justice. But the first few pages of his autobiography show that this argument is completely false.

Fred loathed the 'odour of sanctity' that surrounded many people in the church as well as in the professions. But he had faith in ordinary people. In one of the last interviews he gave before his death he said, 'My definition of God is that within humans which causes them to strive for liberation—liberation from poverty, fire, drought, oppression of any kind.'

Could it be that Australians view Fred Hollows as a 'saint' because he understood their struggle, identified

Eureka Street welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters may be edited. Letters must be signed, and should include a contact phone number and the writer's name and address.



their particular demons, and, in his own inimitable style, gave expression to their quality of endurance in ways that institutionalised Christianity in this country has never done? Could it be that the popular appeal of this brusque, knockabout humanitarian tells us something very profound about Australian spirituality?

Chris McGillion
Sydney, NSW

No Joe

From J. O'Neill

Sir: I have grown used to *Eureka Street* becoming a strongly feminist journal but your December/January issue goes overboard when on the inside cover it is claimed that Christmas 'has always been a time for special focus on concerns of women'. In my innocence I always thought it was a time for special focus on families and particularly children. In the same issue Dorothy A. Lee in her 'Conspiracy of Hope' debunks Joseph's role in the Christmas story and sees Christ coming as a 'playful conspiracy between a handful of women and the Holy Spirit'. I am not certain what you can do about the wantonness of the Holy Spirit or the male Christ. You can make a start next Christmas by campaigning to keep Joe out of Christmas.

J. O'Neill
Cairns, Qld

Our stress was on focus, not exclusion. 'Sir', incidentally, is madam, but she also answers to 'father'. —Ed.

Words of honour

From H.J. Grant

Whether ultimately it be a pledge of loyalty or remain an oath of allegiance towards acquiring Australian citizenship, a public position of trust or an Australian passport, the text of the oath should be identical in expressing reciprocal obligations and entitlements; it should also be in language that is understandable, uplifting, that identifies Australia and acknowledges our multicultural origins.

All nations in their maturation tend to remove, refine or change symbols, trappings and language associated with those who substantially peopled and developed them often by occupation, stealth or invasion. England within the United Kingdom is no exception.

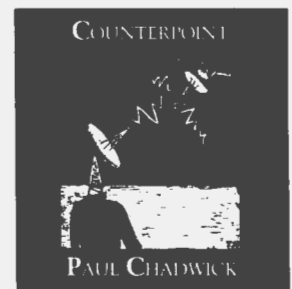
Britons, the original Celts inhabiting Britain when the Romans came, fought the latter and then invading Anglo-Saxons before being pushed back in the 5th century into the mountain fastnesses of Wales and Cornwall. By the time of King Alfred, in the 9th century, the Anglo-Saxon tongue had achieved a measure of unification. Incursions by the Danes, members of the same Teutonic stock as the Anglo-Saxons, caused King Alfred to offer them settlement in the north-east of England.

The next and last invasion from abroad, the Norman Conquest in 1066, saw the Saxon, Harold, defeated at Hastings by the Norman, William, and until the 14th century French was the language of the ruling classes. The emergence of Middle English in that century, however, and its progressive infiltration by French, Latin, Greek and Italian words and phrases evolved into what is today called the 'English' language, though it is actually the most international on earth.

Thus Australia, while continuing and strengthening its brand of the English language, refurbished and inspired by other tongues, including Celtic, is as entitled as England is to develop its own mores and customs. The process of allegiance provides that opportunity.

H.J. Grant
Campbell, ACT

A measure of control



SHOULD THE CANADIAN, CONRAD BLACK, be allowed to buy a controlling stake in Fairfax? He has an application before the Treasurer to take his 15 per cent holding to 25 per cent. Under the Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act, the Treasurer has sole power to approve or reject such an application. John Dawkins has postponed a decision until after election day. Depending on whom you speak to in the Keating government, Black is on a promise of success or his application is doomed. On past pronouncements, a Hewson government is likely to approve the application.

While Conrad is waiting, let us examine the way Australian governments make these decisions about whether a foreign investment proposal is contrary to the national interest—the sole criterion under the Act. Government policy says foreign investment in mass-circulation newspapers is 'restricted', but sets no limits. Each proposal is assessed by the Foreign Investment Review Board, a four-person panel, one member of which is a senior Treasury officer. The board makes recommendations but has no power. It operates in deep secrecy. (The government fought fiercely and successfully to prevent disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act of the board's advice over the 1987 takeover of the Herald and Weekly Times Ltd by Rupert Murdoch, an American.)

If, like me, you are opposed to foreign control of Australia's media but want to base this position on something more than secretions from the xenophobia gland, you will not find anywhere in the relevant law or published policy statements a reasoned analysis of the national interest in local control of media. Nor, for that matter, will you find the case *for* foreign control. It seems that even the unpublished 'Confidential—Limited Access Only' material offers the Treasurer no help in determining precisely what the national interest requires when ownership of the press is at issue.

The Foreign Investment Review Board's minute of 5 December 1991 to the then Treasurer, John Kerin, about the competing bids for Fairfax, has fallen from a truck. It shows that two members recommended rejection of both the foreign bids—that of Black, *sans* Packer, and that of the Irishman, Dr Tony O'Reilly. The other two members recommended approval of both. They considered 'the prospect of foreign control to be outweighed by the benefits of foreign newspaper expertise, such as higher quality journalism and more modern technology.'

These supporting reasons are not fleshed out, nor is it explained how the third bidder, Australian Independent Newspapers, could not have delivered these benefits. (In his last act as Treasurer before Hawke sacked him, Kerin approved O'Reilly and rejected Black. Swiftly, Black rejigged his bid so that it matched O'Reilly's

almost exactly and the new Treasurer, Ralph Willis, approved it. (Interested readers may consult *Corporate Cannibals—the Taking of Fairfax* by Colleen Ryan and Glen Burge, Heinemann, 1992.)

The continuing importance of the board's advice to Kerin is that it reveals the flaws in the system that is operating again for the current Black application. The 1991 minute plainly reveals the futility of percentage limits. After much hoo-ha, the ALP federal caucus had set a maximum of 20 per cent foreign voting equity. But the board concluded that either O'Reilly or Black would control the company with that or even less:

'In our view, the fact that the new Fairfax board would have majority Australian membership may not settle the issue, as we presume the directors and policies would be chosen on the advice of the foreign bidders with the requisite newspaper expertise. The benefits promised by the bids depend on them bringing foreign management, technology and journalism skills to Fairfax, which in itself might indicate effective foreign control. On balance, we would incline to the view that effective control of Fairfax would more likely be foreign.'

Some might say that in 1993 it is perfectly clear that Black controls Fairfax through his board representation and management appointees, so it does not matter whether his shareholding increases to 25 per cent or more. For several reasons, it does.

Fifteen per cent does not give him an entirely free hand, and the holdings of important institutional shareholders in Fairfax, such as the AMP, take on greater relative significance. A takeover bid, out of which effective Australian control might emerge, is a greater likelihood with Black stuck at 15 per cent. A majority shareholding would also permit Black to fit the Fairfax operation more tightly into his international Hollinger group. As with the meshing by Murdoch of the bulk of Australia's press into his international News Corporation, this does not necessarily mean that Australian readers and advertisers benefit.

If governments will not permit Black to increase his stake, he might sell out completely. A return to Australian control would be possible then. But what factors, precisely, lead to the conclusion that foreign control of the media is contrary to the national interest? Here's my list, about which debate is welcomed:

- Foreign interests have conflicts of loyalties that may lead to coverage in their Australian media outlets that does not give primary attention to Australia's national interests—say, over agricultural subsidies if the foreigner were American, or nuclear testing in the Pacific, if the foreigner were French. (Local managers appointed by foreign owners hotly contest this claim.)
- Resident owners are more accountable. The more distant the ultimate power, the more likely it is that the



THE NATION
MARK SKULLEY

needs of local parts will be neglected in favor of what is best for the corporate whole.

- The media are not an export industry, so foreign investment has a negative effect on the balance of payments through the repatriation of profits, dividends and interest.
- If the media do develop export potential as the information economy grows, especially in our region, then Australia should reap the benefits, not the foreign parents of media companies.
- An English-speaking country with as small a population as Australia's must retain control of its media to ensure that its culture is not swamped by foreign information and entertainment. Media are unquestionably crucial in shaping how Australians view themselves, the world and their place in it.

Copyright capers

THE STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OVER the copyright in the work of employed journalists took an odd turn just as *Eureka Street* published my discussion of it last month. The Copyright Law Review Committee has received 27 submissions to the inquiry established by the Federal Government when the big publishers applied pressure for amendments last year. The publishers (chiefly Murdoch, Black/Fairfax and Packer) jointly argued for amendments to the Copyright Act that would give employers sole copyright in the work of employed journalists, including for non-newspaper uses such as in computer databases and media-monitoring services.

The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance put the case for the status quo: employers control first use in a newspaper, magazine or similar periodical, and the employees control the rest. The ACTU, through Bill Kelty, backed the journalists. Among their arguments were public policy considerations such as concentration of media control. Since Australia's media structure was in so few hands, did it make sense to amend intellectual property law to concentrate in those same hands control of the content as well? (The Communications Law Centre and I prepared the alliance's submission.)

The committee scheduled a hearing for 12 March in Sydney. But in its summary of the major written submissions the review committee declared: 'the committee considers the issue of concentration of media ownership to be irrelevant to the question of ownership of copyright.' It did not say why. Before a word of oral evidence, or a single question, the inquiry appears to have shut out the biggest issue. This may relieve some participants, but it will not prevent the wider question of control of information from being raised again when the government and Parliament have to decide what to do. Any report by the committee that ignores the issue will then lack relevance. ■

Paul Chadwick is Victorian co-ordinator of the Communications Law Centre.

Absolutely

THE HOT AIR FROM THE HUSTINGS is drier than the Tanami desert and yet John Clarke has refused seven lucrative offers from newspapers and magazines to write something—anything—funny about the federal election campaign. Clarke says that he didn't want to put a 'herbaceous border around a block of concrete they are otherwise marketing.' But the truth is that he takes his comedy seriously.

A lengthy talk with Clarke at the spartan inner-Melbourne office he uses for writing, continued over a pot of tea at his home, reveals his concern at the increasingly blurred line between the serious and the trivial, between fact and comment, between the real and unreal. Clarke declined approaches to pen something about the controversial compensation payment over Leo McLeay's bicycle accident. 'I have read everything I could on the Leo McLeay issue and I have yet to discover what he did wrong, apart from being Speaker ... the rest of it seemed to be a perfectly standard bit of industrial compensation, but the media decided that he was wrong and that he had rorted the system. I found no evidence of that, and if there was it wasn't presented.'

Clarke believes cartoonists such as *The Age's* Ron Tandberg often hit the mark missed by their journalistic colleagues. 'I think he [Tandberg] is much sharper on the important issues than anybody else on the paper. I don't think he is trivialising it, I think he is subverting ... Tandberg didn't accept the story [on Leo McLeay] that was being sent out at the time. The great cartoonists question what is going on, brilliantly.'

CLARKE'S OWN BRAND OF SUBVERSION is a kind of supercharged and wacky Socratic dialogue, disguised as an interview with a public figure. Off-camera, Clarke is modest, listens to questions and is generally several steps removed from his pop-eyed, pelican-haired interview subjects, but there is still a sense that he is conducting interlocutory proceedings against himself. Clarke talks about a subject, he says, to find out what he really thinks and then cuts it back to the bone for performance. 'It's really very good discipline for me because my first draft of everything is really the opposite. I like to rattle right around the perimeter of something, so brevity is a very useful discipline precisely because it is not my natural first impulse.' But strange things still happen with his speech, even in the unpolished stage, as when he turns the election campaign into a slab of concrete that he does not want to beautify.

straight

Clarke is taking the mickey out of the medium, the messengers and the public figures. 'Sometimes it's designed to be humorous and nothing much else, other times it's designed to represent a particular comment, sometimes it's to do with criticism of an argument, criticism of the way an argument's being conducted, sometimes it's a criticism of the person being interviewed and it's sometimes a criticism of the way the interviewer does that sort of interview ... Certainly there is always something in there you actually think because most silliness derives from some serious impulse.'

LOOMING BEHIND IT ALL is the insatiable maw of television. 'They [politicians] address and present in the current grammar of television, which is dominated, inevitably, by those things that are most popular, which are soaps. They have accepted the imagery of television. Television corrupts, and absolute television corrupts absolutely ... I was born in 1948, so I was brought up in the '50s and '60s and when I was a kid no government was elected for being successful at television. Since that time, people have become very sophisticated users of television. There have been prime ministers who have been so deft at using television that they had less requirement for a cabinet; it [television] actually became an instrument of the process rather than a third party.'

Television's erosion of reality makes Brits want to emigrate to Ramsay Street, and it is why bouquets arrive at television stations when the characters in a soapie tie the knot. Chat-show hosts become bigger stars than their interviewees, politicians host chat shows, and chat-show guests—motormouth Sydney disc jockeys and the like—are mainly people who are famous for being famous.

Fifteen years ago, it was considered 'interesting' when a prime minister appeared on *Countdown*; but now Annita Keating is a guest model for *Vogue*, and John Hewson takes his own make-up artist to the Great Debate. As Clarke says: 'It doesn't matter whether you are Ronald Biggs or Albert Einstein, as long as you are staying at the Sebel Townhouse.' Clarke believes the

terms of the traditional symbiosis between politicians and journalists is now 'written by the machinery of television'. The leaders of the Canberra press gallery get to be co-stars in the soap opera and can agitate for a new cast once ratings begin to flag. 'It's like the soap that has got a main star but that bloke who keeps coming in to deliver the vegetables, he's cute, we really like him, we want the old guy to move over. So we start saying that in the television columns by Cyclops, the anonymous opinionated dingbat. That sort of stuff begins to happen ... The old star was written out and now has a column in *TV Week*, commenting on the new program.'

Barrie Cassidy, a former press secretary to Bob Hawke, wrote in *The Australian* about why television is important in campaigning—partly for its reach, partly because it is easier to manipulate than newspapers or radio. The main aim of campaigning, Cassidy says, 'is to see that theme reflected in the six o'clock television news. That is not to underestimate the power and influence of the press and radio but, undeniably, a great many people have a limited interest in politics between elections and they will form their impressions from what they see at the top of the major news bulletins ... Television is limited by its need for pictures. And this is the point. A candidate must not only deliver the message but must show the message if he or she wants to maximise chances of coverage. The visual impression is doubly important because the size of "sound grabs" has been cut, on average, to 10 seconds or less over the years. Providing those pictures for television becomes a carefully orchestrated procedure. They must be relevant to the story and irresistible.'



This explains Paul Keating's giving autographs at a Melbourne car plant, John Hewson's jogging to a truck depot in Townsville, and the presidential-style campaigns being run from bunkers in Sydney, elbow-deep in advertising gurus, pollsters and other image makers. It also explains why local candidates scarcely get a look in. But what is to be made of John Hewson's willingness to ape the poses taken by Bill Clinton? Clarke insists

that he is no expert but points out that, midway through the campaign, Hewson is being depicted in these vital accompanying images as increasingly relaxed and confident, while Paul Keating and Labor are on the defensive. Clarke says the photograph of Hewson with dark glasses and saxophone on the Norman Gunston show was good publicity for somebody perceived as a 'stuffy, boring technocrat', and even better considering that the particular segment never actually made it to air. 'It's an astonishing thing to see in the newspaper a photograph of something that hadn't happened the previous night on television ... The story was that a photograph was taken. Amazing. On the front page of almost every newspaper and it hadn't happened.'

THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF of *The Australian*, Paul Kelly, has predicted that during the 1990s the information revolution will eliminate differences between media outlets. Late last year, in a lecture on the future of newspapers, Kelly said that the challenge facing newspapers was a matter of learning how to move with the times without also destroying their reason for being.

In the US presidential campaign, for example, *The Economist* had noted a division between the 'old' news (quality newspapers, magazines and television networks), and 'new' news (supermarket tabloids, afternoon television talk shows, cable television, radio talk shows). Kelly said that the 'old' news had tried to ignore Gennifer Flowers' allegation, reported in a supermarket tabloid, that she had had an affair with Bill Clinton. But

Well, not quite direct: even talk-back radio tries to filter out its callers, and has the time delay and the cut button as a last resort. Television, in particular, gives the illusion of intimacy. Says Clarke: 'I don't think you get the best politicians and the best advice being given to politicians, since packaging advice is seldom the best advice about truth. It looks democratic but in fact disenfranchises the electorate who are reduced to the role of mug punters. democracy is in a bit of strife anyway, but talk about the people's medium is a grave myth. It just washes over them. It's just low-level consumerism and the people don't control it and don't have a hell of a lot of access to it. The ABC, for instance, and SBS are both owned by the people of Australia, but they are networked from Sydney, the same as all the other television stations are. SBS has got no money, and the ABC is apparently run by people who are empire builders and who have centralised it in Sydney—they want to compete with commercial television stations that they will never beat in a fit.'

