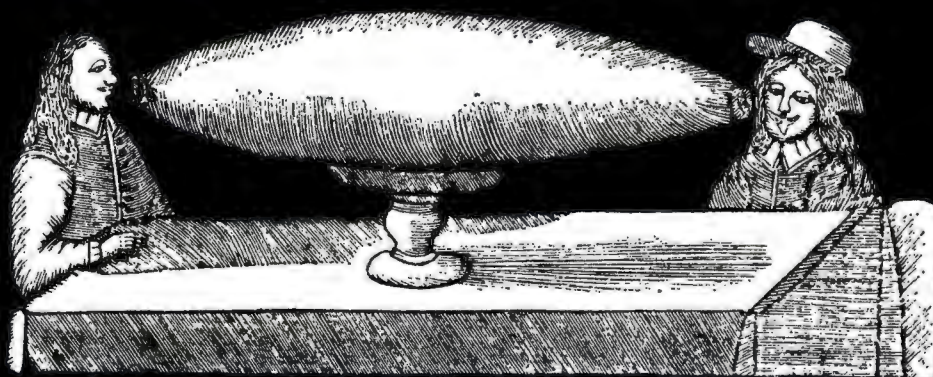


EUREKA STREET

Vol. 8 No. 2 March 1998

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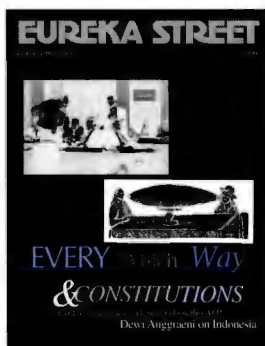
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EUREKA STREET

Volume 8 Number 2
March 1998

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology



*Sizing up: Kim Beazley
and Laurie Oakes
at the ALP Conference
in Hobart.*

*Photograph by
David Glanz.*

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Clouds of witness

IN THE LAST TWO MONTHS has come welcome news that reconciliation has taken place between Fr Tissa Balasuriya and the Sri Lankan church authorities. More disquieting has been the news that Fr Paul Collins' views in his recent book, *Papal Power*, are under investigation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Without prejudging here the truth of the criticisms made of their books, I am concerned at two points by the process to which Fr Balasuriya and Fr Collins are subjected.

In the first place, the mere news that a Vatican Congregation has begun proceedings causes grievous harm to the person accused, even if the charges are totally groundless. It initiates an open season when every hound inside and outside the Catholic Church can tear the hare to shreds with impunity.

This is not merely unjust to Fr Collins, a genial and dedicated Catholic priest, but is harmful to the Catholic Church in Australia. For Paul Collins has won a sympathetic hearing for Christian positions among people who would normally class themselves among the 'educated despisers of religion'. His work on ecology, in particular, has attracted many young people who had assumed that the Church has nothing to say on the issues of the day.

Secondly, the investigation launched into his writings is based on denunciations by people whose names remain anonymous, and on opinions offered by officers of the Congregation. The judgment will be given by the Department which has initiated the prosecution. There will be no opportunity for Paul to meet his accusers face to face. In a community which is built on justice, love and truth, cannot procedures which better embody these values be found?

Perhaps a starting point might be the teaching of Jesus, who, Matthew's Gospel tells us, insisted that grievances be first addressed by face-to-face conversation:

'If your brother should commit some wrong against you, go and point out his fault, but keep it between the two of you. If he does not listen, summon another, so that every case may stand on the word of two or three witnesses.' ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ teaches at the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne.

Asia: Future conditional

ASIA'S CURRENCY CRISIS has been a model for understanding the new global economy. Like a Puritan schoolmaster enunciating lessons in clear logic, the crisis has revealed new truths and reinforced old beliefs. Here are a few.

The International Monetary Fund and the United States Government are still the most powerful influences on global economic management. Not the World Trade Organisation, not Japan and not the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation group.

Asian economies that in the past successfully mixed state intervention with market forces can be buffeted into chaos when exposed to international financial markets.

The old argument that democracy is dependent, in some sense, on liberal capitalist values still has life in it, most notably in Indonesia and South Korea. Suharto is trying to downsize cronyism. In December, Koreans elected a new reformist president, Kim Dae Jung.

The West under US guidance still really believes it knows what is best for Asians, their economies and social systems, and how they should reform their corrupt ways to conform with 'universal' standards.

A big lesson for free-trade Australians is the empty rhetorical promise of Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation. APEC was sidelined. And despite the pride economists have in their analytical techniques, currency markets remain mysterious and unpredictable. Their unforecasted movements can still make highly paid currency jocks at the big merchant banks look clumsy.

A corollary to this last point is that even Nobel Prize Winners in Economic Science can be wrong, or at least become snagged in ideological hubris. Someone, say, like Chicago University monetarist, free marketeer and Nobel Prize winner Milton Friedman. Friedman attacked the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund earlier this decade as harmful to the sound operation of market forces. A floating currency was the key to solving balance of payments problems—not IMF bail-out packages. And World Bank funds only served to prop up governments that created the problems by impeding economic freedom.

The operations of the IMF and the World Bank were examples of one of Friedman's favourite aphorisms: If a private enterprise fails, it closes down unless it can get the government to bail it out. If a government enterprise fails, it is expanded.

The proof? The economic performance of the four tiger economies, which had relied least on the bank and the fund, and were basically the vigorous flower children of free markets.

Yet Asia's currency contagion was probably not a result of great imbalances in exports or imports or the speculative calculations of currency investors, like George Soros and his Quantum Fund. There was speculation. But the IMF and the Australian Reserve Bank locate the problem elsewhere: in a

second and new type of financial crisis. One different from the type caused by big government spending (the one that bothers Friedman so much).

Despite the mysteries of currency movements, what sunk the baht, the rupiah and the won was panic that Asia's financial system was unsound. And that it would stay that way until reforms were made. This is where the IMF came in.

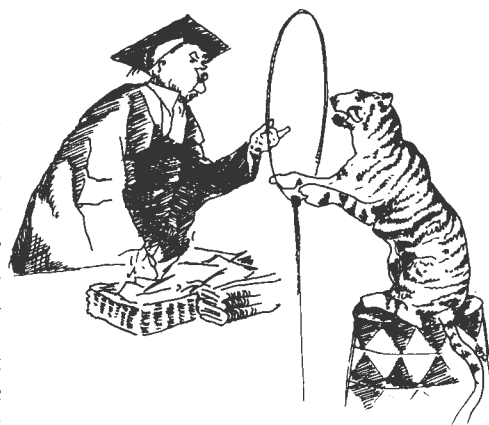
A country has to do a lot of painful things to get a loan from the IMF. Intervention comes with a downside known as 'conditionality'. It's not loan sharking. But it does often involve higher interest rates to stabilise the currency, cuts to social spending to reduce the Budget deficit, and lower wage growth to take pressure off the current account.

This time around the IMF expanded its reach. It is more activist, more political. It now looks at things belonging within the economic sovereignty of nations, such as their financial systems. Even cronyism, corruption and the Asian Way.

That's the real lesson of the Asian meltdown: IMF conditionality has become stronger.

Suharto may have defeated Sukarno in the Year of Living Dangerously. But Suharto will not beat the IMF or the currency traders with his soldiers. ■

Lincoln Wright is a finance writer for the *Canberra Times*.



Truth casualties on Bougainville

MEDIA REPORTING AND ANALYSES of the nine-year Bougainville war have all too often been slack and unreliable, with even respected journals of record being reluctant to accept corrections to ill-informed feature articles.

Lindsay Murdoch, a recently revealed authority on Papua New Guinea, stated in *The Age* (24 January 1998) that 'PNG late last year backed away from an undertaking given by its representatives in July that the people of Bougainville would be free to determine their own future'.

No such 'undertaking' has been heard of in Port Moresby or Canberra.

Several days later a Lindsay Murdoch feature was captioned: 'Canberra must let Bougainville chart its own destiny'. Its prelude was: 'Ten thousand lives lost in a nine-year civil war won the people the right to vote on whether to remain part of PNG' (*The Age*, 28 January 1998).

Fortunately for those who bothered to read the text, it was stated only that Bougainvilleans 'may' be given such a chance and that Port Moresby 'had refused to confirm' that it would allow them such a vote. Port Moresby has, however, according to Murdoch, allowed that 'the dispute be internationalised', because the United Nations has been given 'a monitoring role'. It is to be hoped that Lindsay Murdoch does not mean to suggest that the UN will proceed to do more than this. The UN has made it clear that it has more urgent priorities and can spare no substantial resources for what it prefers to see as an internal PNG problem.

Bougainvilleans have already been over-nurtured on the idea that they have some 'absolute right to self-determination'. Even non-rebels have been led to believe that this could be sustained on geographic, racial (because of skin-colour!) and cultural grounds. This is not so; no such 'absolute right' exists. Nor is it clear that, if it did exist, a majority of Bougainvilleans would wish to exercise it.

A more sensible ground for an act of self-determination would exist if Bougainvilleans, conceived of as a 'minority', could demonstrate that they had been significantly oppressed and discriminated against by government and other citizenry.

This is far from the truth. At the outbreak of hostilities in December 1988, initiated by a small group of landholders led by Francis Ona, Bougainville was the most prosperous and best-governed province of PNG. It enjoyed a level of autonomy which left it mostly to the devices of its own people and one which had been agreed to by acknowledged and democratically elected provincial leaders in 1976. Its decentralised government was as well resourced as that of any other province and it had greater internal resources to draw on.

Bougainvilleans held high offices in state and church: the first Commissioner of Police, the current Ombudsman, a deputy Prime Minister and an Archbishop of Port Moresby were all Bougainvilleans.

However, there was a genuine grievance at the site of the great copper mine: the terms of compensation for environmental

degradation and loss of land needed revision, and the government (not the mining company which did make offers) obtusely failed to meet its obligations under an agreement made in 1974. In fact, the perception in Port Moresby, seeming to justify this, was that Bougainvilleans were much better off than other nationals.

Instability in government in Port Moresby also prevented it from grappling quickly with the problem but, once violence broke out, Prime Minister Namaliu offered a package of 20 per cent (previously five) royalties to landholders, the sale of the government's 19.1 per cent equity on generous terms to the province and a K200 million development scheme.

The democratically elected provincial government accepted this and declared opposition to secession, while setting up a committee to seek extension of its powers. A small group of rebels, led by Francis Ona, rejected any compromise and assassinated a provincial minister whose proposal for peace barely stopped short of complete autonomy.

This group was primarily responsible for the subsequent destruction of their province.

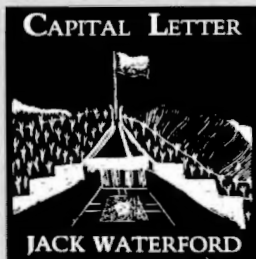
These facts have been obscured, particularly by journalists for whom Bougainville is a new patch, and by the publicity quite rightly given to the indiscriminate violence of the PNG security forces. (Less attention, however, has been given to the barbarities of the rebels.) Nevertheless, it would have been anomalous if the Prime Minister had not called out his security forces, however incompetent, to deal with saboteurs of his nation's primary industrial base. Francis Ona had no mandate from Bougainvilleans to lead a rebellion or to dub himself 'Father of the Nation'.

There is then no moral right at the moment to a referendum on independence, although pragmatic grounds may be found in the future if government in PNG were to break down irretrievably.

Lindsay Murdoch's '10,000 lives' allegedly lost in the civil war is not based on any justified estimate. He has simply taken up a round figure bandied about by pro-rebel propagandists. (Lately the figure has become 20,000.) To make any sensible estimate of lives 'lost' through the war one needs more than hard mortality figures, even if these become available. Medical services in Bougainville pre-1989 were better than anywhere else in PNG, owing to the ancillary services associated with the copper mine. Francis Ona stopped them, as he did the mining revenues which funded medical services for the rest of PNG. Ultimately, his gangs burnt down Arawa hospital. Ona has been known to declare that Bougainville can dispense with Western technology.

If the lives lost in Bougainville have 'won any rights', as Murdoch claims, it should be the right to be protected from the likes of Francis Ona and from ill-informed, though no doubt well-intentioned, partisan journalists. ■

James Griffin is an historian and Professor Emeritus at the University of Papua New Guinea.



Negative steering

UNITY MAY BE STRENGTH, and political

disunity may be political death, but a party that fears ideas and avoids debates is hardly a party preparing itself for government, or worthy of having it should the other side shoot itself in the foot.

The highly choreographed ALP party conference, in which hardly anything was left to chance, in which even the slightest flicker of tension was quickly smothered, and in which everyone with anything to contribute was chloroformed, was hardly the ALP showing itself either as a party that had learnt lessons from voter rejection, or a body with passion and ideas capable of attracting committed support.

It was an interesting contrast with the Constitutional Convention in Canberra two weeks later. This column is being written before that is over, and with no ultimate outcome in view, but what has been striking about its first 10 days has been the way in which delegates of different stripe have grappled with ideas, changed positions, sought to accommodate other views, and sought also to position themselves properly for the political consequences flowing out of the convention outcomes. That impression will persist even if it ends up in debacle.

There has been, in short a debate. Certainly, there have been immovable objects confronting irresistible forces, and self-indulgent rhetoricians preening themselves in their own applause. But what distinguished the great majority of the delegates, young and old, male and female, the professional and non-professional politicians, was the way in which they gave some impression of seeking to persuade and to convince, and of themselves listening and adjusting along the way.

Even accomplished Labor politicians such as Gareth Evans and Kim Beazley himself, showed some willingness to mix it in debate without great evidence of fear that they might be embarrassed by being bested.

And while, for most, it was an emotion and an instinct rather than pragmatism or logic which was the lodestone, there was present some idealism and some fervour which political parties would love to harness but cannot. And never will, so long as they put their fortunes in the hands of spin doctors.

At the moment, the polls seem to favour Labor. At least they suggest that it is in there with a strong chance of tossing out the Howard Government. This is, of course, the reason for all of the caution, the demands for discipline, and the need to suppress internal debate.

Even the economic uncertainty caused by the Asia crisis, and the political uncertainty caused by Australia's somewhat more than token involvement in the latest Iraqi adventure have the capacity to undermine two areas where Howard is reasonably strong: the impression of sound economic management and a broad general stability.

Another issue being trotted out involves gambles as well. A show of firmness with micro-economic reform on the wharves, moreover, would probably win more votes for Howard than it loses; the risk for him is not so much in having his

ministers and advisers found to be deep in conspiracy as in their being found to have lied about it.

Couple with this some skilful positioning by marketers of Labor's being caring and sharing (but not profligate) on social issues, and some success at positioning Howard as mean-spirited and uninspiring in the same area, hope for some wrong-footing of Peter Costello on tax reform, and the ingredients are there for the sort that would see Labor restored to the front benches.

But is it as simple as that? Labor is not the only party with access to marketing resources. The Howard charge—that the new Labor platform is virtually a policy-free zone, yet hopelessly contradictory in messages sent out about economic intervention—is not without substance. And it takes more than generalised messages of concern for the halt, the blind and the lame for Labor, with its record, to paint itself as the human face of economic rationalism and globalisation.

It was against Labor's record, and the performance of not a few members of Beazley's current front bench, that John Howard won an election by evoking images of economic insecurity and government by deals with privileged groups.

Howard may well now have dashed the hopes of some of his constituencies: are these now so disillusioned, or converted by a Labor public relations porridge that they will see their rejection of Labor as just a mistake, one they are now eagerly waiting to repair?

HOWARD HIMSELF, of course, has made enough mistakes to be vulnerable in two areas which once worked for him—an image of general competence and an image of general, if uninspiring, decency. In that sense Labor can even hope to win government by default. But that would be about as silly as it gets. The ineptitudes of Howard in Government, not least over the various travel rorts affairs, have stained politicians fairly evenly, and merely heightened a general cynicism about their probity. The bipartisan pratfalls in NSW—where the Carr Labor Government found rare common cause with the Liberals in the fag-end of the Christmas parliamentary session to screw extra superannuation all around—has probably compounded it.

Even more dangerously, it renews an increasing despair about what politicians, of either stripe, are capable of achieving at all.

A party that deserves support must show that it is practical and responsible. But it must also be able to harness some idealism, and inspire some enthusiasm and passion from potential supporters. John Howard may have demonstrated that one can do this, in some vital constituencies, merely by articulating a deep discontent with the performance of the other side.

If it is true that, in that sense, he won government by default, then a Kim Beazley who did the same would be in even more diabolical trouble at about the same time in his term. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Limit of the law

From Rev. Dr Christopher Dowd *op. Dean, Mannix College, Victoria.*

Professor Hilary Charlesworth's article, 'No principled reason' (*Eureka Street*, November 1997) printed under the heading 'Theology and the Law', is long on law but short on theology. The references attached to this article include only one book about theology, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her*. This paucity of theological background explains Professor Charlesworth's inability to think of any 'principled reason' why the exemption of religious institutions from Australia's sex discrimination laws in the area of the training, ordination and appointment of priests and ministers should continue.

Professor Charlesworth is not the first person in recent days to raise the ominous prospect of the abolition of the religious exemption provided by the federal Sex Discrimination Act. Any attempt to do this would itself be an instance of religious intolerance, a violation of international human rights law recognising the right to freedom of religion and an interference with

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the principle of the separation of Church and State. It would be discriminatory against those religious communities whose creeds require distinctions on the basis of sex to be made concerning the conferral of ordination. More importantly, it would violate what the Professor herself seems to recognise as 'a higher law above that of governmental authority'. Should any government be foolish enough to remove the exemption from the Act, the only course of action open to the religious organisation to which I belong would be civil disobedience on the principle that 'We must obey God and not men' (Acts 5.29).

The question of who can or cannot be ordained in the Catholic Church is an internal matter exclusively for that Church, to be determined according to the Church's understanding of itself and its priesthood on the basis of theological criteria drawn from its own sacred texts, traditions, authority, truths and values. As for the ordination of women, the Catholic Church has always had a very clear, well-known position on that question, one which in recent decades has been repeatedly confirmed by the Church's highest authority. Doctrinally, the issue is settled even if, politically, pockets of dissenting recalcitrance persist. At any rate, it is an issue with which state human rights law has absolutely nothing to do. Whatever defects there might still be in the commitment of the Catholic Church to 'the human

rights of all its members', the prohibition of female ordination is not among them.

Religious institutions are not 'anti-pathetic' to human rights law, as Professor Charlesworth suggests; they require merely that these laws fully respect the religious values and customs of community groups. It is true that human rights law poses a challenge for religious traditions but it is equally true that the challenge is reciprocated.

A few other points of clarification:

The activity of the Holy See, in alliance with Islamic delegates, at various United Nations conferences in the 1990s was informed by opposition, not to women's rights, but to certain attitudes towards sexuality, reproduction and the treatment of children which are irreconcilable with Catholic belief, chiefly abortion, described by the Second Vatican Council as an 'infamy' and an 'unspeakable crime' (*Caudium et spes*, nos. 27, 51).

It is not the case that the Catholic Church did not condemn slavery until the late nineteenth century. St Thomas Aquinas, the most authoritative official Catholic theologian until very recent times, characterised slavery in the thirteenth century as contrary to the right use of power (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, q. 2, a. 4). Pope Paul III condemned the enslavement of the native peoples of the Americas in 1537. Nor is it the case that there was no acknowledgement within the Church of freedom of religious belief and practice until the Second Vatican Council. Again, Aquinas taught that Jews and pagans were not to be compelled to accept the Christian faith, their children were not to be forcibly baptised and their rites were to be tolerated (*Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae, q. 10, aa. 8, 11, 12). This is not to deny that there have been ambiguities and deficiencies in the Church's

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This month, the writer of each letter we publish will receive a pack of postcards featuring cartoons and graphics, by *Eureka Street* regulars, Dean Moore, Siobhan Jackson and Tim Metherall.

Talking Points

SYDNEY DWELLERS may like to stroll down to Politics in the Pub at the Harold Park Hotel in Glebe, held every Friday night from 6.00 to 7.30pm. March discussions include: 'China Today' with Professor Daniel Kane and Associate Professor Hans Hendrichske (March 6) and 'A Night with Kim Beazley' (March 13). 115 Wigram Road, Glebe. Enquiries to Pat Toms (tel 02 9358 4834), Win Childs (tel 02 9552 3599) or Katherine Barton (tel 02 9810 9551).

attitude to such matters in the past but rather to point out that Professor Charlesworth's oversimplifications fail to take into account the historical complexity of lines of thought and practice within the Catholic tradition.

Christopher Dowd
Clayton, VIC

Cursory riposte

From Liz Curran, Executive Officer, Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace.

Mr Barich, in his response (*Eureka Street*, September 1997) to my article 'Wrong way on rights', notes that it is not right to say that Australia's report to the UN was 'cursory', as it was over an inch thick. For the record, in referring to the report as 'cursory' I was referring to the report's content and quality, not its size.

Liz Curran
East Melbourne, VIC

Magnum opus

From Geoff Hastings

Although much of Robert Crotty's article (*Eureka Street*, December 1997) is not unknown, he presented it with his usual ineluctable clarity, fortunately for us, in the face of such convincing scholarship. Although our faith is eponymously known by the Second Person, he is doctrinally part of the Holy Trinity, when geography and time have no meaning.

It is miraculous that Jesus has survived being the soft target for so many centuries, when the First Person has more to answer for, and for longer. Perhaps we get our sense of caution from our long persecuted Jewish friends who know experientially that it is

unwise to question our shared Lord about the stage management of His Grand Opera. Islam also shares our God, but no one wants to gain first-hand knowledge of a fatwa. Our Orthodox in-laws seem to have continuing support of the Third Person in spite of their obstinacy about *filioque*, but their calendar might be brought up to date.

Although it must be exhilarating for scholars to keep removing doubtful truths that prop up a shaky edifice, they might consider us unlettered folk who enjoy a cup of tea and bun in the warm parlour of Mr Chips; and don't really care about those beastly chaps outside that are saying unspeakable things about his mum. And who cares where he was born?

Geoff Hastings
Watsons Bay, NSW

Twigging to it

From John W. Doyle *sj*

Norman Davies last year brought out an immensely popular revised edition of his monumental *Europe: A History*. On page 496 he has one Íñigo López de Recalde claim: 'Give me a boy at the age of seven, and he will be mine for ever.'

Is this a misreading of the highly defamatory 'till he is seven' version that used to be popular with writers hostile to the Jesuits and their schools? Or is it an only slightly less unbelievable rendering for today's public?