Clarke says the SBS television news has been the best service for a 'very long time.' He expects the ABC to provide a good television news service, but says its language, assumptions and lack of clarity make it 'unwatchable'. He finds a tendency in campaign coverage towards mixing comment and reportage, and sometimes the whole enterprise drops into 'general waffle and wave upon wave of warm, predigested drivel ... The only thing that matters during an election campaign is the outcome of the election ... Nobody's talking terribly much about the ramifications of policy. They are simply talking about how this is what the policy is, and how it compares with that policy there.'

CLARKE IS NO DOUBT SINCERE in his view that democracy begins with citizens being able to ask a question—and receive an answer from their elected representatives and political candidates. And in thinking that voters do not now get this right, particularly when it is filtered through stage-managed television events such as The Great Debate. But it's ironic that the encroachment of soap opera into politics and life is one of the reasons his interviews are accepted, and often devastating.

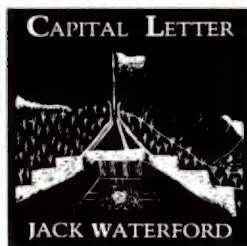
The Channel 10 daytime soapie, *The Bold and the Beautiful*, now has a voiceover at the beginning of each episode: 'Due to a temporary absence of Ron Moss, the role of Rydge Forrester will be played by Lane Davies.' The show continues with the temporary actor being told by his stage mother things such as: 'It's a family problem, Rydge. It's yours, your wife's, and your father's, and because Brooke chose to tell me about the pregnancy first, it's my problem as well.'

The temporary Rydge Forrester takes it all in his stride, just as Clarke does when he is 'doing' Hawke, Keating, Elliott, Hewson, Bondy or whoever. Only Rydge isn't as funny. ■

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the story could not be contained. 'Old news has prided itself on setting the agenda, on mediating between the politician and the public. New news wants to bring the politicians direct to the public.'



Forget the substance, just listen to the rhetoric

IT'S A NEGATIVE CAMPAIGN, based on fear and loathing. Neither side is pushing its own plans and policies to any great effect, but each is intent on lambasting the other. The slogans—and neither side is talking anything else—are, by and large, unmemorable, and demonstrably dishonest. Each of the main contenders gets less attractive by the day, and, if ultimately we have to vote for the bastard we hate least, we will do so without once having felt inspired.

A pretty depressing picture, but it's not all bad. For one thing, this is the first election in several decades that is primarily being determined by gut political instinct. That each party is so negative, and so one-track, is a measure both of the narrowness of the debate and of their desperation. The fight, in short, is a relatively honest one because neither has an asset that is stronger than the countervailing deficit.

The curious thing is that neither side seems accurately to have located the target. The coalition hammers home the point that Labor has produced a million unemployed and that 'Labor's got to go'. Yet the polls suggest that voters have little faith in the capacity of either party to reduce unemployment. Labor, and Keating personally, are by no means pardoned for the recession—but that is becoming less of a problem for them, because the recession is now almost an accepted part of the background. The strong point for the Liberals is the simple proposition that it is time for a change. For Labor, the strong point is fear of radical change, of confrontation, job insecurity, higher health costs and new taxes. And selling this involves some self-criticism for mistakes of the past: 'Yes, we are in a dreadful mess, which is partly our fault. But we are doing our best to get out of it. The Liberal solution is far less likely to make things better and it could make you far worse off. You could be a victim of their ideological experiments.'

Of course, each side has a plan, even if little time is spent promoting it. Each side has its bag of goodies designed to build support. But the trouble with plans is that a wary electorate seems to know that recovery depends less on the success of either party than on factors well beyond the control of either; that the capacity of either party to achieve much is doubtful, and that their good intentions are doubtful too. Bribes or handouts will have to be pretty direct to be influential.

The divide between the parties is narrow. Even on economic policy—virtually the only battleground—the differences are mainly a matter of degree. It would be

wrong, however, to say that there is no ideological contest. But it is not primarily about the economy, or industrial relations, or Medicare, or tariffs, but about the role of the state. Labor stands for at least as big a role as now; the Liberals want reductions in the power of government to influence personal or economic transactions. It is a classic contest, and the differences are so well understood by the parties—and, they believe, the electorate—that they tend to talk in shorthand, and to argue less about principles than about cheap points.

I have been reading some of the rhetoric from the last time that there was a change of government. Oddly, the present contest seems marginally more honest. *Malcolm on Labor*: risky, out-of-step, divisive, negative, irrelevant, insecure, uncertain, turmoil, rampant union power, soaring inflation, worsening unemployment and a replay of the Whitlam years.'

Malcolm on Malcolm: Certainty, responsibility, security, responsible, strong, reliable. Our fair and comprehensive policies will help, expand, modernise, explore and protect: we can all be as proud as when our sportsmen won at the Commonwealth Games.

Bob on the Liberals: Debased leadership, disfigured national life. Division, confrontation, Australian against Australian. People unforgivably thrown out of work. Turmoil and scandal. Fraud, deception, and a vicious cycle of confrontation ...

Bob on Bob: I will reunite you, bring the best out of you; we will win with caution, realism but no miracles or overnight solutions. Controlled and responsible, orderly, rational and consistent, national reconciliation, national recovery and national reconstruction: just as we triumphed through Curtin, you can unite in effort with me until victory is won.

The words were concerned with the implantation of images—much more powerful in attracting votes than any programs or promises. Every time Malcolm Fraser said 'we', or Bob Hawke said 'I', the words that followed were meant to soothe. It is an American technique called mind-mapping, drummed in by the apparatchiks. And it is as phoney as a two-bob watch, though not ineffective—at least not for Hawke, not that time round.

This election is much cruder, neither of the contestants being as susceptible to programming. The contest is no less genuine. ■

Jack Waterford is deputy editor of *The Canberra Times*.

It's not easy being blue-green

Paul Keating taunted environmentalists about being more interested in 'green' than in 'brown' issues. The reality of Australia's land-use problems is far more complex.

THINK OF LANDSCAPE and you think of its smell. In South Australia, the Murray winds through dry, flat land on its last dawdle to the sea. In summer the air smells spicy—of baked eucalypt, and of river water. Last summer, the smell changed. You could say that it turned rank, except that the Murray is always a bit rank, in the fashion of big brown rivers. Kerouac described the Mississippi as 'the great, rank river', and Huckleberry Finn smelt its earthiness: 'It was kind of solemn, drifting down the big still river, laying on our backs looking up at the stars, and we didn't ever feel like talking loud, and it warn't often that we laughed, only a little kind of low chuckle.'

But the Murray is half a world away from this and, to most Australians, more foreign. We feel more at home with Kerouac and Huck's river than we do with our own. When the smell of our river changed, it was the difference between rank and fetid. The new smell was musty; sinister. It rose to meet you in the evening, when the overhead sprinklers were switched on in the fruit orchards. It rose out of the sink when you washed your dishes. The smell covered you when you were in the shower.

The Murray water, pumped straight from the river, was poisoned by an overgrowth of blue-green algae. Outbreaks of the algae are nothing new; they have happened every hot summer for some years. Blue-green algae grow in still, warm water with high nutrient levels. The Murray, once an unreliable and faster-moving beast, has been tamed and slowed by locks and weirs so as to provide a reliable source of irrigation water. Irrigation run off, fertilisers, cattle droppings and human sewage draining to the river have enormously increased nutrient levels.

But last summer low rainfall and hot weather took the system to crisis. The growth was so bad that in places the Murray and Darling rivers and their tributaries were bright green. For those who lived along the river, it wasn't just a matter of aesthetics. The algae are poisonous, not only to those who drink the water, but on skin contact. Stock could not drink the water. Where the outbreak was severe townspeople could not wash in it. At the time of writing, there has not yet been a major algal outbreak this summer, but this is probably

only because the river is in flood, and the summer has been cool.

Algae, of course, are only the most visible and topical symptoms of damage to the river system. Salinity is old news. It is caused by rising groundwater dissolving the salts locked in the soils and bringing them to the surface. Since Europeans cleared native trees and replaced them with shallow-rooted perennial crops, the groundwater has been rising fast. Drive north from Melbourne on the Calder highway and you will see, as you approach Mildura, the frighteningly acne-like scars in the Mallee, where the soil looks greasy and nothing will grow but salt bush. Water tables in areas such as Shepparton are rising so fast that up to half the land now used to grow fruit will be unusable—poisoned by salt—within 25 years.

Last summer, as the hot months drew to a close, an awareness seeped into the national consciousness. The Murray-Darling river system, used and abused since the beginning of white settlement, was reaching a point where it could no longer cope. It is therefore hardly surprising that the Prime Minister's recent environmental statement, launched at the beginning of summer, chose the Murray-Darling as its focus. This great river system, 2500 kilometres in length and with a catchment covering an area equivalent to that of France and Spain combined, is a ready-made symbol for politicians wishing to appear visionary.

KEATING'S STATEMENT was instantly criticised by environmentalists, prompting the Prime Minister to coin a new term. The conservation groups, he said, did not care about 'brown' issues—the hard and unappealing questions of land management. Rather, they were concerned only with trees and cuddly animals. His attack was unfair. The environmental statement, meant to convince doubters that Labor still has a serious conservation agenda, tied together a lot of things. Some of them were new, all of them were good in their own way. None of them was particularly visionary, brave or difficult.

There was, for example, more money for the control of feral animals and weeds; a proposal that the International Whaling Commission should set aside a

Sludge drudge: John Davis, of Myandetta Station, paddles through blue-green algae in the Darling River north-west of Bourke, NSW. Photo: Courtesy of The Age.



sanctuary for whales in the southern ocean (a move high in public-relations value, but which doesn't actually cost anything); and goals for the use of recycled paper in Commonwealth offices.

The big-ticket item concerned improvements to sewage handling in the 10 towns and cities responsible for 90 per cent of the nutrients in the Darling River. They are Toowoomba, Orange, Bathurst, Tamworth, Dubbo, Gunnedah, Moree, Inverell, Narrabri and Dalby. The big money in the Prime Minister's statement—\$46 million—will go to improving these sewerage facilities and improving waste water management in the smaller communities along the river system.

Nobody argued. Governments, farmers and conservationists alike have argued for years that this work should be done. But until the blue-green algae outbreak, no one was prepared to put up the money. In his speech launching the statement, the Prime Minister described it as: 'One of the great undertakings of the second half of our century.' Yet those whose votes have been swayed in the past on issues such as rain-forest conservation might have found it hard to get excited about dealing with country-town shit, so the selling point was something far more attractive-sounding—a project to create a corridor of trees along the banks of the Murray.

It sounded visionary—exactly the sort of thing needed to fire the nation's imagination. Predictably, the corridor-of-green proposal got most of the media coverage, and doubtless the idea of trees being planted along the Murray cheered many city dwellers. But as a serious attempt to get to grips with the damage being done to the river, the corridor-of-green proposal is worse than a token. It creates a false impression of action, while the real problems escalate.

Far from conjuring up a grand reforestation project, the government is providing a mere \$3.1 million over four years. The money will be distributed through Greening Australia, the indisputably worthy conservation group that never annoys anybody. Greening Australia has no illusions about the small amount it will be able to achieve. It will aim to set up 'demonstration corridors'. The organisation's documentation admits: 'Clearly there are not sufficient funds within this allocation to enable the whole 2500 kilometres of the Murray corridor to have corridors of green developed across the basin.' Rather lamely, it continues: 'For this reason, projects will be chosen for the demonstration potential, and Greening Australia will advocate for further funds from both government and private sponsors ... to extend the corridor-of-green concept.' In fact, Greening Australia's public affairs manager, Ms Helen Anderson, says the

money will probably be sufficient to fund about 15 projects per year over the life of the project, with these being put forward by local communities—landholders, school children and businesses.

So what should be done? It goes without saying that there are no easy answers. Talking about dependence on the river is not just a turn of phrase. The Murray-Darling river basin produces a quarter of Australia's cattle and dairy produce, half of our sheep, lambs and crops and about 40 per cent of all exports. If the present damage continues, a large part of the Australian way of life will be threatened, and the impact will be felt by city and country dwellers alike. We depend on the Murray-Darling basin, and we are causing its demise.

At the other end of the spectrum from the Prime Minister's statement is the Australian Conservation Foundation. Its new president, Tricia Caswell, suggests that rather than talk prettily about regeneration, the nation should set a target to declare a moratorium on further damage to the Murray-Darling river system within five years. The Prime Minister's statement, she says, focuses on 'engineering solutions', such as the sewerage initiatives, rather than tackling the hard questions about land use and sustainability.

'If we seriously said we wanted to stop causing damage,' Caswell says, 'then what would that mean? Five years is a considerable period of time, and would really focus attention on what it is we are doing to the river. The answers we would be forced to come up with would show how tokenistic these present efforts are.'

The implications of such a moratorium are hard to overstate. Just about every economic activity within the basin causes damage. Irrigation, for example, is the backbone of a large part of the nation's economy. It is also a major cause of damage. Caswell says: 'We have to look really hard at land use. It may well be that some of the lands simply shouldn't be farmed, and will have to be retired.'

NEAR KERANG, in Victoria, large areas of land are already 'retired', for the simple reason that they are so saline that nothing will grow. The bureaucrats do not admit in plain terms that these lands are unfarmable. They talk about them being suitable for 'salt-tolerant agriculture'. The scientists at the CSIRO and state agriculture departments are still working on what that might mean, with research concentrating on breeding salt-tolerant grasses that can be used for cattle fodder.

But although it is easy to talk about 'retiring' land and changing land use, for the communities along the river and the landowners whose way of life depends on farming, it can be an impossibly hard option. Such adjustment, even over 30 years, would be traumatic to the local communities and the national economy.

There are some middle paths, but even these imply enormous economic adjustment. For example, throughout Victoria and New South Wales, dairy cattle are reared on irrigated pasture that is suffering from salinity as water tables rise. In the past dairy cattle thrived

If the present damage continues, a large part of the Australian way of life will be threatened, and the impact will be felt by city and country dwellers alike. We depend on the Murray-Darling basin, and we are causing its demise.



Genies grant wishes, genes don't

IN HIS STIRRING BOOK *The Selfish Gene*, sociobiologist Richard Dawkins impishly suggests that human beings are nothing more than devices whereby the genes in our DNA can preserve their existence: 'We are,' he writes, 'robot-vehicles blindly programed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes ... Living organisms exist for the benefit of DNA.' For Dawkins, the gene has an extraordinary power and he gives it a quasi-divine status: the gene 'does not grow senile; it is no more likely to die when it is a million years old than when it is only a hundred. It leaps from body to body down the generations, manipulating body after body in its own way and for its own ends, abandoning a succession of mortal bodies before they sink in senility and death. The genes are the immortals.'

To be fair to Dawkins, he later admits that genes are not *really* immortal. One might add that genes are not even alive, since they are not living organisms and hence neither live nor die. Human beings, arguably, are able to make choices as to whether or not their genes are passed on to the next generation. Biology may influence this choice, perhaps, but the genes cannot *choose*.

In an article in the British journal *Philosophy*, philosopher David Stove has questioned Dawkins' Darwinian views, arguing that sociobiology is a false religion. According to Christian belief, says Stove, 'human beings and all other created things exist for the glory of God; according to sociobiology, human beings and all other living things exist for the benefit of their genes.' The belief that genes are the most intelligent and capable things on earth is very difficult to defend, as Stove argues through several examples. It is clear that human beings 'are the most intelligent and capable things on earth.' Genes are 'not even starters ... in the intelligence-capability stakes.'

Stove acknowledges that all great religious beliefs are incomprehensible at various points, but that such incomprehensibility does not necessarily make them untrue. He concludes, however, that though the beliefs of the sociobiologists are not incomprehensible, 'it is one of the religions which are obviously false.'

If the sociobiologists were right, and if genes were the most intelligent and capable things on earth, then, says Stove, 'it will be an immense historical irony. Religion, which was driven out of biology by 19th century Darwinism, will have been put back by—of all people—the extremists of neo-Darwinism.'

What would Archimedes make of this conversation between the biologist and the philosopher? If genes try to keep genes alive, what is it that human beings try to keep alive? Does this debate indicate that one of the treasures that we humans try to keep alive is the idea of what is absolutely true and good, therefore ... ■

—John Honner SJ

in areas like Gippsland, where the rainfall is high enough to sustain them, but in the past few decades high-rainfall areas have been progressively given over to beef cattle, although they don't need such lush vegetation to survive. That process could be reversed, leading to less use of irrigated pasture.

As well, scientists with state agriculture departments and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission are conducting research into growing commercial wood lots, using the water that drains off orchards. In this way the orchards will gain from the pumping effect of the trees, and the block-owner's income will be diversified. Victorian Department of Agriculture researchers at Mildura predict that within 30 years the flat green of the citrus orchards and vineyards will be interspersed with native wood lots.

Fruit growers and dairy farmers could, theoretically, become foresters. Our region is heading for a wood-fibre shortage into the next century, so timber will become a high-income earner. And, as well as making money, trees can benefit the soil. They act as solar powered pumps, lowering the water table and combating salinity.

But the problem is that it takes 10 years for a tree to grow to the point at which it will earn the farmer an income, and in the present economic climate there is no way Australia could either give up the export income from fruit growing, or support the farmers while we waited for the trees to grow. As one dairy farmer put it to me: 'Show me a way to live in the meantime, and I'd plant trees. You don't have to get out to milk trees twice a day.'

In fact, even small changes in land use are almost impossible to achieve, and at present, in spite of the rhetoric and in spite of the blue-green algal threat, there is little hope that governments will be able to summon up the necessary political will.

In his environmental statement, Paul Keating called the Murray-Darling a 'real and symbolic artery'. The metaphor is a cliché when applied to rivers, yet it is right for the Murray. It is our lifeline and our drain, a great vessel, with capillaries of pipes running to and from it, carrying water to our gardens, our crops and our cities, and discharging our wastes so they can be carried sluggishly out of the interior to the sea.

Although sentiment is growing, the bonds that tie most Australians to the inland are still mainly economic. Halting the damage to the Murray-Darling basin is essential to our financial survival; yet it may be that it is impossible to stop the damage without also causing critical economic damage. The Murray-Darling is the symbol of the conundrums Europeans created when they first moved from the coast to settle the inland, and a symbol of Australia's fragile sense of nationhood. Clinging to the fringes of the continent, we still act like foreigners. We are not yet at home in the interior. ■

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Switching on

HOPE IS THE GREAT GIFT that we bring to our young people. I say this because when discussing the media it is too easy to produce a catalogue of doom, citing increasing evidence of our inability to cope with a generation whose understanding of themselves and the world is in large part formed through the media. But there is also consistent evidence that the impact of the media is filtered through the beliefs that young people already possess: if we work with families in this matter, then the grounds for hope are even greater.

The political changes of the past quarter century should also make us pause before judging the media too hastily—both in the degree of influence that we assume them to have, and the kind of influence that they exercise. The political ferment surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Union, for example, suggests that even when a ruling elite has near-total control of information sources for seven decades, the result will not be a population with closed minds. And it is probably because of media coverage that wars are now more likely to end sooner than they otherwise might have: one thinks of Vietnam, of Kuwait, and—hopefully—Bosnia. The mobilisation of people around the world in the mass relief of starvation and poverty is also something that has only become possible because we live in a media-saturated age.

Nor is the beneficial impact of the media simply a matter of the reportage of 'news'. Take television soap opera, for example. *A Country Practice* confers with various medical people, so that issues pertinent to youth are presented to them. That program has been playing an educative role for some time, and issues of cancer, diet, AIDS, prejudice and violence, are all addressed fairly positively. One commentator has this to say about soaps: 'Many of these programs have a powerful educational impact on viewers and readers, in their narrative of maturity gained through difficulty, of a character develop-

ing because he or she has faced and overcome the difficulty. They are also something of a celebration of friendship. They show the value of having the advice and emotional support of friends, when a person is faced with a frightening choice and feels the lack of personal resources to manage it.'

A Year 10 student said to me that in talking about the media we should speak as though we were talking about a friend. Young people regard radio and television as friends, he said, because they are there as *company*; they amuse you, help you avoid being bored, give you good ideas about people and things. If radio is 'the intimate companion' that it has been called, then it and television should be spoken about with care by an adult lest the younger generation think that we are trying to tell them that something pleasurable is bad.

But none of this, of course, means that the influence of the media is an unmixed good, or that this influence is not a powerful challenge to educators. Most of us are aware of the broad range of the statistics, but here is how the South Australian Education Department's *Media Studies* document summarises them: 'During their schooling, these ... children will complete 11,500 hours of formal schooling. They will also experience at least 15,000 hours of films and television alone, an experience sometimes referred to as the "unsupervised classroom". They will have witnessed some 18,000 murders, committed by every known means of disposal. They will have viewed and listened to 500,000 advertisements and watched seven times more films than they have read books ... they will have spent their time reading newspapers, comics and magazines. Their total





exposure to media messages will be about 20,000 hours. This represents almost double the amount of time they spend at school.'

Professor George Gerbner, for 20 years a commentator on the role of the media, and especially television, sees the consumer society as a product of television. Gerbner's focus is on the US, but since North American television heavily influences programming in the rest of the world, his findings are probably applicable to most industrialised countries. The world on the small screen, Gerbner contends, is far from the 'real' world. The average viewer sees 300 screen characters a week in prime time. They are portrayed with apparent realism, but bear little relation to their real-life counterparts or to the viewer's actual world. In a typical week, a viewer will see 30 police officers, seven lawyers, three judges, 12 nurses and 10 doctors, but only one engineer or scientist. Service or manual workers comprise 10 per cent of the screen population, but are 65 per cent of the real world. Men outnumber women on television three to one. On television the popular male age range is from 25 to 55, but for women it is 25 to 35. People under 18 are a third, and those over 65 a fifth, of their actual presence in the US population.

VIOLENCE IS SEEN SIX times an hour in prime time, of which two incidents per evening are fatalities (so that in 10 years a heavy television viewer will have seen about 7000 screen deaths). Women and old people, although actually under-represented in comparison with the real world, are disproportionately the victims. Young white males occur most often in violent scenes, but are

least likely to be victims. This is the opposite of the real world where, after young black males, young white males are the most likely section of the US population to be injured or killed in incidents of violence. The medium is preoccupied with crime. Among the week's 300 characters are 23 criminals, and crime is at least 10 times more frequent on the screen than in life. Nor are children spared: during their weekend daytime programs, the 'kid-vid ghetto' as advertisers call it, there are 18 violent acts an hour.

A curious side effect of screen violence is the role of medicine. Screen violence rarely causes pain or suffering and rarely seems to need medical attention. On the average, only 6-7 per cent of major characters require treatment. Nevertheless, doctors are almost beyond reproach: fewer than four per cent are shown as evil, which is half the percentage of practitioners of other professions that television depicts as villains. Doctors are also characterised as fairer and more sociable than other characters, and as more intelligent, more rational, and more stable than the (usually female) nurses. The MD, says Gerbner, 'symbolises power, authority and knowledge and possesses an almost uncanny ability to dominate and control the lives of others.' If this helps to explain the demigod status of physicians, the daytime soap operas must contribute to what strikes many foreigners as rampant American hypochondria. Almost half of all soap-opera characters are involved in dramatic occurrences related to health.

But the media is not just the television, of course, it is music and magazines and books and newspapers. Australians are still among the most avid readers in the world, when one considers the number of magazines and books sold per head of population. On the same measure, Australians read more magazines than the members of any other western society. At the school of which I am headmaster, of two Year 10 media studies classes totalling 60 boys, 58 have read *Penthouse*, 56 *Playboy*, 46 *Dolly*, 30 *Cleo*, and 24 *Cosmopolitan*. The 'male' magazines such as *Penthouse* were seen occasionally, and presumably furtively, but *Dolly* and *Cleo* were looked at much more frequently. The boys claim that their sisters up to about 16 are all readers of *Dolly*, after which they move to *Cleo* and *Cosmopolitan*. The boys tend to skim-read these magazines, but say they like to read about what interests girls, and that

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The image makers are not puppetmasters—especially if young people have been given an opportunity to think critically about advertising and media images. I have found, talking to students in our media studies course, that concepts such as manipulation and consumer fantasy are clear to them.

their sisters buy the magazines in order to learn about fashion, make-up, jewellery, for advice on sexual problems, on diet and weight, for interviews with famous people, and to alleviate boredom.

Hugh Mackay and others speak of the 'death' of the old Australia. A number of factors have caused this, such as the changing role of women, the fact that parents are simply not around their children as much as they used to be, so that the clarification of values comes from other sources, and concerns about security that have been raised by the impact of the recession. Mackay claims that three important sources of security frequently come up in discussion with young people—the peer group, the family, and the brand name. The use of tried and familiar brands, such as Coca-Cola, is reassuring; no age is wrong for Coke. Reeboks and Doc Martens are the unrivalled shoes, and Sportsgirl, Country Road and Esprit are the strong fashion labels. Myers and Grace Bros are neutral but Target and K-Mart brands must be removed, because it is humiliating if friends see one wearing clothes with these labels.

For the youth of the '80s, Mackay says, the two great fears were annihilation, and boredom. There was a real fear of World War III, but that has clearly receded. There remains the constant threat of boredom, the great enemy of fun. Today's Australians in the mid-teens sometimes feel despair about employment, or loneliness or inability to make friends, and this emphasises a feeling that the present is everything. What is never boring is being with your friends, and radios and tapes are precious companions. If a teenager is isolated from his or her group, the radio or the tapes create an emotional link to the experience of the group. For many young people, television is a last resort, granted that the other activities are not available. The videotape is important, partly as a welcome excuse for going to a friend's place.

There are two phenomena in modern Australian society that put teenagers into some disarray, and the media must partly define the way in which they come to terms with these phenomena. There is a perception that society is much more violent than it used to be. Whether this is in fact so is debatable, but what is true is that there are now five times as many *arrests and convictions* for battery as there were 20 years ago, and the population has not increased fivefold in the past 20 years. Reflecting this, perhaps, we have reached a point at which Australia has the second highest suicide rate among young men in the world, measured on a per capita basis. (Bangladesh has the highest rate.) Suicide is the biggest cause of death among males under 35 (for those under 25 it is the motor vehicle), and males

are far more successful in committing suicide than females.

The other phenomenon is the disintegration of what had been the ordinary pattern of relationships. Fifteen years ago, 90 per cent of marriages were first marriages; now it is 60 per cent—an enormous change in the social fabric. If this rate continues, those who have only been married to one partner will be a minority by the turn of the century. Most Australians will either have been married several times, or not married at all. Loneliness is an increasing problem for the Australian society in which our young people are growing up. The Australian household is becoming smaller and less stable, and 50 per cent of Australian households now contain only one or two people. In Sydney, every third household contains just one adult.

All of this is reflected in the images of Australian society presented by the media, and perhaps nowhere more so than in advertising. The slogans with which advertisers tout their products are as varied as the kinds of social experience described in the previous paragraph: they range from affectations of altruism, such as 'you can rely on us', through affirmations of personal worth to the simply selfish—'the most important person in the world is you', 'treat yourself'. For young girls, especially, the images favoured by advertisers set harsh standards. The average weight of models featured in the media is about 25 per cent lighter than the average weight of women of comparable age in the wider population—a gap that has increased since the 1940s.

But the image makers are not puppetmasters—especially if young people have been given an opportunity to think critically about advertising and media images. I have found, talking to students in our media studies course, that concepts such as manipulation and consumer fantasy, and the amoral nature of much that is presented, are clear to them. We need to allow our children to have the truth that will set them free, and that means not trying to shut out the world—a media-saturated world.

The television soap opera is a good example of a formative instrument in the lives of young people—and young people watch them in great numbers. In the typical soapie, a massive human issue is opened up before the first advertising break, elaborated in the next two segments, and resolved in the last seven minutes. The issue might be abortion, alcoholism and one's parents, running away from home, sexual relationships, AIDS, divorce, or coming to terms with a homosexual inclination. Soap operas are the morality plays of our time, and they are far more influential than our sermons. Where do young people hear such issues being dealt with in a way that attracts and engrosses them as it does through the soapie? Not in the pulpit, and usually not in the classroom. But in the classroom they can learn something about how to watch a soapie. ■

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An insider looking out

AN AUSTRALIAN THEOLOGIAN and publisher named Frank Sheed once wrote of a famous bishop named Augustine, trying to explain what made him unforgettable: 'To begin with, there is his personality. Reading his *Confessions*, you realise that you have never met a man even faintly like him. He joins the church at the age of 33; 12 years later he writes the *Confessions*. By now he is a bishop, and he writes of himself with an unaffected candour that would be startling in a bartender.'

Australians will soon be able to judge for themselves whether they have ever met a bartender even faintly like Archbishop Rembert Weakland, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA. He will be the keynote speaker at the National Liturgical Music Convention in Melbourne next month. In at least two particulars, what Sheed noticed about St Augustine holds true of Weakland: his career in the church has been remarkable, and he speaks with a candour that is disarming. As if that weren't sufficient, he also plays the piano quite well enough to have been a concert artist.

The candour that some find disarming, others find alarming. In neither the US nor in Australia, therefore, is the welcome extended to Archbishop Weakland unalloyed. In January the Archbishop of Melbourne, Frank Little, had to disown a spurious letter over his forged signature, on letterhead stolen from the cathedral office, advising Archbishop Weakland not to come to Melbourne. In denouncing this fakery, Archbishop Little said that the quality of other letters being sent to him as part of the anti-Weakland campaign had reached an all-time low. Fax machines are humming on the ecclesiastical right.

Why? For the same reason that Rome blocked an honorary degree which the theology faculty of the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, had proposed conferring on Archbishop Weakland in 1990—the same reason inadvertently revealed by the archbishop him-

self when he observed with characteristic frankness that his career, once so remarkable, had come to a standstill: 'Yes, I'm sure that they are thinking up ways to keep me in line, to criticise me, to isolate me ... so my career is over. I will die the Archbishop of Milwaukee. Nothing wrong with that at all. But to get worked up over something like Fribourg, to feel bad about it? To look over my shoulder and wonder if Rome will be pleased with what I say?'

In other words—and here's what makes the right nervous—the archbishop is not unwilling to speak and act according to his own lights, even if those lights do not correspond exactly with official Roman preferences. For example, the observations quoted above about Fribourg and his career are typical. They are only one sampling from a whole array of candid statements he made to Paul Wilkes, who in 1990 conducted extensive interviews with Weakland and then wrote a two-part series about him for *The New Yorker*.

The archbishop was denied the Fribourg doctorate, in the first place, because he had held six 'listening sessions' with women in his archdiocese, on such questions as abortion and contraception, whose ostensible purpose was to let women express their views. He has defended such sessions by saying that a good teacher, if he senses his teaching is not effective, will 'step back, listen and ask some questions'. Rome was not pleased—presumably at the suggestion that the official teaching



Graphic: John van Loon

might be ineffective, or that that should make any difference.

Where do Rembert George Weakland and his independent mind come from? Born in 1927, George Weakland grew up poor in a large family in the coal-mining region of western Pennsylvania. His mother was widowed when George was six. As a student, he was the local phenomenon who read constantly, memorised long poems and taught himself to play the piano on his mother's old upright. By the time he was 12, he had become the local church organist. At 13 he entered the preparatory school associated with St Vincent's Abbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, the nation's oldest Benedictine monastery. He received Rembert as his monastic name, and the order sent him for studies to Rome, where he was ordained at the age of 24.

After further studies at the Juilliard School of Music and Columbia University in Manhattan, Rembert returned to Latrobe to teach music in the abbey school. He was elected abbot at the age of 36, and in 1967, at the age of 40, he was elected abbot primate of the worldwide Benedictine federation. This office took him back to Rome, where he was noticed by Paul VI, who appointed him Archbishop of Milwaukee in 1977. At the time, it was thought that he would go even higher.

If one were looking for the source of Weakland's independence as a churchman, his Benedictine roots would certainly be part of the explanation. Unlike most other bishops, he has a 'family' within the church other than that cold home afforded by ecclesiastical politics. One gets a sense of this rootedness in his remarks to Tom Reese SJ, the author of *Archbishop*, a study of the archdioceses of the US and how they are governed: 'I am finding that more and more bishops are isolated. We religious had our own support groups and we had superiors who were interested in us. I find that more and more bishops somehow don't get any support groups and they get isolated. They come to the bishops' meetings, they smile and greet people, and they go home, and no one seems to worry about who ministers to the bishops.'

If one were looking for the source of his independence just as a man, one could point to his piled-up academic honours, his Horatio Alger career, his fluency in six languages with all that that implies about his humaneness, expansiveness and adaptability, his proficiency in music. Is there anything at which he has not succeeded—with the possible exception of pleasing John Paul II? His fellow Benedictine, Sebastian Moore, commented to Paul Wilkes that, as a newly ordained monk, Rembert had seemed a bit arrogant in the way of young people who know that they are talented but had also seemed to be something of a goody-goody. If that is so, then his trajectory to the status of 'radical bishop' emu-

lates that of Oscar Romero, who in fact is one of Weakland's heroes.

The things that have gained him most criticism—such as the 'listening sessions' on abortion for the women of Milwaukee—would not be regarded as radical except in the hothouse atmosphere of church circles. The words he has spoken that have been thought radical fall into the category, even among church people, of what-everybody-thinks-but-nobody-says. If the list of such utterances seems long, that is because there are lots of things about which most people in the church keep quiet these days.