John W. Doyle
Kew, VIC

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★
FOR THOSE IN MELBOURNE—on the last Friday of each month of 1998, a musical celebration featuring the music and writings of **Hildegard of Bingen** (b.1198) will be held in St Ignatius Church, Richmond. The presenters will be singers Juliette and Geraldine Hughes, and supporting instruments, with a narrator or prayer leader. Fridays 7.30-9.00pm: March 27, April 24, May 29, June 26, July 31, August 28, October 30, November 27, December 18. 326 Church Street, Richmond, Victoria, tel 03 9428 1212. Suggested donation \$5.

★
IN MAY, the Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace will launch a new Australian Human Rights Register. Maintained by the Commission, the register will record Australia's fulfilment or neglect of domestic and international human rights obligations. Information will be sought from over 120 non-government organisations, including churches, disability advocates, ethnic communities, law societies and community legal centres.

The Commission is relying on non-government organisations (NGOs) to supply the information that will make the Register a useful tool and would appreciate hearing from you if you are in a position to supply details.

The CCJDP is located in new offices at 383 Albert Street, East Melbourne, VIC 3002. Postal Address: PO Box 146, East Melbourne, VIC 3002.

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THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC



Court codes

ON FEBRUARY 5 the Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal people went to the High Court in Canberra. They had challenged the constitutional validity of a federal law that allows a bridge to be built between Hindmarsh Island and the South Australian mainland. Aboriginal women say that it would violate their spiritual beliefs associated with the island, the subject of a confidential report that was leaked to the media by then Opposition member, now defence minister, Ian McLachlan in 1995.

The case is significant. The Court will be asked to find that the Commonwealth's constitutional power to make laws for Aboriginal people can be used only to benefit them, not to impair or diminish their rights. If so, it would be argued that the Wik bill, rejected by the Senate and likely to trigger a double dissolution, would have a detrimental effect on Aboriginal entitlements to make Mabo-style land rights claims under the Commonwealth's *Native Title Act*.

Battle lines have been drawn—the NSW government and the Commonwealth's Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission arguing that the Hindmarsh Bridge Act violates Australia's international human rights obligations, the South Australian, WA and the Northern Territory governments supporting the Commonwealth.

The case did not proceed on that day. The preliminary argument was about an even more serious justice issue: the perceived integrity and impartiality of the High Court itself.

Lawyers for the Aboriginal plaintiffs moved, with the cautious respect of which only lawyers are capable, to ask one of the justices, recently-appointed Queensland QC Ian Callinan, to disqualify himself. A reasonable person, they argued, might in the circumstances reasonably apprehend that his consideration of the case might be affected by bias.

Usually, judges who have professionally advised those involved, directly or indirectly before they joined the bench in cases before them, announce the fact and disqualify

themselves from those cases. Former Victorian QC and recent High Court appointee Justice Harness did, in a case involving the Western Mining Corporation last year. But Justice Callinan considered the arguments overnight, then decided he should sit. He had previously expressed strong views on the scope of the Commonwealth's power to make laws under the 'race' provisions in the Constitution, had advised the Commonwealth government on Hindmarsh Bridge issues, and had also advised his personal friend and strong advocate of the Hindmarsh Act, Mr McLachlan, who was the perceived de facto, if not de jure, proponent of that legislation. His decision was a surprise, even to the Commonwealth, which had expected Callinan to disqualify himself.

Ngarrindjeri lawyers were then left to consider a further, unprecedented, challenge to his decision, to the Full Bench of the High Court. There are no formal procedures for such an appeal: typically, the decision is left to the individual judge. They are unlikely to invite further delay by doing so.

Judges of the High Court—in fact all judicial officers—are expected to act in what some would say is an unrealistically 'impartial' way. Of course, since judges are human beings and social animals, they do have views. The discipline of the law is designed to structure hearing, argument and decision-making processes to minimise the risk that those views might disadvantage or privilege one party over another.

During the 1960s and 1970s the 'conservative' opinions of the majority of the High Court and its decisions, particularly on issues of taxation, trade and commerce, the relative balance of State and Commonwealth powers and individual rights and freedoms, were a source of some anguish to 'progressive' lawyers. They did not accept then, as 'conservative' lawyers do not now, that the High Court merely discovers and pronounces upon existing law. The function of the Common Law doctrine of precedent (following the reasoning in earlier, similar cases by superior courts in a hierarchy), and the development of the law through the application of rules to new factual, political and social circumstances, is to promote the law's orderly development. If the 'new' legal

outcome is unacceptable then the people, through their Parliamentary representatives, can change it for the future. That, after all, was the reason for the Commonwealth's enacting the *Native Title Act*: to manage the social and economic effects of the High Court's decision in *Mabo*, in 1992.

During the 1990s the High Court made a series of constitutional interpretations that 'found' unwritten Common Law and democratic rights implicit in the prosaic words of our States'-rights-focused, 98-year-old Constitution. The Common Law and democratic rights 'found' related to legal representation in serious criminal cases, access to the courts, freedom of political speech, procedural fairness based on Australia's international human rights treaties.

'Progressives' welcomed them, but conservative political leaders and some lawyers mounted an increasingly bitter attack upon the institution and its incumbents, accusing them of 'judicial activism'. Indeed, Callinan's appointment was controversial, assumed by some to be meant to put a capital 'C' conservative on the bench and stop the rot.

The argument that judges' views do, but should not, play a part in the law's development was being run, simultaneously, a few hundred metres away in the old Commonwealth House of Representative, where the Constitutional Convention was in full roar. The Convention was debating a new constitutional preamble, as it decided on what form of a republican government should be put to a referendum for the people to adopt or reject.

The words of the proposed Preamble were not what inflamed the debate—and it was fiery—but the very notion that the Australian people should, by expressing their values, democratic aspirations and most precious lights, enable the High Court to take them into account in interpreting the Constitution and statutes. A vigorous critic of the High Court's recent direction, government-appointed delegate Professor Greg Craven, told the Convention that such a preamble would not only give the High Court greater opportunities to 'find' rights not expressed in the Constitution and 'make' law, but since the Preamble was the 'lymph gland' of the Constitution—would create a kind of bill of rights, by stealth. Surprised members of a working group

reported that Professor Craven had launched a personal diatribe at an eminent constitutional lawyer, formerly one of the advocates in the Mabo case, Ron Castan QC, accusing Castan of improperly influencing the group's recommendations to achieve such an end.

Australian law has never been completely codified. One can never anticipate all future circumstances in which a law has to be applied or interpreted. Even 'codes', as many European justice systems prefer, leave interpretative authority to courts.

Our Australian Constitution is partly unwritten, too. It provides, for instance, that all executive power lies in the Governor-General. This is subject to an unwritten convention that it will be exercised only on the advice of his ministers, who are accountable to the people through Parliament, as the Governor-General is not. Even that convention turned out to be ambiguous: its most contentious exercise was in the use of the unwritten 'reserve powers' by Governor-General Sir John Kerr, in 1975, to dismiss the elected Whitlam government when the Senate blocked Supply.

The thrust of the republican cause had its origins in the damage then done to the perceived impartiality, and lack of accountability, of the Governor-General. The present incumbent, Sir William Deane, has in his turn been accused of political partiality in speaking publicly of the need for Aboriginal reconciliation.

In principle, courts are impartial arbiters of fact and deciders and interpreters of the law. In practice, the law recognises the humanity and fallibility of judges, and that they do 'make' law. If the latter is to be limited, then this end should not be sought through the appointment of judges holding perceived views (in any case, judges tend to change their attitudes considerably once they shift to the other side of the Bar table.) Judges themselves could express their conventions formally, and perhaps they should.

It is unfortunate that the latest High Court appointee did not follow the unwritten judicial convention that where there is even a scintilla of the possibility of an apprehension of bias—not actual prejudice or prejudgment, which was never alleged—then in the interests of trust in the justice system, he should stand aside, voluntarily, honourably, and blamelessly.

His decision may have done more harm to respect for the High Court than the last 30 years of both conservative and progressive 'activism'. It may, in fact, have achieved more for the cause of codification of official powers and discretions, and the constitutional protection of citizens' rights in relation to the institutions of their government, than all the political grandstanding on the floor of the old House of Representatives.

—Maira Rayner

Asia: Present tense

THESE IS A DEGREE OF SELF-DECEPTION in Asia at the moment in the way those who have benefited from a decade of staggering growth are handling the currency crash. Bangkok's streets are still covered in locust-like swarms of 500-series Mercedes-Benz, even though payments on 90 per cent of them have not been received in the last two months. Malaysia's newspapers are still advertising home loans despite the credit-squeeze that has led the Government, very quietly, to impose an unofficial ban. Wives of the wealthy across Asia are being applauded in front-page photos for handing over their jewellery and gold to the nation.

Folksy remedies such as this and donating US dollars to special accounts have only feel-good value of course. Some of the figures that detail the extent of the damage in the private and public sectors are breathtaking. Indonesia's foreign debt is double current estimates of its GDP. Siam Cement, a former state monopoly that made big money from the construction boom in Thailand, now has debts equal to its total profit for the last seven years. With such fundamental problems, even the healthier-looking economies have a long way before recovery. And the worst may be yet to come.

The two darkest clouds on the horizon are social unrest and the devaluation of the Chinese currency. These two events seem

inevitable—it is just a matter of when and, most importantly, by how much.

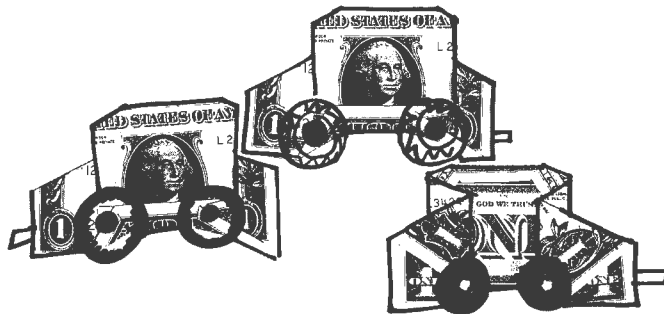
Civil unrest has already come to Indonesia, with riots across Java and other islands in response to price-hikes in essential items. (Commentators have suggested this could raise ethnic tensions. So far, however, in most instances, only particular shops have been targeted, not all Chinese businesses in the towns concerned).

The Government is preparing for the predicted unrest. Three extra battalions of troops were stationed in Jakarta at the end of January and cheap train tickets, which had been extensively advertised, were intended to return the unemployed to the provinces for the holiday after Ramadan. Many took the opportunity to go back to their home villages. As far as the Government was concerned that meant fewer people to cause trouble in the capital city.

If it is to be among the unemployed that discontent will ferment, they certainly are an expanding group. Some 800,000 Indonesians have lost their jobs since Suharto's January budget signalled what was to come, and that number is likely to rise to well over the one million mark by the end of February. At the World Economic Forum in Switzerland, held in the first week of February, concerns were expressed at the prospect of unemployment rising in other countries as well, particularly Thailand, where one and a half million are expected to be put out of work in the near future. Some local estimates put it at 2 million by the end of 1998.

In Bangkok, a demonstration by workers from an auto-part manufacturer, angry with their bosses for withholding the traditional end-of-year bonus, turned into a small-scale riot. The event in itself was not as interesting as the public reaction, with many newspaper editorials suggesting that 'professional agitators' were involved, and speculating about whether this was the shape of things to come. This is a place—one cable news service chose to describe it as a 'peaceful Buddhist country'—that last saw street violence six years ago, during the military crackdown of 1992. But if there is to be an explosion of violence in the region, Indonesia, with its massively devalued rupiah, escalating inflation and succession difficulties is the more likely site for it. [See Dewi Anggraeni's analysis, p16.]