For instance, in the interview that Weakland gave to Paul Wilkes he said of the 1987 Synod of Bishops, which focused on the laity and at which he spoke up for incorporating women more fully into church life, that 'he would never go through such a charade again'. By which he meant that the official 'result' of the synod, the Pope's statement, could just as well have been confected before the hundreds of synod documents and discussions that ended up counting for nothing. About the Vatican bureaucracy that produces such results Weakland says: 'I spent 13 years in Rome; the Vatican is demythologised for me. It is not the repository of truth and right thinking that some make it out to be—not at all.'

On a more personal note, but also speaking for others whose experience might be the same, Weakland aired for Wilkes some of his views on celibacy: 'Men who leave the priesthood because of loneliness are not weak. They are simply good men who have fallen in love with good women. If we are alive, we are continually falling in love. You asked me once if I had ever fallen in love. Yes—at 12, and most recently at 64. I'm falling in love all the time.' That's not the sort of frank admission one associates with non-Renaissance prelates. To be fair, it should also be noted that Weakland went on to say that celibate priests had to be on their guard lest their emotions run away with them, and that so far he had done 'pretty well' in that department.

SINCE THE WILKES INTERVIEWS, Archbishop Weakland has gathered his more systematic writings into a collection published last year by Orbis Books as *Faith and the Human Enterprise: A Post-Vatican II Vision*. That title captures the thesis that Weakland announces in the first essay in the collection, based on a conference given in December 1988: 'Many [post-Vatican II priests] feel that they gave their lives to relearning their theology so they could pastorally implement the desires of the council. Now they wonder if it may have been in vain, that the council is being lost, or that we are returning to preconciliar days in thought and attitudes. This is a serious danger, and perhaps the only important one ... I do not know how I could have survived the past two decades without the documents of Vatican Council II.' All depends, he insists, on how those documents are interpreted.

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—REMBERT WEAKLAND OSB,
ARCHBISHOP OF MILWAUKEE

An exchange late last year with the Archbishop of New York, John Cardinal O'Connor, —an encounter that postdates Weakland's book—illustrates this point exactly. On 6 December, in the wake of a meeting in which the US bishops scrapped their nine-year effort to write a pastoral letter on women, the *New York Times* published on its op-ed page an essay by Weakland, which argued that the Catholic Church should keep open the question of women's ordination and, in the meantime, open up to women the positions of power now reserved for cardinals, archbishops and monsignori. The *Times* gave this piece the jaunty title, 'Out of the Kitchen, into the Vatican'. Even though the *Times*, through electronic printing, has in effect become a national newspaper, Cardinal O'Connor felt that a challenge had been laid down on his own turf and he responded in a long essay published in his diocesan newspaper. It was a fair-minded and temperate expression of disagreement, and that's what makes it useful for demonstrating a difference in theological outlook.

At one summary point the cardinal writes: 'Archbishop Weakland tends by temperament, it seems to me, to be optimistic about the possibility of cultural harmony between the church and the world. By temperament, on the contrary, I tend towards believing that we are in for years and years of confrontation.' It makes no difference to the cardinal that certain people in the church think an accommodation to modern ideas of participation and liberation requires the ordination of women—if, in fact, that is not according to the mind of Christ, as he thinks it is not.

In a 31 December rejoinder in his own diocesan paper, Archbishop Weakland said politely that the cardinal had, in so many words, hit the nail on the head. He recalled H. Richard Niebuhr's book *Christ and Culture*, with its chapters 'Christ Against Culture' and 'Christ the Transformer of Culture', saying that Cardinal O'Connor would be at home in the former chapter and he in the latter. He also said he well understood the cardinal's tendency to 'circle the wagons', because he himself had recently had trouble with the press in Milwaukee.

This figure of the 'circled wagons', companionably used by Weakland to show that he, too, feels beset by the media and other hostile forces of the world, can also illustrate the difference between him and men like the Cardinal Archbishop of New York or Pope John Paul. It is easy to deduce from what Archbishop Weakland has said and done that, were he the wagon master, the defensive circle would not be so tight. This strategy, even if it allows an occasional member of the wagon train to stray outside into the hands of the enemy, also makes it easier for an occasional encircling enemy to join the friendly forces inside. And after all, the tighter the circle, the fewer the people who can fit within it. ■

Thomas H. Stahel SJ is the executive editor of *America* magazine.

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Three years hard

Concluding his history of the Cambodian boat people in Australia, Andrew Hamilton argues that their imprisonment has harmed the Australian community as well as the Cambodians themselves.

That evening, guarded by three soldiers in the coach to which I had been taken in such comfort, I had lost everything, even despair. There is a moment of truth when you are overcome by sheer astonishment: 'So that's where I'm living, and the sort of people I'm living with! So this is what they're capable of! So this is the world I live in!' We are so stupefied that we even lose the power to scream. It was this sort of stupefaction, with the consequent loss of all criteria, standards and values, that came over people when they first landed in prison and suddenly realized the nature of the world they lived in and what the new era really meant.


—NADEZHDA MANDELSTAM, 'HOPE AGAINST HOPE', LONDON, 1989, p43.

WHETHER THE TREATMENT meted out to the Cambodian boat people in the past three years is seen from their point of view or from that of the Australian community, it is a lamentable story.

From their own perspective, these were people who had found their lives in their own country so intolerable as to risk a dangerous boat trip to get here. They arrived vulnerable and disoriented, and since then they have been imprisoned for three years. For a year they

had no access to legal advice, they were twice uprooted in the most abrupt circumstances, and they have been cut off from the support offered by other Cambodians in Australia. They even saw the law changed to deprive them of relief through the courts.


From the perspective of the Australian community, the events are equally disturbing. It seems that in Australia people can be imprisoned for three years without access to the courts, that promises of confiden-



tiality can be broken and that important decisions, such as the rejection of refugee status, may not be communicated to them. People can be transferred from place to place in ways that can only be described as psychologically brutal, with documents relevant to their cases lost and agreements made in courts not honoured, and with the government unable even to defend before the courts the manner of their rejection.

When it seems that people who have been treated in this way may gain their freedom, legislation supported by both parties can nullify the effects of any access to the courts they may enjoy. When the High Court declares that for almost three years they have been unlawfully detained, legislation can restrict their right to receive appropriate compensation. And all this can happen without public outrage.

Why did it come to this? I believe that the history of the Cambodian asylum seekers reveals contradictions in Australia's immigration policy, of which ultimately the Cambodians were victims. But before arguing for this claim I want to reject two simplistic reasons given for the sufferings of the Cambodians: that they were simply victims of a callous and incompetent Immigration Department, and that the Australian process for assessing claims to refugee status—allegedly the fairest and most efficient in the world—has been made unworkable by lawyers and by appeal to the courts.



When social injustices occur, it is tempting to blame the bureaucrats. And undoubtedly the role played by senior advisers in the Immigration Department, and the attitudes of individual officers, have affected the lives of the Cambodians. But government departments administer policy within a framework of legislation and regulation, and the history of the Cambodian boat people shows a department struggling with an incoherent and unethical policy embodied in complex regulations.

The notion that Australian procedures for refugee determination are the fairest and most efficient in the world does not stand up to examination. By international standards, Australia is only moderately fair. It is true that the RAAF does not strafe asylum seekers, as the Honduran planes once did those who fled from El Salvador, and that the RAN does not push the boats back, as the US Navy does the boats from Haiti. Nor are asylum seekers at the mercy of paramilitary forces, as was once the case in Thailand.

But few nations imprison asylum seekers before deciding whether they are refugees, and those that do detain them ensure that this detention is regularly reviewable or strictly limited. Most governments, moreover, are able to defend before the courts their adherence to their own procedures. Australia deserves no medal for best and fairest.

Until the changes to the Migration Act in November 1992, Australia's refugee assessment procedure relied on time-consuming written submissions: the applicant's formal request for refugee status, the departmental officer's comments on the case, the initial judgment, the applicant's response, the delegate's judgment, the appeal and so on. As well as being inefficient, this reliance on written submissions compromised the fairness of the process. The review committee had little chance of judging an applicant's credibility by personal interview, and had to rely heavily on the accuracy and completeness of the written submissions. These in turn depended heavily on the sensitivity and accuracy of interviewers and interpreters, and upon the availability of competent legal advice.

TO DECIDE WHETHER this notably inefficient and not notably fair process for assessing refugee status was further undermined by lawyers and by recourse to the courts is a complex question that goes beyond the Cambodian cases. First, because the need for lawyers, and such opportunities as they have had to delay refugee assessment, arose from the inefficiency and unfairness of the process itself. The complexity of the process, its reliance on written submissions, the fact that evidence about refugee status was both collected and adjudicated within the Immigration Department, and the requirement that rejected claimants should be able to comment on unfavourable inferences, all created a need for legal advice and fostered an adversarial relationship between lawyers and the department.

There have, of course, been faults: lack of experience or misjudgment by individual lawyers, and the failure to work in a coordinated way. But even for these faults the responsibility largely lies with the government. Because legal aid to the asylum seekers was not funded until quite late in the story, it was inevitably left to generous and busy lawyers to give their services in their free time. Further, as the Cambodians were moved from place to place they lost contact with their legal advisers and new relationships had to be established.

If it is incorrect to blame the lawyers for subverting Australia's procedures for determining refugee status, it would be wicked to blame the courts. In matters of refugee assessment the courts can only review whether the officers of the government have abided by their own laws and regulations. The evidence shows that access to that kind of review is vital in decisions so damaging in their effects on the individual asylum seekers, but that it has had no effect in subverting proper processes.

In 1990-1991, for example, only 16 refugee cases were appealed in the Federal Court. Of these, one was withdrawn, two were decided in favour of the Immigration Minister and five in favour of the applicant, and the minister withdrew from five of the cases. Sixteen cases in a year is hardly a threat to the efficient working of a refugee policy. On the contrary, the fact that the government should have been unable to defend almost



a third of the cases, and should have lost another third, would seem to argue for automatic court review of every negative decision.

DURING THE CAMBODIAN IMPRISONMENT in Australia, the central goal of Australian policy has been to assert control over entrants to Australia. This is done by ensuring that people who wish to enter and reside in Australia should apply offshore, and so arrive after proper investigation and with proper documentation. The greatest threat to this control has been seen to lie in undocumented persons arriving directly on our shores, particularly by boat. Stories of 'boat people' awaken fears that hordes of people will arrive uninvited and burn their boats on a vast and undefended coastline.

A second goal of government policy has been instrumental to the first: to deter people from entering without documentation and from making their application for residence on Australian soil. The main form of deterrence used in the past was prompt and summary deportation. These two goals, control of entry and effective deterrence, have been the core of Australian immigration policy.

A third goal of government policy revealed in the story of the Cambodians has been that the government should be seen to act in accordance with international standards of legality and humanity in the treatment of asylum seekers, as expressed in the international covenants to which Australia is signatory. The desire to be seen to act properly is, of course, ambiguous. It can mean either the desire that the real quality of one's actions appear, or that, whatever the reality of one's actions, they appear in a good light. Under pressure the desire for transparency is likely to be corrupted into the desire for a favourable public image.

A final goal of the Immigration Department has been to treat asylum seekers fairly and humanely within the framework of these first three goals.

There is an inherent tension between the first two goals and the last two goals of government policy, for control of entry into Australia and effective deterrence demand that all people who arrive uninvited on Australian shores should be discouraged and, if possible, deported. All who arrive are seen as would-be immigrants, for whom there should be quotas, queues and a predictable order. If Australia is to be seen to adhere to international standards of fairness, however, it must abide by the provisions of the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, which it has signed. The convention implicitly distinguishes between immigrants and refugees: onshore refugees are to be given protection and asylum, whether they come in their tens or their thousands and whether they are expected or not. How they arrive, and how their arrival affects Australia's immigration program, is irrelevant.

IT WAS THE CAMBODIANS' MISFORTUNE that the inherent tension between these goals was transformed into open

conflict at the time of their arrival in Australia. The catalyst was the decision of the then Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, to offer continued residence in Australia, on humanitarian grounds, to Chinese students who feared returning to their country after the Tienanmen Square massacre. This offer, made during a recession and when many people were advocating a smaller immigration intake, led members of other ethnic communities to seek similar concessions and aroused fears that the integrity of the Australian immigration policy was at risk. It is easy to imagine the dismay with which the decision must have been greeted within the Immigration Department. At all events, the Cambodians were the victims. Before their case was heard the Prime Minister denied that most of them were refugees and asserted that they would be deported. At the same time, government officials went to Cambodia to make arrangements for their eventual return.

The determination to make an example of the Cambodians raises many questions, the most obvious being whether the political judgment made on their case affected the fairness with which their claims for refugee status were handled. The evidence suggests that there may have been no specific bias against the Cambodians, but there are many indications of a general bias against accepting the claims of onshore asylum seekers.

In 1991-92 the proportion of onshore claimants accepted in Australia as refugees, or granted residence on humanitarian grounds, was less than five per cent. The proportion of those whose claim for refugee status was accepted in Canada and New Zealand was more than 50 per cent, while in the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, where only a small proportion was accorded refugee status, more than 40 per cent of applicants were given residence on humanitarian grounds.

Some indication of the appearance of a general bias against onshore applicants can also be found in the practice by which the Immigration Minister's delegate, in many cases, ruled against the applicant when the Refugee Status Review Committee was evenly divided in its recommendation. Previously the convention in such split decisions had been that the benefit of the doubt should be given to the applicant. Finally, the policy that the minister will not exercise his discretion to give residence on humanitarian grounds to 'prohibited non-entrants' is consistent with a general bias against the claims of onshore applicants.

An example of the appearance of this general bias can be seen in a quotation from a document of the US State Department which the minister's delegate has used more than once in order to substantiate the judgment that those who have returned to Vietnam after leaving the country illegally faced no danger. The delegate quotes the document in these terms:

'Vietnamese who emigrate are generally free to return. The Vietnamese government regards overseas Vietnamese both as a valuable source of foreign ex-

change and expertise ... Thus, the government generally granted visas to overseas Vietnamese and encouraged them to visit Vietnam whether they emigrated legally or had to be granted permanent resettlement after illegal departure from Vietnam.'

In the original document the full text of the paragraph reads:

'Vietnamese who emigrate are generally free to return. The Vietnamese government regards overseas Vietnamese both as a valuable source of foreign exchange and expertise *and as a potential security threat*. Thus, the government generally granted visas to overseas Vietnamese and encouraged them to visit Vietnam whether they emigrated legally or had to be granted permanent resettlement after illegal departure from Vietnam. *At the same time the public Security Police keep an eye on them, especially those who come under suspicion as a result of their actions and associations. During the year some Overseas Vietnamese were arrested, detained and deported for activities deemed to be subversive as described in section I.d. above.*

In his citation, the delegate omits the parts of the original (in my italics) that might tell in favour of the applicant's claim, and the use of the text is clearly tendentious.

ALTHOUGH THE DETERMINATION of the Cambodian claims to refugee status reveals only the general bias against onshore asylum-seekers that is integral to Australian policy, it appears that the treatment that the Cambodians have received has certainly been affected by this bias. It seems that the representatives of the Australian community have come to place less emphasis on humanity in their treatment of the Cambodians, and adherence to the standards of humanity demanded by international conventions has come under increasing pressure.

This has been particularly true of their detention. The integrity of Australian immigration policy has become identified with the Cambodian detention under increasingly harsh conditions. From places where they lived in relatively relaxed conditions that allowed some contact with members of the local Cambodian communities, they were sent to Darwin, and then to Port Hedland. Their psychological welfare and the continuity of their relationships with their legal advisers counted for nothing compared to the security of their detention. Moreover the circumstances of their movement, particularly from Sydney, showed how they were now

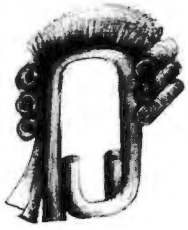
regarded as prisoners, subject in their movement from place to place to disciplines and indignities that seem more appropriate for criminals.

The extent to which detention without relief became the linchpin of the Australian immigration policy was shown in the amendment of the Migration Act to ensure that even the courts could not secure the release of the Cambodians into the community. This legislation was introduced during a court case, expressly to ensure that the courts could not grant personal freedom to the litigants. It was thus illiberal, expressing the pernicious view that within society law need do no more than reflect, on an *ad hoc* basis and with retrospective effect, the arbitrary will of the legislator. The legislation was also, in its effects at least, racially discriminatory. This is an offensive claim but I make it on precise grounds, and I do not suggest that either the Immigration

Minister or members of his department are racist.