From the current crisis a few heroes have emerged. One of them is Tarrin Nimmanhaeminda, Thailand's finance minister. Four months ago, when the Democrats came to power, he was forced to



pick up the pieces of an economy that had been allowed, by a capricious and blatantly corrupt administration, to disintegrate. He has gone about his work steadily and with a quiet assurance. His Stanford-educated smoothness and market-fearing ways have endeared him to those who cry out for restructuring. He utters the magic incantation 'investor confidence' at the announcement of every reform, as if simply invoking its name will make it return. Perhaps that is the only way it will.

As Tarrin sees it, nothing would deter that confidence more than a drop in the value of the Chinese renminbi. At a press gathering for foreign journalists, he announced he'd received assurances from the Chinese leadership late last year that it wouldn't happen—at least for a few months.

China has been affected by last year's currency disturbances, but compared with South East Asia it is relatively unscathed. Its growth is down from the 13.5 per cent of four years ago to a less leviathan-like 8.5 per cent. This might seem 'a beautiful set of numbers', but China is developing from a low base and its economy is in transition. As more of its people switch from rural to urban work, the economy must churn along to provide them with jobs. The concern is that growth at around 8 per cent will not be enough.

One option for the economic mandarins would be to devalue so as to avoid losing competitiveness against Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines—countries that export cheap radios and, like China, even cheaper shirts. This would not be to gain new markets (China's foothold in the West is substantial) but to prevent their loss. Analysts fear that if the renminbi were to be pegged down by even a modest amount the region could see a whole new round of currency spirals.

Quick action from a regional rather than a national basis would help to prevent this. Japan could open its markets more to South East Asia, whose exports inside Asia are substantial (half of Thailand's exports go to South Korea and Japan), thereby giving them the opportunity to increase trade and foreign cash reserves without scaring China. The difficulty is, as Tarrin himself notes, that regional cohesion is sorely lacking. Mahathir's proposal that ASEAN trade in their own currencies would help to insulate Asia from collective devaluation, jeopardising trade contracts between member countries. However, whichever currency is used as the base (currently the Singapore dollar is being put forward) it might develop a strength that

compromises the scheme. Nevertheless, it is a start that encourages internal trade in South East Asia. A similar consensus on tax, interest rates and structural reforms could be the next move.

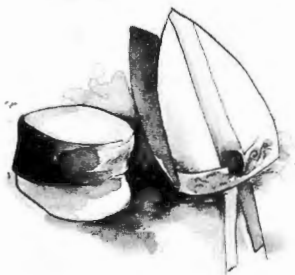
And there is that acronym, IMF. It has been derided from Melbourne to Manila. The IMF's strict regime is of course brutal—high interest rates and budget surpluses will hurt, and hurt those least able to take it. However the IMF is only acting on behalf of its master, international capital. The irony is that those who now lament the lack of control over foreign investment, such as Dr Mahathir, are the ones who were profiting from its imprudence just half a year ago when it funded shallow development projects for short-term gain.

The IMF is indeed enforcing flat-earth economics that will usher in a new form of colonialism, inasmuch as it will force amendments to foreign ownership laws and break up government cartels. But without international capital around you can kiss everything goodbye. This could be the most significant step the region takes to catch up with the developed world, which sold off the farm long ago.

—Jon Greenaway

No cigar

TOWARDS THE END OF JANUARY, after his visit to Cuba, Pope John Paul II told an audience in Rome that the trip had reminded him of his first visit to Poland in 1979 and he expressed the hope, 'to my brothers and sisters on that beautiful island, that the fruits of his pilgrimage will be similar to



the fruits of that [earlier] pilgrimage'. It was the first time the Pope himself had drawn a parallel between Cuba and Poland but not the first time that the connection had been made. Ahead of his visit to Cuba, many commentators were suggesting that John Paul II would sound the deathknell for Fidel Castro and his socialist revolution. Even Fidel himself addressed the issue in a broadcast to the nation ahead of the Pope's

arrival. Cuba was not Poland, Fidel said. And clearly he had a point.

The Poland John Paul II visited in 1979 was a country living under an externally imposed dictatorship. The unpopularity of this imposition had been demonstrated in the popular uprising of 1956 and again in the strikes that gripped the country in 1970 and 1976. These events—and the manner of their suppression—helped galvanise opposition to the regime. When the Pope arrived in June 1979 a nascent popular movement was already well developed and it centred on powerful social forces represented by unionists and intellectuals. Indeed, Poland's Premier Edward Giereck, who had reluctantly agreed to the Papal visit, was so frightened by the prospect of another uprising that he chose to follow the Pope's open-air Mass in Warsaw from the relative safety of a hotel overlooking Victory Square.

The Church's long identification with Polish nationalism obviously helped to undermine the credibility of the official ideology. And the Pope certainly gave Poles great heart and an all-important sense that they were not alone in standing up for their rights. But the Pope's moral entreaties in defence of human rights and national independence could not take the place of a well-constructed program of political action against the regime. Moreover, the Pope's visit didn't ignite that action. It was the price rises in July 1980 that spawned Solidarity, the lessons learnt from 1956 to 1976 that helped inform its strategy, and the decision of the Soviet leadership not to attempt to salvage a clearly crumbling empire that saw off communism in Poland.

Cuba could hardly be more different. Its revolution is home-grown. Those with the greatest stake in preserving the benefits of the revolution are working-class Cubans: most of the revolution's opponents—middle-class urban whites and seigniorial Cubans—are not captives in their own country but have long since fled to the US and elsewhere where even their hostility to contemporary Cuba is waning. The economy is not in free fall. Cuba has weathered the severe drop in living standards that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet bloc and has returned to growth. The Pope's visit was not an intrusion into some kind of comatose time warp of the Cold War. It was part of an opening to the outside world that has been going on for the last decade.

Similarly, the Church in Cuba could hardly present more of a contrast to the Polish Church. Historically Catholicism has had a weaker hold over Cuba than over



SUMMA theologiae

Flotsam and jetsam

any other country in Latin America. It was always a minority religion in practice (estimates are that only 15 per cent of Cubans were active Catholics before 1959) and it had a marginal impact both on the country's political and cultural life. The recent 'upsurge' in interest in the Church is exaggerated. For instance, the number of baptisms in Havana increased fivefold between 1979 and 1994. But in actual numbers that represents an increase from 7500 a year to 34,800—out of a total city population of nearly 2 million.

Anyone who followed John Paul II's visit with an open mind could see that these fundamentals have not altered in any significant way. The Pope's three Masses in provincial capitals—Santa Clara, Camaguey and Santiago de Cuba—were only moderately attended and fairly sedate affairs. Some observers suggested that this might have been due to the novelty of attending Mass or to a fear that attendance might incur the wrath of the regime. It probably had more to do with the fact that the Church in Cuba was weakest of all in the countryside.

The Pope's final Mass in the Plaza of the Revolution in Havana, by most accounts, attracted about 250,000 people. This would be on the low side of a major pro-Castro rally. And it passed without incident. There was none of the generalised euphoria that accompanied the Pope's 1979 visit to Poland. John Paul II was not a native son coming home to free his people but an outside celebrity breaking the monotony of daily routine.

'Every utterance, prepared or spontaneous,' editorialised London's *Tablet* after the Pope's first trip to Poland, 'was a challenge to a system that has nations enslaved.' In Cuba the Pope did at least as much to legitimise the revolution as to undermine it by acknowledging its achievements and criticising the US embargo.

The Pope's central message, that liberation could not be reduced to its social and political aspects but required the exercise of freedom of conscience, was significant and obviously well-received by many Cubans. But it was also measured compared to what he said in Poland in 1979 ('the future of Poland will depend on how many people are mature enough to be non-conformist') and is an oft-repeated one.

Fidel alluded again to the parallel between Cuba and Poland in his farewell address to the Pope. 'There were those who presaged apocalyptic events [as a result of this visit],' he said. 'Some even dreamed of that.' Those who refuse to see the Cuban

THEOLOGICALLY, THE SUMMER MONTHS IN AUSTRALIA ARE FALLOW. Because few of the major quarterly periodicals arrive from overseas, you have to do with the monthlies. These make better beach reading, anyway. They are also important because they show the sweat and breath of faith often sanitised in long articles that require long reflection in the writing.

If I were marooned on a desert island with one subscription form, I would send it unhesitatingly to the *Tablet*, unrivalled for its broad and unbiased coverage of Catholic life. If the occasional bottle washed up other periodicals, I would be delighted to find *The Christian Century*, *Commonweal* and *L'Actualité religieuse*. But if other regular reading like the *National Catholic Reporter*, *America*, the *Month*, *New Blackfriars* and the exemplary *Expository Times* turned up, I would not complain.

But recently one of the most stimulating monthlies has been the *Furrow*, a magazine that reflects the experience and conversations of a turbulent Irish church. The catalyst of debate has been a series of clerical scandals. But the deeper issue is the gulf now felt between modern Irish culture and the practices and words of the church. A recent Irish video shown on the ABC told the story: when traditional Catholic hymns can be preened in the concert hall for an ageing audience by beery baritones and cutesy kids, you know they no longer belong to any living culture.

Many contributions to the *Furrow* are concerned with diagnosis. The usual suspects are rounded up to help with the enquiry: religious teachers, the media, out-of-touch bishops and the materialism of the age. The better sleuths, however, like the frequent contributor Brendan Hoban, see the crisis as one of faith, hidden for many years by unreflective religious practice and by a religious formation that relied on socialisation, encouraged submission, and discouraged questioning.

Different remedies are offered. Some critics, like Breandán O'Madiagáin, a university teacher, argue for a more rigorously intellectual approach to the teaching of faith. Others, like Irene ní Mhaille in the November edition, significantly from a missionary background, argue for the importance of touching the heart.

Australian observers will find the scene familiar, and most will sympathise with the writers' wish list: an informed and critical faith, a deep and affective commitment and sensitive leadership in a participative church. Equally, they will nod knowingly at the occasional search for scapegoats—luckless religious teachers, the harried parish clergy, or the suddenly inquisitive and irreverent media.

They will also find familiar the perplexity and anxiety before an unravelling church and a changing culture, and the fear that, in Sean O'Connáill's phrase in the December issue, the Irish Catholic Church will form 'history's latest landfill'. The collapse of the nineteenth century Irish cultural settlement, however, will hardly surprise anyone who has followed the patient chronicling of its erosion by writers like John McGahern.

If their account is accurate, strong clerical leadership of a passive community, for which some critics argue, will not be an effective response, because it has been one of the most significant forces for secularism. At a time when young Irish want space, it will simply deprive the house of its verandah and garden, forcing them to stay inside or to find another home.

The alternative that the most persuasive commentators offer the Irish (and perhaps the Australian) church is not to look for one-stop solutions, but to get on with living in the world that is given and to explore the openings to faith within it. This was the path of Augustine and Origen in similar times of change.

The contributors to the *Furrow* do this with a life and a rhetorical verve that marks them out as distinctively Irish. They offer hope for the Irish church. They also make the *Furrow* great reading, even on the beach. ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ teaches in the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne.

revolution for what it is—an authentic, if imperfect, expression of Cuban nationalism—will go on dreaming. After all, they have done so now for 40 years.