THERE CAN BE MANY GROUNDS for regarding practices, whether laws or policies, as racially discriminatory. They can be discriminatory in their form, as when under apartheid in South Africa blacks were specifically excluded from using facilities open to whites. Practices that are not discriminatory in their form can be racially discriminatory in their intention. Under the White Australia Policy, for example, the dictation test could have been administered to anybody, but was intended for use to exclude non-white applicants. Practices can also be racially discriminatory in their effects. To institute a curfew in selected neighbourhoods, for example, could be discriminatory if members of one particular race lived in those precincts. And finally, because law is not simply a set of practices but commends and enshrines community beliefs, a law can be discriminatory in the way it is brought about if it is commonly understood to be directed against people of a particular race. Thus, a law in a foreign land against singing *Waltzing Matilda* might be perceived by many to be discriminatory against Australians, even if it were not meant to be so.

This legislation does not appear to be discriminatory in its form. The basis, however, for claiming that the amending legislation to the Migration Act was racially discriminatory lies in the fact that it caused disadvantage to a limited group of people, the vast majority of whom were Cambodian or Chinese. Thus, it is discriminatory in its effects. The legislation is also, however, discriminatory in its intention. For part of the intention in passing it was to ensure that a clear signal would be sent to the countries of our region, which are Asian or Polynesian. While it could be argued that it is a pure accident that the countries of our region happen to be Asian, this argument is vitiated by the fact that no signal was intended to be sent to New Zealand, which is also a country of our region. The difference, of course, is that New Zealanders, who in law are called exempt non-citizens, are seen as kin. And finally, the legisla-



tion was discriminatory in the way it was brought about. It was perceived and often praised in the Australian community as the legislation against the Cambodians. And by its institution the legislation has weakened resistance to other forms of racial discrimination in Australian society.

II

Sir Humphrey Appleby: *'Minister, government isn't about morality.'*

Hon. James Hacker: *'Really. Then what is it about?'*

Sir Humphrey Appleby: *'It's about stability. Keeping things going, preventing anarchy, stopping society falling to bits. Still being here tomorrow.'*

Hon. James Hacker: *'But what for?'*

—'YES MINISTER' BY JONATHAN LYNN AND ANTONY JAY, BBC 1984, P. 454.

THE STORY OF THE CAMBODIAN BOAT PEOPLE is an object lesson in the development of public policy in areas where there are conflicting claims. In this case, a policy evolved and was administered without an adequate ethical basis, resulting not only in great suffering to the asylum seekers, but also in damage to the interests of the Australian community that the policy was meant to defend.

When I speak of an adequate ethical basis of a policy, I mean that the policy must effectively respect the human dignity of all the people who will be affected by it. It is notoriously difficult to find agreement on what is entailed in respect for human dignity, but it is not a vacuous notion. It certainly has to do with human flourishing. If we ask, for example, what are the conditions for the human flourishing of a group of asylum seekers who have left their own lands with a history of trauma, have faced the risk of a dangerous journey, and have arrived at a land whose language they do not speak and where they have no resources, we would find reasonable unanimity in the answers.

These people need food and drink, shelter, health care, education for their children, contact with people and institutions of their own culture, freedom of movement, freedom from fear of return to the horrors from which they have fled, and the opportunity to again

take responsibility for their lives. This is not a complete description of what is involved in human dignity, but informs the understanding of it expressed in the UN Declaration on Human Rights and other documents.

But the fact that a group of people makes a claim does not imply that the claim can always rightly be met.

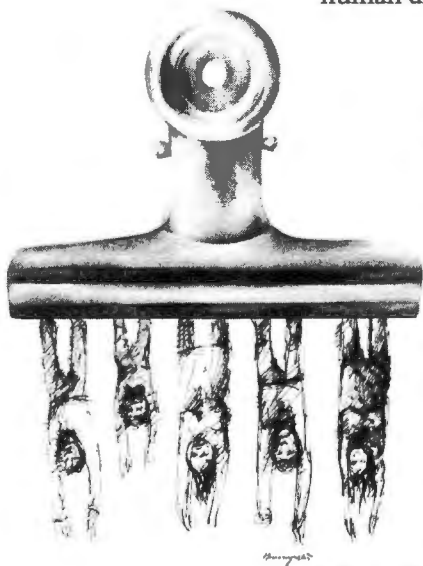
For there are always possible conflicts between claims. In the case of immigration policy there are potential conflicts between the claims of the Australian community, the asylum seekers and potential immigrants. The resolution of these claims may lead the host community to deny to strangers some of the conditions that their human dignity appears to demand. The difficult and challenging part of any ethical framework is to resolve these conflicts in a way that respects the conditions under which all those affected can live with dignity, and to embody this resolution in public policy.

The Australian policy towards asylum seekers has lacked an adequate ethical basis, however, as becomes apparent when the justifications given for the detention and deportation of the Cambodian asylum seekers are examined. Its proponents justify these measures on the basis of the compelling need to deter the flood of people who would enter Australia were this firm signal not given. For this claim to count as an ethical argument and not as the mere assertion of expediency, its proponents would need to show three things: that if not discouraged a flood of people really would wish to enter Australia; that those who have and will come as asylum seekers make no valid claim on Australia; and that detention and deportation are ethically justifiable means of deterrence.

None of these propositions stands up to examination. In the first place, there is no evidence that hordes of people are waiting to rush into Australia. They did not do so when Australia's borders were only thinly defended, and they do not wish to do so now. The belief that Indonesians, for example, would rush to enter Australia if Australia relaxed its vigilance is as unlikely as the belief that Australians would rush to settle in Indonesia; either belief becomes credible only to those who have an inflated and unconsidered belief in the cultural superiority of their own country. The only plausible case for expecting an influx of asylum seekers, either into or out of Australia, would be if people were fleeing from intolerable conditions. And in that case they would make a compelling claim on their neighbours.

Secondly, those who justify the Australian policy towards the Cambodians must show that present and future onshore asylum seekers make no valid claim on Australia for residence or for protection. But this claim is untenable. Those in great need do make a valid ethical claim on those in less need, both within a nation and across national boundaries. In the case of refugees, this ethical perception is recognised in Australia's subscription to the UN convention on refugees and also in the commitment to resettle refugees.

Thirdly, those who argue that the Australian policy is ethically based must show that it is proper on other grounds to detain or deport particular groups of people. Ethically speaking, deterrence is proper only as a fringe benefit, in cases where the deterrent can be independently justified. Jail, for example, may be an effective deterrent to crime but the jailing of offenders does not become ethically justifiable on that ground alone.



A case for *deportation* can be made in some circumstances. The needs of the host community demand some measure of control over the entry of people into the community, and this right would seem to entail the right to deport to their own countries people who have no valid claim on the nation to which they come. If deportation also deters others who also have no valid claim, this kind of deterrence can be ethically justifiable.

In Australia, however, one hesitates to make this kind of argument because here the definition of what constitutes a valid claim is unduly restrictive, and the argument may be taken to legitimate quite unacceptable conduct on the part of the government. The example of an Iranian Christian is sufficient warning. In 1985 he claimed refugee status at an Australian airport, was denied access to the lawyer awaiting him on the other side, was promptly returned from Australia to Hong Kong and from there eventually to Iran, despite an order of the Federal Court requiring the Immigration Minister to have him returned to Australia. The man is believed to have been killed or jailed in Iran.

Detention is more difficult to justify, particularly when it is extended over a long period. The value of human freedom is recognised in the international covenants to which Australia is a party, and when the UN High Commission for Refugees dealt with the detention of asylum seekers it proposed that detention should generally be avoided because of the hardship that it brings. In Australia detention has been argued to be necessary because without it the legal fiction that 'prohibited non-entrants' had not entered Australia could not be maintained; because without it they would escape into the community; and because if they were allowed to live in the community they would threaten the integrity of Australian immigration policy.

The argument that detention is necessary to sustain the legal fiction that the Cambodians have not entered Australia seems, at least to the non-legally trained, to be cynical beyond belief. And the claim that asylum seekers will escape into the community unless detained is also unreasonable. At most it would demand that those whose claims have been finally rejected should be detained before being deported. But it is unreasonable to detain asylum seekers earlier, precisely because they wish to gain from the Australian community something which they would risk losing if they were to lose contact with government departments. They have no reason to disappear into the community.

The main argument used for detention, however, has been the claim that it is necessary to defend the integrity of Australian immigration policy. This claim appears to be based on the argument that detention is necessary for the deterrence of other asylum seekers.

This argument lacks moral credibility. It cannot be said too strongly that it is simply unethical to make one group suffer unmeritedly in order to deter others. Nor does detention seem to have been an effective deterrent in our region. The flow of asylum seekers has

been affected more by the conditions from which people flee than by the conditions in the nations where they seek asylum.

So the Australian policy towards onshore asylum seekers is without any adequate moral base, because it has failed to show the need or the legitimacy of the human diminishment on which it is based. Does this lack of a sound ethical base matter?

IBELIEVE THAT IT MATTERS a great deal, for it helps to form a culture that subverts the good of the community that the policy is meant to serve. This process of culture formation has been noted and described in a variety of ways. Early writers of the Christian Church developed its broad outlines in describing the effects of sin. It has been studied historically in accounts of the prosecution of witches and heretics, and more recently in the racial policy of Hitler's Germany. I shall draw from these examples to illustrate stages in the process, although I do not wish to suggest that what has happened in Australia is of the same degree of malignity.

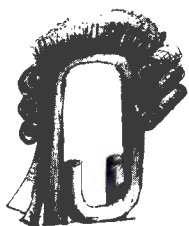
At the first stage, people identify the good of the community with *large and abstract goals*, and in their policy allow these values to override respect for the human dignity of the victims of the policy. In Nazi Germany, for example, the good of the community was identified with racial purity, and those deemed to be of other races were treated without respect.

The next stage is that of *blindness*. Those who administer the policy simply see its victims as objects of the policy and are blind to the human suffering which they cause. This culture of hardness is the product not of the cruelty of evil people but of the lack of human awareness of ordinary people. So, in Germany under Hitler, the administration of the concentration camps was reduced to a question of logistics, and human beings to statistics or raw material.

The third stage is that of *zeal*. Those bound together by this culture unite against the less committed members of society who question the sacrifices made for the goals. The uncommitted become the real enemy, the more dangerous for appearing harmless. They are the Pinks who defend the Reds, the Semi-Arians who support the Arians, the friends of Jews who shelter the Jews.

The final stage is that of the *scorched earth*. By now everything valuable in the society has been sacrificed to uphold the policy. The welfare of the community is destroyed by the cost of the policy, and the unethical





culture destroys its own rationale. It has been argued, for example, that the human costs involved in the imposition of orthodoxies after the Reformation led eventually to a widespread abandonment of faith at the time of the Enlightenment.

ALTHOUGH IT MUST BE LEFT to those intimately associated with the administration of Australian immigration policy to say whether this process has been reflected in their own practice, the story of the Cambodian boat people certainly bears examination in this regard. That story has shown that large, abstract goals, such as the integrity of Australia's immigration policy, have come to prevail over respect for the human dignity of the people who are affected by the policy. This is how the most horrifying events, such as the way in which the Cambodians were transferred from Sydney to Darwin, were able to be defended as proper.

The later stages of the history, too, have revealed a zeal directed against those who questioned the policy. They are regarded as bleeding hearts—unrealistic, irrational and emotional. Their motives are called into question and they are even blamed for the sufferings of the refugees themselves. By this stage it appears that the rightness of the Australian government policy is totally beyond question, and its deficiencies are due to subversion by others. Increasingly, the treatment of the Cambodians is planned and executed in secrecy and isolation.

Finally, as we stand close to the end of the Cambodian story we are in a position to ask whether the interests of the Australian community have been served or betrayed by the way in which the Cambodians have been treated. Certainly, the costs to the community of sustaining a policy without an ethical base have been high. On a conservative estimate the direct cost of detention has been \$4 million, and there is no assessing the indirect costs.

THE INTANGIBLE COSTS for a community of acquiescing in such treatment of its guests are incalculable. The introduction of legislation in the middle of a court case to nullify the possibility of an adverse decision is a precedent whose cynicism threatens the fragile respect for law as a guarantee of human rights. It is hard to imagine that more harm to Australian public life would have been done if all the Cambodians had been granted residence immediately on landing.

At the time of writing, it seems that most of the Cambodian boat people will be deported to Cambodia. And if they are deported, it will be because their applications for refugee status have been denied—because representatives of the Australian government will have decided that the Cambodians have no well-founded fear of persecution when they return to their own country.

Although those decisions will have been made conscientiously, the general bias against accepting on-shore claims to refugee status still leaves grounds for questioning them. It can be argued strongly that some

applicants for refugee status would have received a more favourable reception had they been assessed in other nations. In Australia, the benefit of the doubt is not given to the applicant.

Other nations, too, would accept more readily the claims of particular groups within the Cambodian boat people. Those of Vietnamese and Chinese origin have strong grounds to fear a return to Cambodia, for both communities have been the target of threats there, and some members of those communities have been killed. But in Australia such fears were not judged sufficient to justify the award of refugee status. So, a case can certainly be made that at least some of the Cambodians whose applications have been rejected are refugees in the sense defined by the UN convention.

If they are not refugees in that sense, however, are there other reasons that may justify granting them residence in Australia? I would argue that the Cambodians should be allowed to stay on three grounds.

FIRST, THE SITUATION IN CAMBODIA remains dangerous and uncertain. The description presented to the Refugee Status Review Committee by the Department of Foreign Affairs has been optimistic. This is understandable, given Australia's support of the peace plan, but the continued intransigence of the Khmer Rouge, and the increased fighting in many parts of Cambodia, make a much more pessimistic assessment increasingly plausible.

Secondly, the history of these peoples' sufferings within Australia makes a valid claim on the Australian community for special treatment. The claim that they now make is different from that which they made when they arrived, for they have now been imprisoned in Australia for three years, their detention prolonged and made more harsh by the inattention and decisions of representatives of the Australian government. It can be argued that they are morally entitled to some compensation, of which residence might be the appropriate form. Certainly, they are entitled to more than a dollar a day.

Thirdly, it is in the best interests of the Australian community to give residence to the Cambodian boat people. The precarious Australian traditions of fair play, of hospitality, of respect for law and of humanitarian concern have all been weakened in this affair. To deport the Cambodians will be to accept that what has happened is reasonable. To grant them all residence is to reassert the importance of civilised standards of behaviour in the application of public policy. ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ teaches at the United Faculty of Theology, Parkville, Victoria. He has worked with the Jesuit Refugee Service since 1983 and has been chaplain to the Cambodian community in Melbourne.



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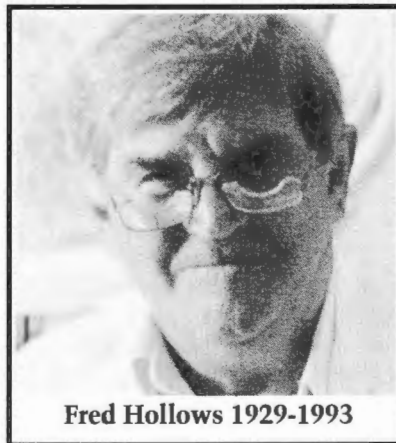
PROFESSOR FREDERICK COSSOM HOLLOWES, who died on 10 February after a three-year struggle with cancer, only became widely recognised for a life of remarkable achievement after it was realised that he was dying. But Fred even made the best of that: he set himself a target of raising \$400,000 for an Eritrean eye program and ended up raising more than \$6 million for such programs in several Third World countries.

This did not happen by accident. During the past two years Fred made more than 1500 public appearances in all states of Australia—often three or four a day—as well as several visits to Eritrea, Nepal, Vietnam and his native New Zealand. He allowed his slow succumbing to the disease to become a public spectacle, since it helped to raise funds for projects he regarded as vital, and sacrificed any chance of dying in quiet dignity. He even began new crusades and controversies, despite the toll they took upon his health.

Fred Hollows was born in 1929 in Dunedin, New Zealand. His father, Joe Hollows, was a train driver, an internationally known chrysanthemum grower, and a solid Christian with an English socialist background and sense of duty. In some ways the antithesis of his irascible son, Joe was also the source of Fred's sense of mission, of his remarkable technical patience, and his ability to focus on the main issue. As a doctor, a technician or as a woodworker, Fred Hollows had steady hands and great calm. He talked intimately to patients and gave them his total attention, but could suddenly snap at a nurse or assistant who, by failing to do a job properly, was preventing him doing his.

After completing school in Palmerston North, Fred decided to become a Church of Christ missionary; but, feeling oppressed by a cloistered seminary, he decided that he wanted to see a bit of life first. He worked in a psychiatric hospital, dropped theology but continued at university as an arts student, and, rather unexpectedly, was offered a position in medical school.

He took it, began a tempestuous relationship with his first wife, Mary Skiler, and travelled with her in Papua New Guinea and western Queensland, where they worked as station hands, cooks and boredrillers. Returning to New Zealand, he completed his degree before going to Britain for postgraduate study in ophthalmology. In Wales, Fred worked with Archie Cochrane, the father of modern epidemiology, who had a strong focus on medical research that was closely allied to community service. Fred's most important early work was on patterns of glaucoma and means of measuring its intensity.



Fred Hollows 1929-1993

He came to Australia as an associate professor of ophthalmology at the University of NSW in the late 1960s, setting up a new department there. He first attracted public prominence, however, with his politics, which were well to the left, and his interventions, inspired by Frank Hardy, on behalf of the Gurindji people at Wattji Creek, who were then on their celebrated walk-off from Wave Hill station—the beginning of the Aboriginal land rights movement. Among the Gurindji he found, and loudly complained about, appalling levels of eye disease, partic-

ularly trachoma.

About this time, a group of young Aboriginals in Sydney wanted to set up their own medical service and one of them, Gordon Briscoe, enlisted his help. Fred Hollows became the first president of the Redfern Medical Service, the first such service in Australia. There are now more than 50 Aboriginal medical services: their expansion and development owes much to his proselytism. Gordon Briscoe approached the federal Department of Health, and with Dr Pip Ivil began working on an idea of a national attack on trachoma in Aboriginal communities, to be led by Fred Hollows. After some considerable lobbying and not a little resistance, the scheme was adopted by the Labor government in late 1975, but was held up by the constitutional crisis before beginning operations in 1976.

Fred Hollows led the teams, and he pushed the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists into sponsoring it. Between 1976 and 1979, the trachoma teams travelled hundreds of thousands of kilometres, visiting more than 500 rural Aboriginal communities in all states, and examined 110,000 people, black and white. Up to 800 different types of pathology were recorded, including evidence of general health and treatment given on the spot wherever possible. It was one of the most extensive public health studies ever done in the world, and is still used as a source of information, and as a model program for others.

TO THE FURY OF POLITICIANS and administrators, Fred Hollows did not see his task as mere ministering to the afflicted: he wanted to help Aborigines to take control of their own lives. The trachoma program employed scores of Aboriginal liaison officers; it complained loudly about the appalling findings and the lack of existing systems capable of dealing with them, and it identified closely with Aboriginal political movements.

During this period, Fred, now a widower, married Gabi O'Sullivan, an orthoptist on the trachoma program;

Gabi now has Fred's five young children, including twins conceived after she knew he was dying, to bring up.

By the mid-1980s, Fred had become disillusioned with what was happening in Aboriginal affairs. He thought the process was now entirely bureaucratic, with careerists running for their own ends, and that once-central concepts, such as Aboriginal control and a focus on prevention, had become mere slogans. Aborigines had to liberate themselves, he would say. If they had the will and sense of direction, support from outside could help. But too many had become reliant on that support.

He also became increasingly critical of a focus on traditionalism. He supported the right of people to choose what they wanted to do but thought governments had stacked the deck to the benefit of old men, and to the disadvantage of women and children. Many of his Aboriginal friends resented his public comments and thought him inclined to be very bossy; few, because of the old links, attacked him publicly.

FRED FIRST BECAME interested in Eritrea when an Eritrean doctor in Rome told him about the war in his country. Fred persuaded the Australian Development Assistance Bureau to fund the training of an Eritrean eye doctor in Sydney. Later, he visited the country and, struck by the sophistication of pharmaceutical and chemical factories built underground or under camouflage, he conceived the idea of Eritrea having its own artificial-lens factories. The model programs he campaigned for, and the ones the Hollows Foundation, in carrying on his work, now promotes involve the transfer of First World technology to Third World communities, using existing skills and commitment; they are not band-aid programs. It became the work of the end of his life.

The same period also saw him get involved in a more complex controversy, one in which his opponents pulled their punches, believing both that he was wrong and that there was nothing to be gained by attacking a man known to be dying. The controversy was over AIDS, and, initially at least, arose from Fred's fears that if AIDS established a foothold in Aboriginal communities, it would spread rapidly and that public health measures appropriate for dealing with AIDS in middle-class Australia were not appropriate for Aboriginal communities.

Fred Hollows was a complex character. He had enormous charm, but could speak harsh and often unfair words. His impact on the Australian psyche came not only from admiration of his selflessness, but also from his clear larrikin streak and capacity for plain-speaking, and the abundant evidence that he was no plaster saint. That he captured the national imagination says as much about Australia as about the man himself. ■

Jack Waterford, *Eureka Street's* Capital Letter columnist, worked on the trachoma program with Fred Hollows.

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*So, having no reply to give
To what the old man said,
I cried 'Come, tell me how you live!'
And thumped him on the head.*

—THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Quixote is doing field research in welfare policy. But watch out. He'll be back.

The profit of language

The Oxford Companion to the English Language, edited by Tom McArthur, Oxford University Press, 1992. ISBN 0 19 214183 X RRP \$59.95.

The Oxford Book of Villains, John Mortimer, Oxford University Press, 1992. ISBN 0 19 214195 3 RRP \$39.95.

THAT MOST HUMANE of psychologists, Abraham Maslow, always eager to sponsor vitality, originality, and responsibility in our curious species, was without illusion as to how we often perform. We are indebted to him for some memorable tags, including 'the Jonah complex' and 'the Jungle outlook'. My favourite among his coinages is 'the Proctological view', which is the attitude of the despairing cynic, who typically belittles others and looks to find their least noble motives.

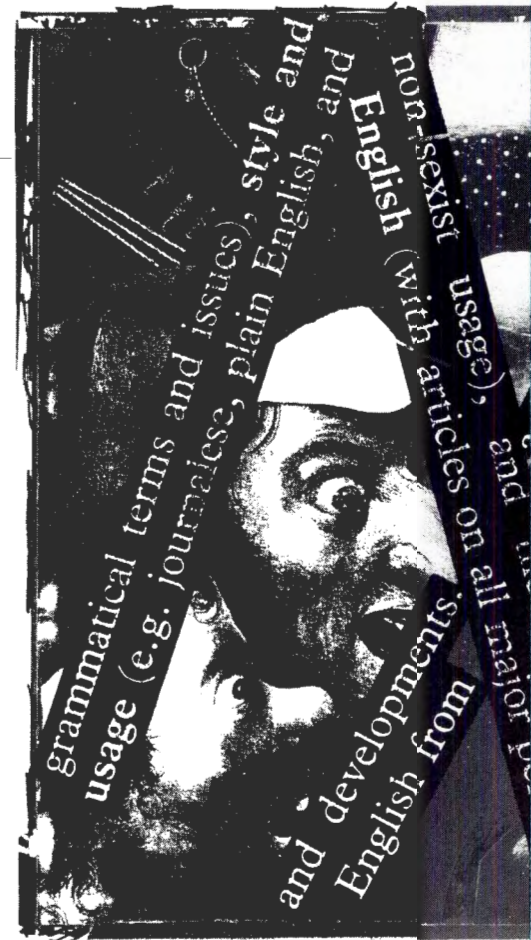
Time was when the proctological view was to be sought mainly among those who had been savaged by life, and who thus had been schooled in desperation. Nowadays, the culture of suspicion in which many have been reared invites us all to become more-or-less continuous proctologists: what Auden called 'the sneerers' ball' is offered as the only show in town. Any orthodox proctologist will find nothing odd in one's coupling *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* with *The Oxford Book of Villains*. 'You taught me language,' says Caliban, 'and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse.' The disheartened and the dishearteners will respond, 'Of course'. Language, the ubiquitous practice, turns out to be villainous.

It is true that no words are good enough to say the harm that language can do. If you have not been lied to today, or misled, or sold short, then you must have stayed away from print, radio, television and the company of

your fellows. Blandishment, solicitation, enchantment, canting, emotional encircling, reproaching, dispiriting, desolating—our lips and ears are as open to these as they are to the tidal shifts of air that we inhabit every day. Any adult knows that the daily pressure of parlance can be a vile business. 'Woe to me,' the prophet said, 'for I am a man of unclean lips.' Was he being theatrical? Would that he were.

Still, we bear up. The wistful biblical aspiration that we may 'speak the truth in love' continues to get a purchase on us. Caliban is not the emperor of his afflicted island. And when I read these two books, what I hear throughout both of them is the note not of encroaching malady but of countervailing vitality. Ours is the only species, as philosophers and theologians have told us for thousands of years, that can either be dysfunctional or envisage, even design, its own healing. The two books in hand witness to our predicament, and salute its palliation.

The contrivers of *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* might be astonished that I should put it so. Probably most of them, as I did, cut their teeth and flexed their tongues in the company of Sir Paul Harvey's *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, that gentlemanly tallying of primal truths about the way in which English literature has taken its course. Harvey never told us, any more than his successor Margaret Drabble did, what should, or might, have been. He



was an archaeologist, not a pathologist. And this remains true of *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*. From 'Abbreviation' to 'Zummerset', through 'Dancelaw' and 'Maori English' and 'Shaggy Dog Story' and 'Urdu', what we are offered is essentially the tale of our verbal behaviour, we the tribe who write and read the insignia of the present moment.

But—THAT WORD WHICH has made more difference than any other to the conduct of human affairs—but, we read or write books about our lingo, just as we deploy that lingo, alerted by hopes and fears. You must take my word for it that, eyes shut, I tumbled the book open at pages 358-359; but you can see for yourself that these pages introduce, casually, such words as 'misunderstanding', 'instructions', 'donations', 'appealed', 'dissolved', 'barbarous', 'deficient', 'decline', 'frets', 'nostalgia', 'desire', 'hostility', 'disliked', 'caricatured'. Talking, in the air or on paper, is by definition a gesture of the mind, but it is quite as certainly a lunge of the heart. Try as we may—and, God knows, some of us try very hard—we cannot remain the victims of idiocy, of endemic privacy. The heart, with an Olympic efficiency, spans the air.



If this is not necessarily gospel for John Mortimer, it is at least the kind of claim that might haunt him. Somebody, and no fool, has chosen as the jacket's device what they call 'the bad thief and his taunting captors—a detail from *Christ Carrying the Cross*, by Hieronymus Bosch'. Larrikinism, in its various forms, is carried to the heart of the human mystery. Those of us who have enjoyed the victory-bent contrivings of Horace Rumpole, the down-at-heel echoer of that proficient historical faker Horace Walpole, will be fascinated to see what Mortimer makes of our all being bent, crooks in project. His pennings within the great yard of evil are chosen thoughtfully: 'The Spirit of evil, Master crooks, Minor crooks, Murderers, Seducers and cads, Con men, Hypocrites, Traitors and spies, Tyrants.' Mortimer wrote a play about—well, perhaps, all of us—called *A Voyage Round My Father*, and an autobiography called *Clinging to the Wreckage*. Essentially, he knows that the game of language is sounding, scanning, and keeping lies to a minimum. He certainly knows that the proctological view is an option that the smallest of shareholders can take up at any moment.

Hatchlings of the word—which turns out to mean all of us—might sum up the moral project in the form,

'Don't live a lie.' This does well for greed, brutality, lust, desperation, and the rest of the gang. Having a go at cleaning up the masquerade is not only the best we can manage, it is the best anyone can be conceived as managing. What Mortimer displays in his menu of the monstrous is an ensemble of those who have no least commitment to our blundering, but admirable, project.

Their characters, at least as presented, range vastly. Graham Greene's Rollo Martins thinks of the death-inducing Harry Lime, 'He's never grown up. Marlowe's devils wore squibs attached to their tails: evil was like Peter Pan—it carried with it the horrifying and horrible gift of eternal youth.' In Gorky's diary, the plea at sentence of a man who has murdered his wife concludes, 'Why punish me, when I have already punished myself? I can still eat nice little apples and eggs, just as I did before, but they no longer possess their former sweet flavour. Nothing gives me any joy now—why then punish me?' Stevie Smith writes to Lord Barrenstock and Epicene, 'I think you are an object not of fear but pity/ Be good, my Lord, since you can not be pretty.' Uriah Heep, distillation of hypocrisy, says of his father, 'He is a partaker of glory at present, Master Copperfield. But we

have much to be thankful for.' Hitler says, 'I have the gift of reducing all problems to their simplest foundations,' and 'The day of individual happiness has passed.'

IT IS ENOUGH to make us sick, as we say, just as Bosch's painting is enough to make us sick. But Mortimer's is not after all the proctological view. His collection is, like, say, *The Oxford Book of Travel Verse*, an entertainment. The fearsome and odious performers, factual or fictional, have all undergone the taxidermy of language, and their leer or snarl is transformed into spectacle. It may be, in fact, that what grips us most about literature is neither its fidelity nor its infidelity to fact, but its exhibition of change, its endemic virtuosity. The worst of news, stated memorably, secretes a little good news. Mortimer does not want, like Dickens's Fat Boy 'to make your flesh creep': he wants to bring a little order out of the chaos of ill behaviour, by putting it under the luminosity of language.

Tom McArthur, who has not only edited *The Oxford Companion* but written 40 per cent of the entries, is by definition an orderer. Makers of dictionaries and all such works have a taxing task, not only because of the huge array of items to be addressed, but because language in action rears, resolves, and dissolves itself incessantly, like waves in the sea. One excellent feature of the *Companion* is the way in which it keeps us alert to this fact, but unintimidated by it. Facing pages have entries on Marshall McLuhan, Macmillan, the macron, the McWord, and magazines. The entry on McLuhan gives us an outline of his career, work and influence, and references for further enquiry. The one on Macmillan, succinctly informative, is a reminder of the ramification of publishing through all literature. 'Macron' implies a classical residue in the most recent of writing, even while it points to language-in-action today. 'McWord', a happy coinage from 1983, suggests some less than entirely happy things—as in, 'McWar: a fast, cheap, well-packed conflict that makes you feel good and doesn't cause indigestion.'

Inevitably, the entries carry their



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makers' marks. The column and a half on 'Australian Literature', for instance, tells us that 'The literature of Australia can be read in several ways: (1) As a discourse about political, economic, and spiritual colonialism and postcolonialism. (2) As a struggle to assert a unique nationality while assimilating international literary concerns and modes. (3) As a site for conflict between a fiction of male supremacy ... and one of female assertiveness and re-assertiveness ...'. The code words are familiar, and have the strengths and weaknesses of all codes. The entry addresses Barry Humphries and Jack Hibberd, but neither Martin Boyd nor Patrick White. One can see why, and that's show business, but one is doubly grateful for the list of six supplementary books of reference for the rounding out of the story.

The *Companion* invites, as companions ought, more than one kind of attention. If you want to know, right now, something about Hawaii Creole English, or Hazlitt, or headers and footers, this book will start you off, and give you a lead as to where to go next. If you are, like Dr Johnson, a rambler, then the book is amply companionable. All good dictionaries are masked encyclopedias, and so is Dr McArthur's work. If the proctological view is best palliated by acts of love, acts of knowledge are the next best thing, and the *Companion* abounds in resources for those.

That early watermarks included a bull's head or a bunch of grapes; that Papua New Guinea boasts 700-750 languages (not dialects); that idioms may be peculiarly rigid—there is no 'bucket-kicking' as an idiom for death; that Shakespeare's vocabulary is sometimes estimated at 20,000 words; that the Swahili for 'a rich person' is 'mbenzi'—one who owns a Mercedes-Benz; that in 1366 the Statutes of Kilkenny, written in French, enjoined the use of English in Ireland; that the expression 'psychobabble' is no older than 1977: it is good that these things should be here. The unlovable F.E. Smith, told by the judge before whom he was pleading that the latter was none the wiser after 20 minutes, replied, 'Very possibly, my Lord, but at least better informed.' Sapience is not part of the deal with a *Companion*.

And yet one returns from it to

Mortimer's compendium of bad persons with wits refreshed and eyes a little more open. When Wilkie Collins says, 'It is a bold thing to say, but nothing will ever persuade me that Society has not a sneaking kindness for a Rogue,' 'Society' and 'Rogue' both have more resonant character after one has been for a while in McArthur Country. ' "Jeeves," I said, "mix me a stiffish brandy-and-soda." "Yes, sir." "Stiffish, Jeeves. Not too much soda, but splash the brandy about a bit." "Very good, sir." ' The gods themselves cannot better or worsen vintage Wodehouse, but they can, with McArthur's help, quicken one's alertness to it. Hamlet thought the actorly mauling of language 'villainous', and wanted it put a stop to. Right as he was, we are the better for language's services to fallen humanity. ■

Peter Steele SJ is reader in English in the University of Melbourne.

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Mining politicians

THERE IS NOTHING LIKE an election to bring on a few political books. This year's crop puts flesh on the bones of Paul Keating and John Hewson and on the past 10 years of Labor government.

Christine Wallace's profile of Dr John Hewson began with several advantages. It had a major disclosure—of the way in which Hewson organised his tax affairs during the 1980s (long after tax arrangement was known to be politically dangerous) so as to write-off a massive income as a consultant. Like Norman Abjorensen's book, it devotes little attention to the question of how a person on the public payroll, as a university professor, was earning such sums consulting business, or whether it was appropriate. Christine Wallace's book was also first cab off the rank, and not a little cheaper.