—Chris McGillion

Up hill, downsize

THERE WILL BE A WAKE this Saturday in the Lithgow Working Men's Club. It isn't for a person. It is for a coal mine—the Clarence Coal Mine, our neighbour and the former employer of more than 300 local men. There is plenty of coal in the ground, apparently. The Clarence Coal Mine is one of the largest in the world, with tunnels that run under rivers and national parks. It could take the men forty minutes to get to work, driving in the dark, underground.

But a few weeks ago the Clarence Colliery closed, and the jobs disappeared. A skeleton staff will stay to pump water out of the mine just in case at some stage in the future, world coal prices justify re-opening. In the meantime Clarence is the latest casualty for the town of Lithgow, once called the industrial hearth of Australia, and now struggling to find new self-image and pride. In the last decade, more than 2500 jobs have disappeared out of a workforce of around 8000. In the last twelve months, ten percent of the remaining jobs have disappeared. One hundred and eighty workers, mostly women, were sacked when the Berlei Bra factory closed.

The work went offshore, to Indonesia. The announcement immediately preceded, and perhaps helped to prompt, Prime Minister John Howard's announcement of a pause in the elimination of clothing and footwear tariffs. But it was too little, too late for the Berlei women. Lithgow, more than any other Australian city (more even than Newcastle on a per head of population basis) has been a victim of the nineties. I asked the Mayor, Gerard Martin, whether he blames economic rationalism. 'Oh yes,' he said, 'Blessed Professor Hilmer. I saw he got a gong in the Australia Day Honours. It's about ten years too late and they should have hit him with it.'

Many jobs have been lost in the electricity industry. The NSW industry is still in government hands, although Premier Bob Carr wants to sell it, but in the last decade government has become such a lean and mean employer that it is hard to believe that any more rationalisation would be possible in private hands. Nevertheless, if the power industry is sold, Lithgow will

again bear the brunt of the changes.

Other jobs were lost when the Federal Government closed down the Australian Defence Industries small arms factory for lack of orders. Specialised machinery, now impossible to replace, was broken up and sold off. 'Will your husband be going to the wake?' I asked my cleaner. Her husband started work in the coal industry at the age of fourteen, and never had a day out of work until Clarence closed and suddenly his wife's cleaning, previously for pin money only, became their sole source of regular income. 'No,' she said. 'They all get very drunk and very silly down at the Workies, and he thinks they'll get drunker and sillier than ever.' 'Is he depressed?' I asked her.

She paused. 'More at a loose end. He needs to do things,' she said, and cleaned on.

When we moved here, many of the locals didn't regard what I do—writing—as real work. Now I feel almost ashamed that I am still earning when the work they used to do, literally at the coalface, has disappeared. We never really thought we were moving to this town. Lithgow, we had been told, was a hole. In winter the air smelt of sulphur and coal. In summer, the town was unexceptional—a moderately prosperous working-class country town, revolving around coal mining and electricity generation. Lithgow had few pretensions. When it was successful in the Tidy Towns competition a year ago, the local newspaper had a misprint in its banner headline: 'Lithgow a Tiny Town'. Lithgow had no decent deli, very few cappuccino machines, three Chinese restaurants. No, we weren't moving to Lithgow. Rather, we were moving to the mountains, and Lithgow just happened to be the nearest town.

We used the town, rather than sought to join it. I think it was when we first went to the dump that I realised how beautiful it was. The dump is nestled between hills and escarpments, with a view over the valley below. Anywhere else, it would be prime housing. But it is actually hard to find an ugly spot near Lithgow. It is blessed with unsung charms. And communities are irresistible, unavoidable, and now we belong to this one. I take my children to the local playgroup, and have seen the other mothers there cope with children's illnesses, with pregnancies wanted and unwanted, and lately, with redundancy.

It isn't surprising that an element of the cargo cult has emerged. The council is sponsoring a campaign to persuade the Federal Government to build Sydney's second airport on the Newnes Plateau to

the north of the town, instead of at the government-favoured but wildly unpopular Badgery's Creek on the edge of Sydney's western suburbs.

How would passengers get from Lithgow to Sydney? There is talk of Very Fast Trains, even monorails, and even tunnels under the Blue Mountains. A public meeting was held at the Workies to discuss the proposal and attracted hundreds of people who were only minimally discouraged by a Federal Government representative telling them that Lithgow was not, and would not be, seriously considered.

'Politicians Lack Imagination', said the headline on the local paper. Lithgow still dreams of the days of big government. The coal mining union has even suggested that the State Government should buy the Clarence Colliery and re-open it. But as the Mayor says: 'Clarence lost \$34 million last year. That's half a dozen schools. I can't see the taxpayers being very impressed.'

Lithgow is hostage to a changing world, but there are signs of hope. The Mayor refuses to be downhearted. Council is looking at giving rate holidays to attract new business, and is going into property development—developing industrial land in order to make it attractive to new industry. Tourism, making a museum out of the city's industrial past, is a real though sadly ironic option. A minerals processing plant is likely to open, processing silicon for computers, and some of the Berlei women have already been re-employed by a company that is making coats for sheep—part of a new technology for shearing that will doubtless mean that someone else's job is lost, somewhere else.

'Market forces will prevail,' the Mayor says, with more than a note of bitterness.

—Margaret Simons

Moonee by Moonlight

THE FIRST NIGHT RACE MEETING in Australia, held at Moonee Valley on Australia Day, was not really that. For decades greyhounds and trotters have run under lights. Thoroughbred racing was following an old trend, in the hope of capturing a new audience. Some of the 32,000-plus who came to the Valley had seen it all before, in Hong Kong at Happy Valley for instance, yet here was night racing not in exotic surroundings, but in Australia's suburban quintessence, Moonee Ponds.

Although the meeting was proclaimed as potentially the most important event in

Australian racing since the introduction of the TAB in 1961, the press build-up to it was anxious. Expectations of a sell-out crowd seemed to have been dashed when heavy rain fell during the weekend, and Monday was grey, chill, cloudy with scudding showers, a reminder that not every day in Melbourne in January is a summer's day. Concerns were expressed over the human toll. Moonee Valley staged an afternoon meeting as well (rather than losing this regular racing day to another club). After that eight-race card, jockeys, trainers and stablehands had to gear up for seven more races at night, before turning out of bed at four next morning for track work. Horses in Hong Kong don't travel far to the track, but at the Valley they had come from Camperdown and Cranbourne, Terang and Geelong, and had to get back there, long after midnight.

Veterans of Hong Kong racing were interviewed. When once top Australian jockeys sought fame in Europe, now they tend to work in Macau, Malaysia and especially in Hong Kong. Some are burned by the experience, such as Damien Oliver, who cut short his contract last year. It was in Hong Kong that Darren Beadman was rubbed out by stewards for almost a year, thereupon embracing religion. Darren Gauci fulfilled a three-year contract, but with no apparent intention of ever going back. Remarkably, David Hayes relinquished the reins of Lindsay Park to brother Peter in order to train in Hong Kong. Currently he heads the trainers' premiership there. Hayes told the press about horses who go better under lights than in daytime. Presumably the converse is also true, and another

hieroglyphic will need to be added to form guides, to tell us how horses go at night, as well as in the wet.

Night race fields are restricted to twelve runners. Each jockey wears a distinctively coloured cap, a move akin to putting numbers on cricketers' backs in one-day games. No simplifying, popularising move was overlooked. Course spruiker Garry Gray affected a casual look, going without a tie and in company with a woman called only Emma-Kate, to whom horses seemed a delightful mystery.

There was a Paul Kelly concert to bridge the gap between the day and night meetings (during which time track repairs were made and the rail was put back in its true position). Stilt-walkers tried to manoeuvre their way through the crowd. For the young, to whom the event, not the races, was the purpose of the evening, there was a night club, Cafe Cosmos. One consequence of the various entertainments was that the space and amenities available to members was yet more constricted. One's complaints, no doubt, would not be 'good for racing'.

It was to be a night to remember. Commentators reminded us that history would be made. Which horse would win Australia's first night race? In fact there was no simple answer. The very good Sydney colt, Vitrintite (named after a kind of black coal, hence supposedly a night omen tip), won the first from Mr Machiavelli, but in twilight. The programme was four races in before darkness was visible. Twilight meetings have long been held in Melbourne in summer. The true novelty—and test—of night racing will have to wait for the winter.

I turned up with some apprehension. In the day meeting I had backed six second-place-getters, although one became a winner after protest. I also had L'espion, which won the Hobart Cup, a race called for the fortieth time by the genial Milton Pettit. At the Valley there was no night form to go on. The race card was very patchy. There was a terrible sprint in which the top weight was Go Davo Go. Yet two races later, over the same 1200m distance, was the Australia Stakes at Group One with \$200,000 prize money. When known as the William Reid Stakes, this event was won in five successive years by the great galloper Manikato, who is buried in a garden near the main entrance to the track. No Manikato tonight, but the top sprinters Al Mansour and Spartacus lined up, together with the highly rated Special Dane.

My daughter celebrated when Jugah Bay won the second. She was among friends. Half of the 1997 Year Twelve class appeared to be in attendance, making the members' back bar resemble the Cactus Club. Indeed thousands of tyro racegoers took scant interest in the punt. Though there was nearly a Cox Plate crowd, it was easy to get a bet. Racing seemed incidental to the people whom the Valley was so keen to attract. Had they been watching, they'd have seen Go Davo Go surmount the handicaps of weight and his name to win easily. Then—in the Australia Stakes—I overlooked the obvious and missed the winner. Three-year-old fillies have excellent records in feature sprints at the Valley and so it ought not to have surprised when Stella Cadente, with the talkative Shane Dye up, won from Al Mansour.

The meeting was televised around the country. This dispersed and distant audience may be the best hope for night racing, once the youth who were briefly enticed return to more familiar diversions. Heading off for the tram, I was reassured by how typical a meeting this had been. Battlers and stars mixed on the track, hoons and toffs in the members. The time of day was immaterial, and the pleasures—for those used to savouring them—as seamy and exhilarating as ever.

—Peter Pierce

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The cost of freefall

INDONESIA WATCHERS HAVE BEEN WATCHING, theorising and speculating for years about the future of the Suharto Government, but never have they been more excited and alert than they are now. And curiously, never have they been so sure and unsure at the same time.

One thing they all definitely feel is alarm. Until mid-August last year, the national currency—the rupiah—was worth 2400 rupiah to one US dollar. Toward the end of January this year the rupiah plunged as low as 16,500 rupiah to one US dollar. The country's GDP is currently estimated at US\$33 billion after a free fall from US\$143 billion.

With the General Assembly of the People's Consultative Council imminent in March, where the Council will elect Indonesia's president and vice-president for the next five years, many events seem to point to the beginning of the end of the Suharto era.

The Javanese King, who is supposed to possess the power to maintain universal balance and bring goodness and prosperity to his people, is seen to have been gradually losing his grip on this power. He was not able to subdue the forest fires that went out of control for months; neither has he succeeded in containing the economic crisis that is pulling the country toward bankruptcy. Rumours about his failing health have also circulated across all sections of Indonesian society and across national borders. Worse still, he virtually confessed to this powerlessness by seeking the assistance of the International Monetary Fund. This, held against the context of his snubbing humanitarian aid from Holland three years ago because it was seen as having too many strings attached, is very significant.

In fact, everything Suharto does or does not do is watched vigilantly by political observers inside and outside the country. When transparency is lacking, every movement behind the opaque glass has to be interpreted and reinterpreted, and becomes a source of speculation.

No doubt the suspense is acutely felt, because all this is occurring just before the presidential election by the General Assembly of the People's Consultative Council.

Despite calls for Suharto to stand down, by various groups, each with its own tone, version and extent of sweetening, everyone knows that he alone makes the decision. The ruling

party, Golkar, has renominated him, the action duly followed by the other two parties, PDI (the Indonesian Democratic Party) and PPP (the United Development Party).

At first, the speculations were whether he would or would not step aside and let someone else take the helm. Now that he has come out in the open and declared that he is willing to be re-elected, the guessing game has moved its focus back to the identity of the vice-president, which, during the time of speculations about Suharto's health, had been temporarily pushed to the back burner.

The position of vice-president is important, because if Suharto's health fails him before the five-year presidential term is completed, the vice-president will become leader, at least until the next General Assembly of the People's Consultative Council. So theoretically, the vice-president will have to be someone who has the respect of the military and the civilian élite, who has sufficient political nous, and more than a passing knowledge of economic matters. In brief, someone competent but not controversial. And in this crucial time for the national economy, approval by international financial markets is an unwritten yet important criterion.

The issue of the vice-presidency assumed international importance mid-January when, in the tradition of opacity and cryptic language, Harmoko, the chairman of Golkar, detailed the preferred qualities and characteristics of the would-be vice-president. Among others, he said the person would have to be well-versed in science and technology. Heads promptly turned to the Minister for Research and Technology, Dr B.J. Habibie. Habibie is one of Suharto's most loyal and longest-serving ministers, so it was feasible that Suharto wanted to reward him with the vice-presidency, and possible succession. This hypothesis was reinforced by the fact that Helmut Kohl, the German Chancellor, had sent his economic envoy to Indonesia, to express Germany's preparedness to help Indonesia with its national debt of US\$140 billion, of which the private sector debt, according to David Edwards, the Indonesia specialist at the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, is estimated at US\$65 billion. Germany is the second biggest foreign investor in the country after Japan, and it is worth noting that Habibie is German-educated and known to have close associations with Germany's policy makers and German companies.

THE DOWNSIDE OF THE PUBLICITY of this issue was manifested in the plunge of the rupiah to exceed 11,000 rupiah to one US dollar, immediately after the news hit international media. Within three days it slid further to 16,500 rupiah to one US dollar. International market leaders blanched at the possibility of Habibie taking control of the country's economy. He was seen as a loose cannon when it came to spending—he is known to have extravagantly ambitious technological projects which might well propel Indonesia into the twenty-first century, but smash the economy to pieces on the way. Even Australia's Gareth Evans went public in voicing his concern at the possible dire consequences for the country if Habibie became vice-president, or president. In an economy so dependent on foreign investments, the loss of confidence on the part of foreign investors was detrimental.

Domestically, the news about Habibie as the possible candidate for vice-presidency did not meet such an emotional

reaction. Those who were less than happy consoled themselves with the knowledge that Suharto had never been known to delegate powers to his vice-president. Neither would the People's Consultative Council give a mandate to the vice-president.

DISSATISFACTION ABOUT SUHARTO has not only come from those whose homes and livelihood have been destroyed by the fires and the economic crisis; it has also come from those who have thus far benefited from government policy that brought about 7 per cent economic growth on a 'basket-case' condition of the 1960s. The source of the dissatisfaction is the increasingly blatant protections and monopolies given by Suharto to his family and close friends.

The country's technocrats are exasperated because this practice distorts the economy, and small businesses are angry because they feel powerless in the face of unfair competition. Even overseas car manufacturers and exporters were protesting when Tommy, Suharto's youngest son, was given tax breaks for his national car project, Timor, which was, by the way, manufactured in Korea by Kia Motors.

Banks owned by Suharto's family and friends flouted prudential regulations and loaned astronomical sums to themselves or people who obviously had no intention of paying their debts, leaving the banks insolvent, swelling the national debt.

With the plummeting value of the rupiah, companies find it impossible to service their debts, which are mostly calculated in the US dollar. They have had to lay off their workers, raising unemployment even higher. As the Idul Fitri—marking the end of Ramadan fasting month—approached, social problems were compounding. These workers, especially those who had been laid off without reasonable packages, were not able to fulfil the tradition of going home to their villages for the Idul Fitri celebration with their extended families. They were going to hang around the cities feeling cheated and very angry. Those who have retained their jobs are also resentful because their purchasing power has been slashed.

Responses to the IMF US\$42 billion rescue package have been varied. People are increasingly aware that the so-called rescue is of benefit to the rescuers. The loan carries a market operating interest rate; it is also designed to arrest the rapid slide of the market for the rescuers' products. Indonesia's downfall will affect the economy of Japan, the biggest foreign investor in the country and one of the major importers of Australia's and many developed countries' goods. The crisis will therefore flow on to Australia and other IMF participant countries' economies.

Technocrats and the educated middle class in Indonesia welcome the IMF's requirement to dismantle the monopolies and protections so far enjoyed by the chosen few. However, they are cynical about the withdrawal of subsidies on domestic fuels and electricity, for that may not only have far-reaching consequences in the general population's capacity to pay for their necessary commodities, but may also paralyse small businesses. In many cases, it is a difference between having something to eat and starvation. Nationalists are suspicious of the IMF's good faith and regard its taking over the economic reforms as a kind of imperialism, especially when it turned out

that the financial body had not in any case been able to arrest the free fall of the rupiah.

So, observers ask, why has all this crisis not driven the force for a change of government? The fact is, what we see in Indonesia is a stalemate.

The three institutions holding the most power in the country are still symbiotically intertwined. The first institution is Suharto himself. Despite the uncertainty about his health, he still has the mental capacity to keep the most important card close to his chest and keep everyone guessing. And when people are guessing they are not sure of their own positions, hence dare not take steps in case they are the steps to the slippery slide. The second institution is the military, known by its acronym ABRI. The top officers of ABRI are loyal to Suharto. According to Dr Arief Budiman, founding professor of Indonesian Studies at the University of Melbourne, these officers are fully dependent on Suharto. They no longer have strong roots in the body of ABRI, but they command respect because of their closeness to Suharto.

The younger officers—according to Budiman—are inherently more independent of Suharto, and still have genuine roots in ABRI. However, they are not independent enough to oppose Suharto, first, because they do not necessarily want to take power, and are not certain that the population will rally behind them if they do. Secondly, the current generation of ABRI officers have been educated and trained professionally, so turning against their superiors presents an enormous psychological barrier. Feeding on the above two institutions is the ruling party, Golkar. Its existence depends on Suharto's continuing patronage and the nodding approval of ABRI. While Suharto's power comes mostly from Golkar, without Suharto, Golkar will lose its *raison d'être*, and ABRI's protection.

IN THE MEANTIME, the middle class has been rendered impotent by its own heterogeneity. In a country where being communist is tantamount to being unpatriotic and subversive, the authorities can easily quash grassroots opposition and dissent by sticking a communist label on it. The only dissent and opposition tolerated comes from the Muslim groups. The other components of the middle class, the Chinese, the Christians, and the Chinese Christians, do not feel comfortable forming alliances with the Muslims. Being minority groups with no political power, the Chinese and the Christians feel that once the Muslims have the power they (the Chinese and the Christians) will be in the most vulnerable position. And history has shown that in economic crises the Muslims have always turned against them. So while the Chinese and the Christians are dissatisfied with the status quo, they are scared of the alternative. They still believe that at least with Suharto and ABRI in power, they have some protection.

Some of the younger officers in ABRI may be unhappy with Suharto, but at present they do not know anyone else who can maintain national cohesiveness.

The de facto opposition leader, Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of the first president, has very little chance of

contesting the presidency despite receiving visible support from the younger generation. Her faction of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) is not represented in the Legislative Council or the People's Consultative Council. In January there were some moves to bring together three very influential personalities in an endeavour to gather enough force to call for Suharto to stand down. They were Megawati, Amien Rais—leader of Muhammadiyah, a Muslim organisation consisting of scholars, teachers and business people—and Abdurrachman Wahid (Gus Dur)—leader of a grassroots Muslim organisation. All three had publicly expressed their desire to see Suharto retire from the presidency. However the moves failed to eventuate because Gus Dur refused to take part. In an interview with ABC

Radio National's Sandy McCutcheon, Gus Dur said that he did not want to see his followers used in a mass movement that might end up victimising some sectors of the community, thus threatening national unity.

Individually or together, neither Megawati nor Amien Rais has any realistic chance of contesting Suharto's position. Like Megawati, Amien Rais has no representation in either Council.

Those who genuinely want change are outside the system. In fact, that is part of the reason they can afford to express their demands—they are not benefiting from the Suharto government. Those who are in the system, but are concerned with the direction the government is taking, are nonetheless worried that if Suharto falls the country will plunge into chaos. In brief, there are no feasible successors on whom everybody can rely to handle unrest. Civilian oppositions are not sure enough of the ground swell in their favour, and the military are watching whether the civilians will take the first step.

With the worsening economic situation, a possible scenario is escalating street riots, especially against the Chinese shopkeepers. They are already in the most unenviable situation, where if they keep their shops closed, they are accused of hoarding, yet if they open their shops and sell their goods at prices higher than the community can afford, they face abuse. Either way, they suffer the double disadvantage of being Chinese and being middle-class.

If the riots escalate, they can expect protection only from the military. Unfortunately, in the long run this will only increase the community's resentment toward them.

So what is the difference between the Sukarno-style sixties and now? Why, in the sixties, was there sufficient ground swell showing public opposition to the government? The big difference is this: in the sixties the military were also opposed to the government; while now they are on the government's side. For unarmed protesters, the military are a formidable opposing force.

The factors that will force change in Indonesia are still unknown. ■

Dewi Anggraeni is a freelance writer.



1964: Megawati Sukarnoputri listens to a speech by her father, President Sukarno, in Jakarta.

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Labor in election gear

THERE ARE TIMES IN POLITICS when power can be measured in decibels—the explosions of war, the roar of a crowd or the thump of fist on table. At Labor Party conferences, the measure is exactly the opposite. Only the powerful can command silence.

Most matters of policy 'debated' in Hobart in January were rubber-stamped while delegates came and went for coffee and smokes and factional intrigue. The platform was fine-tuned to a constant background babble of conversation. The hubbub reached its crescendo as one poor Victorian delegate tried to link genetic engineering to falling sperm counts. But when Kim Beazley spoke on Wik, it was different.

The hall filled to silent, respectful capacity as the leader made his least contrived and most passionate pitch to party members and the country beyond. He spoke with quiet force for probably little more than ten minutes, and was rewarded with prolonged cheering and a standing ovation.

But what had he said? To answer that question is to explain how the Labor Party is positioning itself for what might yet prove to be the electoral comeback of the century.

Across the country, it is probably no exaggeration to say that millions are disturbed at John Howard's ten point plan, appalled at the fact that life expectancy is up to 20 years less for Aboriginal people than for the rest of the population, and that so many die in custody. Many Australians also feel an acute sense of shame that their government cannot bring itself to say sorry to the stolen generation.