It has overshadowed some of the more solid analysis of ideas contained in the Abjorensen book. The two books are, however, best taken in tandem, even if their conclusions are somewhat at odds with each other.

Abjorensen's Hewson is a loner who made it to the Liberal Party leadership without significant compromise of his ideas, with a firm, developed philosophy of economic management and with a strong sense of mission that change of the sort he espouses is inevitable and necessary. Wallace's Hewson is definitely a politician, a far more cynical manipulator than Abjorensen would suggest—a person who has been playing politics with some skill for 15 years, who has shifted position as circumstances have dictated, a person in perpetual conflict mode, with a well-developed paranoia, even for a politician—at the end of the day a bit of a fake in terms



John Hewson, A Biography, Norman Abjorensen, Lothian, 1993. ISBN 0 85091 575 9 RRP \$34.95

A Question of Leadership: Paul Keating, Political Fighter, Michael Gordon, UQP, 1993. ISBN 0 7022 2494 4 RRP \$16.95

Managing Government: Labor's Achievements and Failures, Michelle Grattan and Fred Gruen, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne 1993. ISBN 0 582 87120 4, rrp \$15.99

Hewson, a Portrait, Christine Wallace, Pan MacMillian, Sydney, 1993. ISBN 0 7251 0723 5 RRP \$14.95

of the image he has of himself and which he seeks to project.

Both writers have mined his Baptist roots, a lonely and repressed childhood, the self-improvement ethos of his growing up, his discovery of mammon as an alternative God, his Damascus-Road conversion to the

futility of market intervention, his work as an adviser to the Fraser government, his shift to academia, to journalism and, most profitably, to consultancy; his switch to politics and his filling of a vacuum created by a decade of turmoil in the Liberal Party; his development, marketing and messianism about *Fightback!* mark I, and, almost by way of an afterword, his climb-down in December.

Anyone who reads either book would probably know more about John Hewson than before they started, and would have some feeling of where he comes from and what he stands for. Few would feel that they knew him better, that they understood what made him tick, as a consequence. There is too much of the unknowable in his psyche, and the public and the private Hewson are each so narrow and controlled, with so much of his potential undeveloped, that he stands as aloof as ever. Both books give clues that could help in predicting his behaviour—his dogmatism, his self-reliance, and his (almost comforting) capacity for self-delusion and duplicity. But neither tells us much about how he would handle a completely new situation.

IT IS NOT NECESSARILY a sign of failure that they cannot penetrate the 'real' Hewson. For one thing, there may not be anything much behind the mask. For another, one can overdo the search for the psyche. Hewson, like most politicians, has been as much driven by events as by his background or by his own inner struggle for control over his environment. Even his political philosophy contains little that is unique: the western world was full of politicians of his ilk in the 1980s. John

Hewson did not even have much to do with the struggle for ascendancy of that philosophy in his own party. What he does is more important than what he is.

As I get older, the politicians I despise most are those without ideas, without ideals or a sense of mission, and without any personal decency. Even if one disagrees with the ideas, this does not prevent one admiring them. One can at least grapple with their ideas, and sunlight is a good disinfectant.

On this score of things, Hewson is a person to be taken into account, and the differing insights of Wallace and Abjorensen provide useful material for the balance sheet. He believes that some changes are urgently, fundamentally necessary. He entered politics, probably at some cost to himself, because he wanted to see those ideas implemented. There is something unselfish about him.

The biggest problem for a Hewson, however, is a far from uncommon one, particularly at either extreme of Australian politics. One always suspects that he despises and distrusts the electorate. He might want to save them, but first and foremost he wants to save them from themselves. His own construct of economic libertarianism is as laden with coercive machinery as the society of that Tory 'nanny-state' or the over-regulated paradise of the left from which he wants to save us. His educational and philosophical narrowness—an ethical base off the back of a Corn Flakes packet and 'value-free' economism—means that he will never see it. If and when he is rejected by the electorate, it will, in his eyes, be their fault and their look-out, not his.

Michael Gordon's book is far less complicated. It is only incidentally biographical, and rather more a thriller based on inside information. It details, from one side, a piece of high drama in the Labor Party. Disclosure, conflict and drama are the stuff of a good read; they can even be used, as Paul Kelly uses them in *The End of Certainty*, and rather more successfully than Gordon, as a backdrop for serious discussion of ideas and currents. Gordon steps back from some judgments, preferring to let the account speak for itself.

Paul Keating is a less complicated

person than Hewson, even if he shares some characteristics with him. Keating, like Hewson, is in politics because he believes in something. But notions of economic management are nowhere near the centre of Keating's philosophy, whereas they are virtually the whole of Hewsonism. Keating believes in growth and jobs, and—unlike some of his colleagues—thinks that achieving this is a precondition for his ideal society. But he is not trapped, at least for any period of time, in any prescriptions and has always been entirely opportunistic in his economic management. His basic beliefs are in fact fairly conventional and fairly conservative. It is Hewson who is the radical.

KEATING, HOWEVER, shares many of the characteristics and contradictions of a Hewson: courage and ruthlessness and a willingness to take enormous risks, self-certainty and a tendency to dogmatism, and a tendency to paranoia and the attribution of the worst possible motives to those who stand in his way. Unlike Hewson, he also has a formidable public history, full of embarrassments. Unlike Hewson, he has known political failure and has had any number of public kicks in the teeth. He has gone past them; one can only speculate how Hewson would deal with failure.

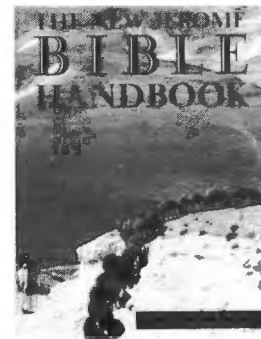
Keating has been so long in politics that he sometimes puts loyalties above principles and pragmatism above decencies. Keating has always had far more potential for greatness than Hawke, who never seemed to believe in anything, but he has not shown himself to be the great leader he says Australia has never had.

Each of the foregoing books is, at the end of the day, a potboiler, of only casual reference value a year hence. The book by Fred Gruen, an economist of breadth, and Michelle Grattan, the veteran *Age* political correspondent, is a far more substantial contribution, destined to be read longer, but unlikely to be read more widely. It is a technical tome, and, though it includes incisive comment and some definite conclusions, somewhat dusty and dry. It is a history of a decade of Labor administration, with the focus on the substance rather than the pyrotechnics; the authors show how Labor

found and left the institutions, lobbies and mechanisms of government.

It is a good book, with sound judgments. Its parting one is to explore the narrowness of the difference between Liberal policies and those of Labor at the end of government, and the suggestion that a Liberal administration would produce more continuity than change. Few would have imagined, in 1983, that by 1993 there would be scarcely any difference between Labor policy and Hewsonism, even as it was known then. As Gruen and Grattan observe, governments in power often take on a rather different hue from that which had been expected of them. ■

Jack Waterford is *Eureka Street's* Capital Letter columnist, and deputy editor of *The Canberra Times*.



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Growing pains

Indochine, dir. Régis Wargnier (independent cinemas). 'When we were young,' the character played by Catherine Deneuve says at the beginning of *Indochine*, 'we thought the world was made of inseparable things. Men and women. Mountains and plains. France and Indochina.' This luscious and pictorially beautiful film is largely about the opposites by which we define ourselves. It is also about parenthood ('You are both mother and father to me,' a plantation worker says to Deneuve just after she has beaten him), and other forms of responsibility, domination and colonialism.

Because it is about extremes—love and hate, good and evil—it is also something of a melodrama. More than two and a half hours long, the film is overblown but aware of its own pretensions. 'I will never understand French people's love stories,' a Vietnamese woman tells Deneuve. 'Full of suffering.'

Deneuve plays a rubber planter who has never left the French colony of Indochina. Thanks to her 'subjects', she has a place in the world. She knows who she is. She has an adopted Vietnamese daughter, Camille (Linh Dan Pham), and both women fall in love with a French naval officer, Jean-Baptiste. Thwarted in love, Camille abandons her comfortable European-style life to join communist rebels. She and Jean-Baptiste are reunited, she shoots and kills a French officer, and the lovers become hunted.

In a miasma of heat and rain, Camille and Jean-Baptiste drift in a junk to a temporarily safe haven, in the meantime becoming legendary heroes to the rebels; their journey is

more like some steamy Arthurian myth than an attempt to grapple with the Vietnamese view of politics.

But the real love-hate story is between mother and adopted daughter, between France and its colony. The mother must, of course, let go. See this film. It is ridiculously ambitious, pretentious, and sentimental about matters that should not be cause for sentiment. But in spite of all that, it emerges as an outrageously beautiful and idiosyncratic tragedy.

—Margaret Simons

Clint's grey day

Unforgiven, dir. Clint Eastwood (Village), has been hailed as the Last Western. That judgment may be a little

Eureka Street Film Competition

They're having an election in Oz! Gosh, Toto, the choice was never this bad in Kansas ... Tell us whether Dorothy would vote for Paul Keating or John Hewson as Wizard of Oz (and why), and we'll award two tickets, to the film of your choice, for the answer we like best. Send entries to: *Eureka Street* Film Competition, PO Box 553, Richmond, VIC 3121. The winner of January's competition was Cecilia Caffery, of Stockport, Cheshire, UK, who thought Shirley Temple's New Year's resolution would have been: to get Macaulay Culkin home alone.



premature, but Clint Eastwood has certainly made a film that amounts to the last word on his own career. His character in *Unforgiven*, William Munny, is an ironic reversal of the roles that made Eastwood famous: the Man with No Name in Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns, and Dirty Harry

Callahan, the shoot-and-ask-no-questions San Francisco cop.

Munny is a former killer and thief who has aged into being an unsuccessful pig farmer. He takes up his guns again after two cowboys in Big Whiskey, Wyoming, slash the face of a prostitute (Anna Thomson) with a knife, leaving her permanently scarred. Her fellow prostitutes are outraged when the local sheriff, Little Bill Daggett (Gene Hackman), orders only that the cowboys should compensate the brothelkeeper, since a disfigured prostitute has less earning power. The women offer \$1000 to anyone who will kill the cowboys, and the impoverished Munny sets out to earn the reward with his friend Ned Logan (Morgan Freeman) and a young braggart, the Schofield Kid (Jaimz Woolvert).

William Munny, unlike Dirty Harry, cannot shoot straight; unlike the Man with No Name, he falls off his horse; unlike both, he is capable of learning, and is un-macho enough to have learned most from a woman. But Eastwood is intent that his audience should learn, too, and *Unforgiven* is an exercise in debunking the myths that make the western possible. This happens most effectively in the contrast drawn between Munny and another bounty hunter, English Bob (Richard Harris). They never meet, but both have violent encounters with Little Bill Daggett and the film measures each of the three men by the other two.

Eastwood's demythologising may work too well; I was so absorbed by *Unforgiven's* evocation of the great screen westerns that I wanted to see them all again.

—Ray Cassin

Battleship frolics

Under Siege, dir. Andrew Davis (Village), follows the pattern set by the *Die Hard* movies. An insane, evil genius (brilliantly played by Tommy Lee Jones) hires a gang of dispensable co-conspirators (enough for their violent deaths to fill most of the movie), takes hostages (in this case the crew of an American nuclear battleship), and rants incoherently about revolution until his goal is revealed to be purely mercenary; at which point his plans

are foiled by our hero, who gets more hindrance than help from officialdom.

One advantage that *Under Siege* has over the *Die Hard* movies is that its hero, Steven 'dumber than Arnie' Seagal, unlike Bruce Willis, doesn't try to be cute. He is simply a lunkhead, in the great tradition of American action movies. As in *Superman*, the eventual triumph of good over evil is also a triumph of strength over intelligence.

At least as important as the influence of the *Die Hard* movies is the influence of Warner Brothers' cartoons. The Tommy Lee Jones character is obsessed by them, ranting about Porky Pig when under pressure and giving himself the codename 'Roadrunner', because he's never caught. The way the bad guys die is also cartoon-like, both in its overdetermination (they are not simply killed, they are impaled, blown up, etc) and in its impermanence (one of them is killed at least three times).

Whether this mode of representing violence is more or less reprehensible than the 'real' thing is debatable, but this is not a movie to see if you are worried about being corrupted. It's sadistic, jingoistic, sexist and a lot of fun.

—David Malachi

Mother love

High Heels, dir. Pedro Almodovar (independent cinemas). No one in Hollywood is creating female roles that compare with Almodovar's. There is the tokenism of *Thelma and Louise*, of course, and the soap-bubble schlock of *Steel Magnolias*; but Almodovar mines a rich seam of desire, betrayal, eccentricity and humour.

High Heels explores a tragi-comic maternal relationship, in the tradition of the director's first feature, *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* And it alludes to many other movies, especially *Autumn Sonata* and *Mildred Pierce*, but the tightrope walk balancing farce, tragedy and whodunnit is uniquely Almodovar's.

Victoria Abril, as the daughter, shows a desperate gamine awkwardness, very different from her usual confident sensualist persona. When not working as a TV newsreader she haunts a nightclub where the main

performer is a drag artist who does impersonations of her mother, a fading chanteuse about to make a comeback.

Marisa Paredes, as the mother, wears Armani clothes as though she were genetically engineered for them; the contrast with her daughter, stiffly correct in Chanel suits that wear her rather than the reverse, is poignant. The daughter stumbles through life in her mother's shadow, picking up her leavings and palely copying her style.

There are some delicious comic touches. Abril reads news bulletins accompanied by a blonde rival who signs for deaf viewers; the joke is milked to the utmost when Abril confesses to a murder on camera. Did she really do it? I was kept guessing for a while, but I may be dumber than most.

—Juliette Hughes

Lemme out

Fortress, dir. Stuart Gordon (Village). This is one of the first films to be entirely shot at the Warner Brothers studios on the Gold Coast. Much of the interest of the film therefore surrounds its technical accomplishment. Having sat through an unfortunate hour and a half, I can report that the film is well up to the technical standard of the mid-price Hollywood product. The miniatures are convincing and the sets effective, though rather spartan. Warner Brothers appears to have established a first-class facility for the production of American pulp on our shores.

This film depicts a futuristic prison and an American society so concerned about its burgeoning population and pro-life morality that the conception of a second child is punishable by imprisonment. To illustrate this nightmare scenario, every prison-movie cliché is dredged up and paraded in tiresome fashion. There is none of the gleeful play movie iconography that marks American pulp at its best, and Stuart Gordon demonstrates neither the directorial talent nor the interest to stop the film drifting from banality to banality.

Perhaps the most striking feature of *Fortress* is its consistent failure of imagination. The fortress of the title, for example, is supposed to be the most advanced system of incarceration

imaginable, but its only surveillance system consists of a metal chamber moving noisily up and down the prison corridors.

In the 19th century, Jeremy Bentham realised that the most effective method of keeping people under surveillance was to deny them knowledge of when they were being watched. The result of this insight was the Panopticon, a vision of imprisonment more profound and more vicious than anything the cinema has yet given us. This prison in this film, however, is little more than an excuse for some mind-numbing action and the occasional grotesquerie.

—Damian Cox

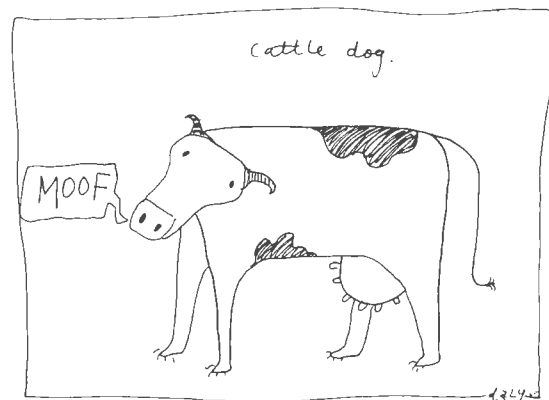
Just deserts

The Bodyguard, dir. Mick Jackson (Village). With seven Academy nominations already for raspberry of the year, this box-office bonanza can't lose. Co-produced by Kevin Costner and scripted by Lawrence Kasdan of *The Big Chill* (both of them should know better) the film squanders talent and opportunity.

Costner plays Frank Farmer, an ex-secret service bodyguard whose neurotic notion of duty makes a nonsense of virtue. The object of his attention is Whitney Houston as Rachel Marron, a glitzy singer-star who swerves between Madonna-like monomania and down-home folksiness. She looks wonderful, but is sabotaged by a very silly script that half-bakes sibling rivalry.

Houston's singing provides this noisy, overblown film with most of its few authentic moments. The rest of the sound track is a score for Armageddon. Costner has moved on though: in *The Big Chill* he played Alex, a stiff lying down. In *The Bodyguard* he graduates to a stiff standing up.