But Beazley's passion was not focused on such matters. The main point of his speech—hammered again and again—was that the Liberals had refused an opportunity to settle the matter of native title. '[Howard] was presented from the Senate with a piece of legislation that gave him almost everything and he couldn't accept it. The big losers were the Australian people.

[The Liberals] had an opportunity to reaffirm yet again that we are a nation that can deal maturely with its history.'

By contrast, he argued: 'We in the Labor Party approached this legislation with principle and flexibility. The law must be workable.' Labor, he said, was happy to discuss further the detail of its amendments. It had 'tapped the mat' and admitted defeat in the Senate despite disagreeing with parts of the Bill. He appealed to the Liberals to show the same flexibility: '[Together] we could have validated invalid leases. We could have given certainty to pastoralists.'

It was as if Beazley were speaking in two languages at once. To party members he was saying: we're not like John Howard; we are a party committed to fairness and decency and



Daryl Melham and Peter Beattie after the seal went on the Wik debate.

Photo above—the balance of power: Gareth Evans and Kim Beazley.

anti-racism. To the business community he was saying: we can cut a deal; we can be trusted to put investment in its proper place above 'excessive' Aboriginal rights.

Both groups heard what they wanted to hear: the party members clapping and cheering, and the Queensland Mining Council greeting the possibility of further Labor concessions on mining leases as a 'positive step'.

So the resolution, passed with much emotion and applause, reflected both interpretations: 'Labor remains resolutely opposed to the Howard Bill in its unamended form, which is discriminatory, divisive' and on the other hand 'utterly incapable of providing the certainty wanted and needed by those with competing interests.' It insisted on indigenous people's continued right to negotiate over resource developments while assuring Labor's support for retrospective validation of leases affected by the Wik judgment—and there are thousands of them.

The conference motion on Wik will probably be of little lasting significance. It is likely to be subsumed in the serious politicking around the Coalition Bill when Parliament resumes. But it summarised the balancing act at the heart of Beazley's strategy. On the one hand, he has to convince that section of Labor's core, blue-collar (and white-collar) constituency lost in the 1996 election that the party has changed its economic rationalist spots. On the other, he has to reassure the media and business that there will be no wild lurch to dangerous (and expensive) populism.

Beazley wobbled along the tightrope at this conference. For two brief moments the crowd had its heart in its mouth as his foot slipped off the wire. Would the stoush over the party presidency or Cheryl Kernot's airport outburst bring him hurtling down? In the end his stability was assured by the way the party's Left and Right co-operated to ensure that the centre of gravity remained in the middle.

So what, after all this, might we expect from a Labor government? By the time the conference ended there was a tidy pile of pledges for branches and union leaders to popularise over the coming months. Some promises were politically cheap—they were identical with the party's position at the last election. Labor remains opposed to a GST, to further privatisation of Telstra and to upfront university fees for Australian students. In office, it will abolish fees, improve Abstudy, reduce the age at which students can claim mature-age Austudy, make HECS more 'equitable' and increase the proportion of public funding for the university sector. It will also abolish nursing home entry fees and use tax income to finance capital improvements.

ON THE INDUSTRIAL FRONT Labor promises a range of improvements, including getting rid of Australian Workplace Agreements (individual contracts) and the anti-union Employment Advocate, and removing the industrial relations clauses in the Trades Practices Act. While the lofty aim is to achieve full employment, the more modest immediate target of cutting the level of unemployment to 5 per cent would, if achieved, be welcome. Labor will reinstate training programs for the jobless and tweak government to a more interventionist stance.

Yet all along the line it was a case of giving with one hand and taking with another. So shadow Industrial Relations minister Bob McMullan lambasted the Workplace Relations Act for putting hospitality workers' penalty rates at risk, but refused point blank to say Labor would repeal the law. He attacked enterprise bargaining—but emphasised that Labor would give unions (and therefore employers) a choice between it and centralised wage bargaining. The platform promises training programs for the unemployed, but insists that the jobless also have 'reciprocal obligations'.

It is 44 years since Barry Jones observed his first ALP conference, by coincidence also in Hobart. As he mused to delegates at one point, times have changed. This year's conference had nearly two hundred delegates and one hundred or so proxies. A substantial minority were women. Proceedings were broadcast on the Internet.

In 1954 there were thirty-six delegates, all male, who met in secret. The ALP was about to split. Jones remembered how a number of delegates walked out in disgust and, in the spirit of the French Revolution, took an oath in a nearby tennis court.

It appears the term 'cross-factional deal' had not yet been invented.



Even the promises on education were hedged around with qualifications. Mark Latham, Shadow Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, told delegates: 'Labor simply can't afford to advocate more money for more programs of the old kind, especially in education. Learning has become far too important to fund failure, or support institutions that fall short of our expectations of success ... Each of us in the Labor Party who has benefited from good government schooling and higher education knows that—even for the most disadvantaged of people—hard work costs nothing.'

If there were cracks in the political facade, they were grouted with generous dollops of 'community'. Beazley used his conference time sparingly, so when he spoke for a resolution praising firefighters and lifesavers, it was a signal. To ram the point home he spoke on the final day, contrasting Labor's values to the Liberals', in particular their Thatcherite belief that 'there is no such thing as society'. Whereas in the past a Labor leader might have emphasised his social democratic commitment to the welfare state, to taxing the wealthy (however mildly) to fund public hospitals and schools, and to other progressive measures, Beazley took a quite different tack. He praised Australia's 2.6 million community volunteers effusively.

'Volunteers form what has been called the third sector of our economy, alongside private enterprise and the public sector. Often voluntary organisations are able to do their work more cheaply than either the public or private sectors—they use volunteers, and often have the expertise the other sectors don't have. In addition, they can often be more effective—being closer to the ground, they understand community needs better.'

The media concentrated on the closing moments of the speech, in which Beazley anointed Kernot quasi-shadow minister for the over-45s. But it is the Labor leader's emphasis on 'the third sector'—politically cuddly and so very, very cheap—that may well turn out to be of more long-term significance.

If this was a crucial philosophical retreat, it clearly passed the Left by. On the surface, factional differences had simply ceased

to exist. Substantial numbers of motions and amendments were ostentatiously moved by key figures of the two main factions. Frans Timmerman, convener of the Victorian Labor Left (Pledge) sub-faction and fringe number-cruncher, confided that five delegates had walked out of the Left caucus in disgust.

'There's no attempt to establish a principled Left position. They only put up with what the Right allows them.'

Others shared his concerns. Veteran left-wing Victorian state MP Jean McLean—the only delegate to speak against Labor abandoning its three-mines uranium policy and replacing it with a willingness to tolerate any mines opened by the Liberals—said despairingly: 'The platform's all things to all people.' Meredith Burgmann, a left-wing NSW state MP, said: 'The real problem is that we're doing so well in the polls that this lot think we can win—so we're doing nothing except lowest common denominator stuff.'

One indication of the Left's low expectations was the way key union leaders accepted that the Workplace Relations Act—even if heavily amended—is here to stay. Both John Maitland, from the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, and John Coombs, national secretary of the Maritime Union, said that they could happily live with the cross-factional deal.

The lack of real debate deprived any bright newcomers from the chance to carve themselves an unexpected starring role. But the leadership ensured that a number of younger members of their team were given set-piece opportunities to establish their profiles.

The last time Labor met, in 1994, Lindsay Tanner was the nearest thing available to an angry, left-wing young man, chafing at the boundaries of policy on East Timor. This time round he was a restrained statesman, a shadow minister and mover of sound and uncontroversial motions on public transport and road safety. He did, however, take the opportunity to circulate a policy document on his portfolio, transport, as a quiet reminder that he should be taken seriously as a thinker.

Mark Latham is often touted as the other challenging intellectual of the new generation in shadow cabinet, but he stuck to a safe script on education policy, one area in which Labor wants most to reassure. Stephen Smith, clearly up and coming on the Right, pushed through the change to uranium policy without a hiccup.

Pending Kernot's elevation to the House of Representatives, Jenny Macklin was the female shadow minister given the chance to shine. With the chance to lambast the Liberals over child-care cuts and nursing home fees, she gave the delegates what they wanted to hear. But her most thoughtful contribution was not made to the conference but to the fee-paying business observers. Calling on the latest World Bank Development Report for support, she made a pitch for the concept of social fundamentals—the idea that government intervention is a necessary component of stabilising nations integrating with the world economy, rather than an expensive irritation. It's not known how the business people reacted, but we are likely to hear more of Macklin's defence of the social market.

THE LONE PUBLIC VOICE of left-wing dissent was WA state MP Alannah MacTiernan, a member of the minor Centre Left faction, who argued in vain for taxing wealth. She left Hobart with the distinction of being the only delegate to move a platform amendment and lose. No one came to her aid as Gareth Evans, leading the agenda section on economic policy, slapped her down for apparently opening even the tiniest of doors to allegations that the family home might be at risk under Labor.

Her aim, of course, was never anything of the sort, as she made clear later. 'The group we've got to be targeting is the 10 per cent of the country that owns 57 per cent of the private wealth. I'm not a Marxist but when I read these figures I'm sickened by them. It has consequences for democracy. Money talks. Some of our [ALP] people are concerned that we will frighten people if we talk about this. My view is that low and middle income Australians are increasingly angry about the very wealthy and the super-wealthy not paying their fair share.'

MacTiernan might have been a lone voice, but the chances are that in the shopping centres or in the workplaces her views



Compliant, if not quite at ease: the CFMEU's John Maitland and John Sutton.



Daryl Melham and Jenny Macklin in rest position—for the moment.

would go down well. Many workers, fed up with economic rationalism and constant worries about job security, would love Labor to tax the really rich.

The ALP leadership knows this. It understands that Australian political life this side of World War II has been grounded on social democratic bedrock. In an astute and unreported passage in his opening speech, Beazley noted that:

The intellectual glue holding Labor's latest platform together was provided by Gareth Evans. He buzzed and weaved around the conference floor full of smiles after steering two key planks—Labor's values and its economic policy—safely through on day one. His sharp mind might make him invaluable, but he's no man of the people. There were sniggers from the public gallery as he attacked enemies of Wik as 'troglodyte acolytes'.

What some delegates called his arrogance nearly brought about one of Labor's rare own goals, in the discussion on foreign policy. Many had hoped that Labor would at least shift to the left on the question of East Timor. Shadow Foreign Affairs minister Laurie Brereton spoke twice to emphasise the ALP's commitment to self-determination. But any impact was cancelled out by Evans, Foreign Minister until 1996, who insisted in a speech from the floor that the policy was identical to that when he was chatting with the Indonesian dictatorship. Luckily for Labor, the media contingent had collectively turned its back on the foreign policy session.

Evans stuck to his guns when speaking later to *Eureka Street*. There was no reason for Labor to be more upfront in voicing concerns over East Timor. 'I'm quite unmoved [by such demands] in opposition as in government. What matters is getting a result.' He was piqued at any suggestion that he had done less than his best for the East Timorese. 'I worked my guts out. I put at risk my relationship with Alatas. [But] if you're going to solve the East Timor problem it's going to be in a way that persuades Suharto to act. This is the calculation which lies behind the kind of behaviour in which I engaged.'

Embarrassing Suharto would tend to push the situation backwards, he said, citing the way that Bill Clinton had publicly called for East Timorese autonomy in Bogor in 1994. 'The next day Suharto came out through his spokesman and said that political autonomy was off the agenda.'