—Morag Fraser





Television Program Guide

Michael McGirr

Sport,

IN 1974, I WAS A MEMBER of an under-13 soccer team that hardly scored a goal, let alone won a match. One time, however, we did manage to get away to a 1-0 lead before most of the opposing team had arrived. Unfortunately, I was a defender and inadvertently levelled the scores with an own goal. Later I put the opposition in front with another. I suspect, to my shame, that the second goal was at least partly for the benefit of the coach. He had got a momentary whiff of victory and, having had it put in jeopardy by the first goal, turned on me like hell's fury. So I put the matter beyond doubt.

But 1974 was an auspicious year for Australian soccer. It marked the first and, to date, the only appearance of the Socceroos in a World Cup finals

SBS television has always had a close relationship with soccer. The network broadcast soccer in its first week of operation in 1980. It also kept thousands out of bed with its exhaustive coverage of the 1990 World Cup, during which 155,000 Australian homes installed UHF aerials to pick up the transmission. Even so, with its limited resources, playing host broadcaster for the Youth Cup will be the network's biggest undertaking to date. 'We run on adrenalin here,' explains Les Murray, the Hungarian-born head of SBS on-air presentation team. 'Channel 9 has 10 times the budget for the same amount of sports programming that we do.'

Although much of the cost will be recouped from fees from overseas networks, putting 100 hours of football to air from five cities is undeniably expensive. But this is one occasion on which SBS isn't stinting. While the Young Socceroos were away playing warm-up games in the Middle East, SBS sat 180 people down to dinner in the ballroom of the Sydney Hilton for a launch of their coverage of the competition.

One reason for such hospitality is that Australia's handling of the World Youth Cup is seen as fundamental to Sydney's chances of hosting the 2000 Olympic Games. Almost 30 per cent of the Olympic delegates who have to be wooed are soccer people, and many of them will be here

for the Youth Cup. Sydney's prospects must have looked remote when the airport strike in February meant the team took 75 hours to reach Saudi Arabia. 'You must remember that soccer is the most powerful sport in

the world,' says Murray, 'not just in terms of numbers of players and fans but in political terms because of the money it generates.'

Murray sees his work as having a crusading component. 'Most Australians grow up believing that the only big event in the world is the Olympic Games, followed by the Commonwealth Games. In fact, the Commonwealth Games hardly makes the small print in most parts of the world.' Major soccer tournaments, such as the Youth Cup, are in a bigger league, and the Olympic delegates will mark Australia's scorecard partly on SBS' ability to present quality coverage to 70-80 countries. Does this put pressure on Murray as the anchorman? 'I've done so many of these things now that it's really second nature to me to work on them.'

Murray speaks as a commentary-box veteran of at least two World Cup tournaments. He has been SBS' soccer presenter from the beginning in 1980. And I when I watched the Young Socceroos play Korea at Marconi, deep in Sydney's west, Les was there, though not as a broadcaster. He sat among the spectators, eating an icecream, and seemed to know many of them.

sport,

Veteran is almost the word to use of the Young Socceroos themselves. The cut off age for the competition is 20 but the team has already toured Latin America and Europe. The game against Korea was played on the evening before they flew out to the Middle East. I met them during a pre-game meal that had been timetabled for the middle of an afternoon that pushed past 38°C. Even in the heat, their impeccable uniforms spoke volumes about the discipline of the team. But they also seemed relaxed.

Kevin Muscat is the captain of the Young Socceroos. 'The nerves will start to hit when we come up to play Colombia in the first game of the cup. When we're out there during the national anthem.' Muscat is the only

Young Socceroo defender Craig Moore (left) keeps a close eye on Brazilian striker Gian in a warm-up match for the World Youth Cup.



series. It was also the year in which most of today's Young Socceroos were born. For three weeks this month they will be the focus of international attention as they compete on Australian soil for soccer's World Youth Cup.

March

member of the team who played in the last Youth Cup, in 1991, when Australia surpassed their previous best by winning third place. They were only knocked out in a semifinal against the host team, Portugal, where they went down 1-0 in front of a partisan crowd of 120,000. 'The crowd were all booing and throwing bottles and doing anything to distract us. But winning the bronze was one of those experiences you just can't describe. Nobody expected us to do so well but when we did everybody sat up and took notice.'

This time the expectations of the Australians are high. Muscat thinks they can win: 'Every time we played in Europe and South America we found Australia has a lot of respect on the soccer field,' he said. Les Murray also sees a chance of victory. Although the Young Socceroos' form against Korea, Saudi Arabia and Oman was inconsistent, last December the team levelled a four-game series against Brazil and Brazil are favoured to take the cup. 'It'll take a lot of fight,' says Muscat.

One member of the team on whom great expectations have come to rest is a lanky 17-year-old Queensland, Craig Moore. 'He is a sensational young defender,' says Murray, 'he will be one of the best players this country has ever produced.' Moore himself is laconic: 'I've never thought like that. I've just always been lucky enough to put in a good game when it mattered.' He started playing soccer when he was five and it has always dominated his life. Like Muscat, he spent a couple of years at the Australian Institute of Sport, somehow fitting in his schooling from there.

When the Young Socceroos turned out under a burnt sunset for the final game against Korea, there were supporters cheering Moore by name. One tattooed woman seemed as though she would have been more at home at the Guns 'n' Roses concert that was to take place not far away on the next night. 'Go Moore,' she mutters between drags on a cigarette, 'go Craig.' Not bad for 17. Has Moore ever scored

an own goal? The team laughs. 'Yes,' he admits, 'but you're not going to write about that, are you? You don't write about own goals.'

Moore and Muscat will more than likely join the growing list of Australians who are playing football professionally in Europe. They are as ubiquitous as Australian opera singers. More than 40 players now have contracts with clubs in France, England, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Greece and Germany, most of them former Young Socceroos. The drainage, caused largely by the lack of professional opportunities in Australia, helps to account for the difference in Australia's standing in junior and senior soccer.

and sport

'European-based players are generally reluctant to make themselves available for national games,' says Murray, 'although they will come back for really crunch World Cup qualifiers.' This creates problems. In 1989, Australia met Israel for such a match in front of 43,000 spectators at the Sydney Football Stadium. An administrative blunder had scheduled the game to coincide with the height of the European season, so four of Australian players had flown back to be in the country for less than 48 hours. 'The coach had no time to blend the team and had to resort to the simplest and most expedient tactics. The team didn't play anything like it could have.'

Even now, Murray's disappointment is obvious. He strongly favours increasing professionalism in Australian soccer. Muscat points to another possibility: the national senior coach, Eddie Thompson, is holding training camps in Europe for the Australian players who are based there.

But there may not be a great many chances to see these young players after they move beyond the youth level. At all events, they may not be playing the same type of soccer. 'The young players try to flaunt their talent,' says Murray, 'they know they

can get all sorts of passports through being discovered. At senior level, the players are much more pragmatic, more cunning. This is where from time to time you get negative tactics and gamesmanship. But the young guys are unspoilt. That's what makes this such a splendid tournament.'

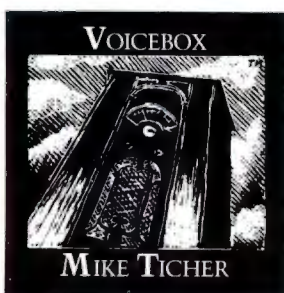
THE COMPETITION BEGINS ON 5 March, with an opening ceremony at the Sydney Football Stadium choreographed by Ric Birch, the man who produced the opening ceremonies at the Los Angeles and Barcelona Olympics. This will be broadcast live and repeated the next afternoon. Round-robin games will be played in Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide until the semi-finals in Sydney and Melbourne on 17 March, and the final in Sydney on 20 March.

SBS will screen a live match at 8.30pm (8pm in Adelaide) on every playing day of the competition. All 32 games will be replayed, generally before the SBS news the next day. There will also be a daily digest of highlights, interviews and previews called *Australia 93 Highlights* going to air about 10.30pm (10pm in Adelaide).

The telecast of the quarter-finals, which are sure to include Australia, may provide a welcome respite from the election coverage on the evening of 13 March. In soccer as in other things, it will be a decisive night for Australia. ■



SBS sports presenter Les Murray: 'I've done so many of these things now that it's really second nature to me ...'



Never trust anyone over 29

I WAS 14 WHEN punk rock made it big in England. At the time I was heavily influenced by its ideology, which was encapsulated in a three-point program for revolutionary action:

- Never trust a hippy;
- Kill the Bill (i.e. the police);
- 'You're too old and your hair's too long'.

I didn't have much occasion to put no.1 into practice, no.2 seemed OK, if a bit extreme, but no.3 suited me down to the ground. Life wasn't really all that oppressive for middle-class white schoolboys in the outer suburbs of London, but anyone could cut their hair short and, hey, I was young wasn't I? I resolved never to buy another record by one of my favourite bands after I found out that the lead singer was a 29 year-old journalist.

Grabbing at half-truths (or outright lies) and turning them into rigid dogma to be defended at all costs is an enduring bourgeois teenage ritual. Fortunately for my generation it resulted in idolising spotty youths in leather jackets, rather than going off to get killed in the Spanish Civil War or trying to convert hostile African tribes to Christianity. We didn't know how lucky we were. Today, it seems, the most rebellious thing a young person can do is to become deeply concerned about the environment. The perfectly normal teenage desire to Smash the System seems to have degenerated into nothing more aggressive than sluggish cynicism and wishy-washy do-gooding.

At least that's the impression you'd get if you spent much time listening to Australia's only national youth network, the ABC's JJJ. Regular exposure to JJJ presenters has much the same effect on me as arguing politics with a 'concerned' teenager. They're utterly convinced of the correctness of their own position, dismiss arguments instead of debating them and, worst of all, have absolutely no sense of their own ridiculousness. I can remember what I was like at that

age—an uneasy mixture of would-be worldly cynicism and naive idealism. The same two characteristics wrestle with each other daily for the soul of JJJ, and the results are pretty unedifying.

In some cases the appropriate stance is obvious. Censorship, racism, anything to do with the nuclear industry and threats to the environment are all Bad Things and should be taken seriously—to the point of tedium, in fact. But in general it's OK to be sarcastic about politicians, people in authority and anything that even hints at dagginess. Take this news item, for example: 'Some good news for Sydney's Olympic bid—it seems Barcelona will need another 15 years to pay off its Olympic debts.' In other words, the Olympics are just a big con-trick for the benefit of their commercial sponsors. Anything that makes Sydney's bid unpopular is therefore 'good news' (and can be tagged as such in what is supposed to be a news report).

The impression that JJJ's political attitudes are largely shaped by watching Ric Mayall in *The Young Ones* is reinforced by the studied air of casualness that permeates the news broadcasts. It's a good indicator of JJJ's uncertainty about what is, or is not, fair game for derision. Refugees are 'kicked out' rather than expelled; the Prime Minister 'reckons unemployment isn't going to come down soon'. If you hear about people 'rocking up to the gig', they're probably talking about Guns 'n' Roses fans, but it might just as easily be Bosnian government representatives arriving for peace talks in Geneva.

Inevitably, they often get it wrong and wind up pouring scorn on an issue that really demands a bit of thought, with excruciatingly awful results. The case of the Victorian woman who died while her husband watched two friends perform an 'exorcism' on her is a good example. The man was clearly deranged—he suggested that her internal injuries may have been caused by demons hanging on to her organs,

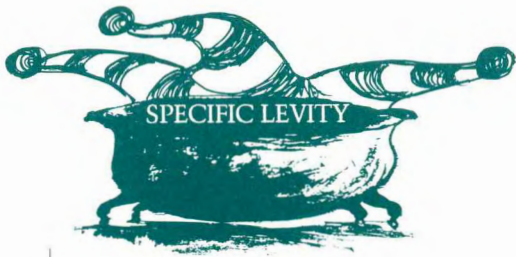
and rejoiced when she died, apparently in agony. This appalling case was the cause of great mirth at the Jays. The police, they reported were 'trying to get their heads around' the demonic deliverance of the farmer's 'missus'. Debbie Spillane and Ian Rogerson, who get together for an hour's banal chit-chat every day, thought it was an absolute hoot that the farmer had invited TV cameras to his wife's funeral, to record her predicted resurrection.

The opposite is also true—issues that demand scepticism are met with gullible idealism. Witness the uncritical approach to the New Age on Angela Cattern's morning show. She grills pop psychologists on solutions to teenage *angst* ('Do you believe in karma, Dorothy?'), while listeners are invited to ring in every day to have their dreams interpreted (they all tell you something about a past life—surprise!). So much for 'never trust a hippy'.

The problem is that, although its attitudes often seem to mirror those of the teenagers it purports to identify with, JJJ can't get away with the excuse that it's just a crazy mixed-up kid. Most of the presenters must be well into their 20s, if not over the dreaded 30. But because it's a 'youth' station, they seem to feel the need to impose a terrible, self-conscious atmosphere of enforced wackiness. The newsreader announces that he's come into the studio wearing 'Arab headdress'; they read the weather report in silly voices. And you should hear the music they play.

Small wonder that Australia's real young people prefer the unabashed commercialism of MMM, in Sydney and Melbourne, or similar FM music stations in the other capitals. JJJ is such an obvious imposter. It's about time it grew up or shut up. ■

Mike Ticher is a 29-year-old journalist whose hair remains obstinately close-cropped.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 11, March 1993

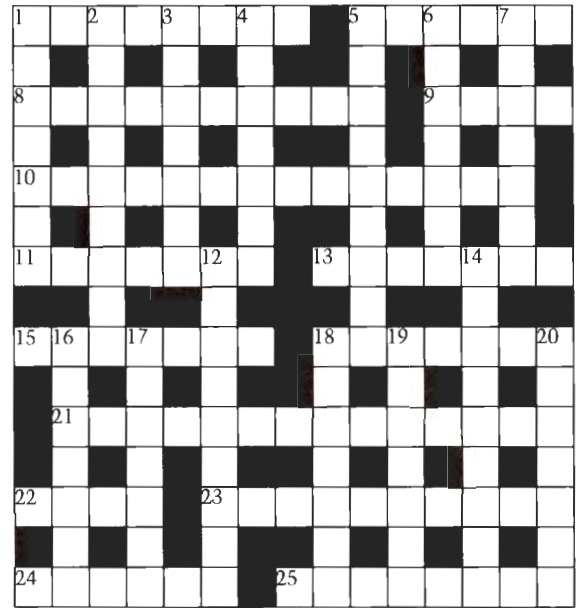
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

- 1 For some of your income, Di, any actor would laugh to order. (8)
- 5 Senior lecturer's primer. (6)
- 8 Conspicuous diamond in memorable clasp. (10)
- 9 Roguish Principal! (4)
- 10 Your present liaisons are newsworthy items. (7,7)
- 11 Perhaps I sailed too close to the wind when I communicated with you. (7)
- 13 My dear, big jumble sales need an organised group to succeed. (7)
- 15 Pluto and the Turkish governor, joined by love, act against orders. (7)
- 18 Indeed, the facade cut in half looks disfigured. (7)
- 21 Would it be an election winner, Canberra's excess going into a share premium? (7,7)
- 22 Her slip? (4)
- 23 Not working for the Speaker, this parliamentary objection! (3,2,5)
- 24 Abstains around the beginning of Easter? On the contrary! (6)
- 25 In the sentence the Schoolmistress especially emphasises the accents. (8)

DOWN

- 1 Part of an icon I call shapely (geometrically speaking). (7)
- 2 In the story, Tortoise gives warning to Worm, say, about the dangers on these roads. (9)
- 3 Cunningly secreted the orders without the shirt. (7)
- 4 Arranged date suitable for changed conditions. (7)
- 5 Order fence to be repaired and strengthened. (9)
- 6 Crooning crazily, Bing at a function sees the tension lessening. (7)
- 7 Cut out the sex and jumbled dice. (7)
- 12 Mix tonic with lees from the wine for the popular choices. (9)
- 14 Honours for the winners of 12, including a cold case of cocktails! (9)
- 16 Bad luck for the batting side—caught on the boundary because of the slope. (7)
- 17 Hewson . . . Keating and vice versa. Such work models! (7)
- 18 Underworld injury—with a twist. (7)
- 19 Tolerated the fanciful dressing of rober to the king. (7)
- 20 Abandons just rewards. (7)



Solution to Crossword no.10, February 1993

R	E	S	T	O	R	I	N	G		C	O	A	C	H
A	E	R		M	L	I	R	I						
C	O	M	I	C		P	L	A	Y	T	H	I	N	G
E	I	H		R	N	E	S	H						
D	I	F	F	E	R	E	N	C	E		S	E	L	F
D	E	N	O	T	E	S		S	H	A	M	P	O	O
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M	I	L	E	A	G	E		C	O	N	T	A	I	N
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N	O	S	E		G	R	E	E	N	F	I	E	L	D
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C	R	I	C	K	E	T	E	R		C	H	E	S	S
A	E	I												
N	Y	L	O	N										



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