The same pragmatism was reflected on other topics, too. Labor's platform, he happily admitted, 'walked both sides of the street' in balancing off the interests of voters and business. 'It isn't a wimping out. It's a reasonable, sophisticated response.' He was unrepentant over smothering even the tiniest hint of a wealth tax. 'One of the most significant forms of wealth accumulation is inheritance' and Labor had no intention of going down the path of death duties.

There was never any question of repealing the Workplace Relations Act. Labor's policy was always going to be a question of balance between flexibility and the role of the Industrial Relations Commission. It was a policy tempered by realism and sophistication. 'This is the sea change in Australian politics—Labor is becoming more and more the natural party of government.' Within the year we shall know if the voters agree.



'Government lost integrity when Labor ideas which the people who elected John Howard had a right to believe would remain part of the furniture of Australian politics—because he said they would—were then dispensed with. Ideas like affordable child care, health care, educational opportunity and secure pay and working conditions.'

The problem for Labor is that many of those same ideas came under attack during its thirteen years in office. It was Labor that ended free tertiary education, introduced enterprise bargaining, embraced privatisation and cut the top rates of both corporation and income tax. And lost in 1996.

Barry Jones, reflecting on the last Labor government in his presidential address, said: 'I'm not suggesting that we should have changed our policies ... We failed to provide 'after sales service' to reassure voters who felt threatened by the speed of social and economic change.'

Gareth Evans was even blunter. 'Under the Hawke and Keating Governments, the Australian economy, and Australian society, was fundamentally transformed and became equipped as it had never been before to meet the challenges of a globalising economy ... Rather than resisting forces of change as so many earlier conservative governments had done ... the Hawke and Keating governments were, if anything, constantly ahead of the cutting edge.'

No wonder then that the conference was bland. It was not stage-management that killed any fervour, but the Labor leadership's continuing commitment to revolutionising

Australian society in the spirit of 'world's best practice'.

While the Left might squirm at some of the policy prescriptions that follow, it no longer has an alternative vision. It shares with the Right ever more common ground. But how can you convincingly attack a government for failing to live up to its 'comfortable and relaxed' slogan when your policies have been and are likely to continue to be equally stressful?

The answer from Labor throughout the conference is that while there would be losers in this brave new globalised economy, Labor would not let them through the safety net. But it's a pale and vapid message to take on the stump.

There is in reality plenty of room to implement a MacTiernan-esque agenda of higher taxes to fund greater public services. Evans, in his speech on economic policy, boasted that Labor had cut the top marginal rate of income tax from the 60 cents in the dollar it had been under Treasurer Howard in 1983 to 47 cents today. Without those cuts, 'We would be collecting now around \$30 billion more revenue annually,' he said. For many Labor voters this kind of tax holiday for the wealthy is nothing of which to be proud. Just think what could be done for welfare, child care, education and health with \$30 billion a year.

Beazley's bid for respectability rules out that kind of policy. But if workers feel Labor offers no serious alternative, Howard must still fancy himself to win a second term. ■

David Glanz is a freelance journalist.
Photographs also by David Glanz.

The Kookynie Poems *for Joyce Heywood*

The Garden

For years after they'd left
turnips would appear—
each season the townsfolk
heading down for the woody
harvest. For a while
it was as if the town
had one up on the desert,
but the lineage weakened,
like the mines failing,
the hotels drying up,
the creek thinning,
the gardeners leaving town
and the desert
rescinding.

Geranium

You plant a cutting
and wait—investing
the dry red soil
with all the water
you can spare.
In the shade
it grows with the heat.
As if it's too good to be true,
you become anxious—
almost wanting
it to finish,
to have spent
its time—as it would
even in a perfect climate,
a variety of species
surrounding it.

Hanging Rocks

A picnic excursion
to a most incredible place—
and this way out, deep in the Goldfields—
but you have to watch out—
the wind'll rip through
and howl, like the dingoes
rubbing themselves
and singing the hessian walls
of the house,
painted three times over
to keep the weather out,
to keep the desert out,
to keep the stories out—
you have to tread carefully
as mineshafts might open up
and swallow you,
bottomless, silent,
suspended beneath
the rocks.

The Dam

To drown
in a dry place
doesn't bear
thinking about.
The long dam
they used for races,
the Salvation Army
picnicking with the children
nearby, singing
and clapping hands,
kicking up a din,
smothering the shrieks
of bewilderment
as Mr Cram dived
and jammed his head
between the rocks,
his blood spreading
out into the dead calm
of the dam, the heat.

Niagara

They named it in hope
that it would yield the greatest
of riches. The name was not
a metaphor for gold.
It signified the huge
shift of water
over the Falls.
But it wasn't to be,
and water remained brackish
and expensive—
the town's wealth siphoned off—
the mines crackling
underfoot like parched
circulatory systems.

*Kookynie, once a prominent mining town on the Western Australian Goldfields,
has long been deserted.*

Funeral Expenses

Though death had hacked
at her hands and feet
and Mother had spent
the family's savings
on bolts of black cloth,
the Infantile Paralysis
retreated from the eldest.
For years after only she
wore brightly-coloured clothes—
the rest of the family
dressed in funereal black.

Cradle Snatching

To fill their cribs,
cradles, nurseries,
bright halls and ball rooms,
boarding houses and missions,
conservatories and parlours,
small and large houses,
orphanages and prisons,
they came out of the desert
with children gathered,
not looking back over their shoulders,
always travelling to the city
by train. A few of the white
children cried—it could have been them,
almost, sometime, they imagined
in the confusion.

After work

TRADITION TELLS US that the sole cure for penury is work, the harder the better. Unlike victims of flood, drought or war, those without jobs are stereotyped as shiftless folk who cannot or will not work.

In many cases it's true, but in many more there simply are no jobs available. The obvious solution to the plight of those without money or property seemed to stare us in the face: find or create work for them.

Dig the fields, paint the barn, work the loom, run the messages, clean the chimneys—with your own body if need be. Get a job!

The age of downsizing and computers turned that sanctimonious diagnosis on its head. As long ago as the 1960s, an army of the technologically redundant started to gather. Many dismal tasks once so reliable in sustaining the under-educated poor were being done more cheaply and efficiently by machines.



*Poverty, it's supposed,
is a character defect.
If that claim were ever
true, in today's era of
structural unemployment
it is no better than
self-righteous cant.*

Within the last decade, medium-level jobs started vanishing as well, swallowed by flexible computers, or shared out to people who would rather not do them. Typing-pools were swapped for word processors on every desk, bank clerks replaced by automatic teller machines,

architectural draughtsmen and women traded in for computer-aided design (CAD) programs.

In the fifties, the glossy magazines preached a coming age of 'cybernation'. It didn't happen, not quite, not then. Cybernated industries, it was claimed, would create as many new jobs as they made obsolescent. Probably true, but the stark and worrying reality is that those new jobs—or not all of them—cannot be filled by the displaced workers.

Nor can they be taken up by quite a large proportion of the young out-of-work. This tragedy has never been simply a matter of insufficient 're-training programs'. Increasingly, the new jobs demand a level of education beyond the experience, and perhaps the competence, of many dispossessed industrial workers.

Meanwhile, near-slavery returns in backyard sweatshops where entire families, often immigrants lacking in language and bargaining skills, struggle to compete on deregulated markets with imported goods from newly industrialised nations without much in the way of labour protection codes. None of this is stable, and it cannot go on much longer.

Yet the jobs superseded by machines are often precisely those involving the greatest degree of tedium, exhaustion and lack of creativity. If people weren't losing their earning-power, there'd be great rejoicing in the land.

In the abstract, handing over to computers all those necessary tasks which are dirty, dangerous, tiring and uninteresting would promise the human species a new era of freedom and personal growth.

Instead, as matters stand now, the dispossessed can look forward to nothing but misery and anxiety, marginal lives of boring pointlessness.

One startling solution to these disasters is simple and feasible. It has been available for more than thirty years, but a moralising prejudice stops us looking at it in the eye. It demands no radical revolution, yet while it answers the extremes of poverty that still afflict large pockets of the industrialised world it also eases the way into the coming dispensation, a world almost entirely without jobs.

And that's its drawback. It stands in profound opposition—or so at first it seems—to the traditional work ethic.

This is the suggestion, bluntly put: *society will pay everyone, as an inalienable right, a basic minimum dividend—a so-called Guaranteed Income—drawn from the cybernated productivity and wealth of the nation.*

IN 1996, the prestigious Canadian Massey radio lectures were to be delivered by Robert Theobald, an early proponent of this Guaranteed Income solution. The Massey offer was abruptly withdrawn in September 1996. Theobald observed:

I was proposing that we required radically different goals for the 21st century: social cohesion, co-operative decision-making and ecological integrity. I argued that these goals had to progressively replace current commitments to maximum economic growth and international competitiveness. I naturally expected opposition to these views. But I expected it to follow the lectures, not to prevent their broadcast.

Recently, they have been broadcast here by the ABC, with immense success, and the book of the lectures has been a surprise best-seller.

Back in 1963, Theobald had published *Free Men and Free Markets*. 'What practical steps need to be taken,' he asked, 'in order to reap the benefits of the scientific and technological revolution rather than its destructive growths?' His answer was shockingly offensive to conservatives of

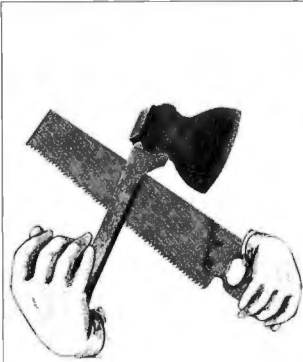
Conservatives tend to be horrified by this suggestion. Government is incompetent, they cry, meddling and corrupt. Handouts to the 'work-shy'—extorted from hard workers—is a travesty of the proper order of things. Worse, it's counter-productive because it eats away the inner worth of the recipient, and tainted anyway, being the fruit of a poisoned tree.

bureaucracy that stifled and humiliated the poor would lead to a revival of the 19th century's bustling free-enterprise drive.

The Guaranteed Income proposal, perhaps because of its politically protean character, remains provocative but untried. The core idea remains alive.

A simple version was devised by economists Cyert and Jacobs: a *negative* income tax, issued monthly. On all income from other sources, though, a family would be subject to high taxation, perhaps 50 per cent. You could have a free lunch, so to speak, but you'd pay double for dinner. Once the family's income reached twice the minimum rate, their guaranteed income would cut out, along with its confiscatory taxation level, and they would switch back to the ordinary graduated schedule of tax. The price of the program was estimated at about half the cost of a small war. In its absence, Americans are now paying in any case for a small war—against many of their own marginalised citizens.

AS AN INVIOABLE ENTITLEMENT, a guaranteed income would offer those who'd been made technologically redundant the chance to engage in dignified self-help. At present, it is difficult for jobless people to get a bank loan to start a small business, or buy and fix up their home, or pay for the protracted study and skill development that



Isn't this rampant socialism, the sort of error exploded in the fall of the Soviet empire? Curiously, the notion was being promoted in the 1960s not by leftist radicals but by such saint of the free-market as Milton Friedman, Nobel Economics laureate in 1976.

both left and right, and still is. He proposed 'the establishment of new principles specifically designed to *break the link between jobs and income*' (my emphasis). Increasingly, the interests of the individual citizen had been subordinated to those of the economy, filching freedom and dignity from a significant proportion of the population.

A third of a century later, the frightful woes of the black and other marginalised 'underclasses' in the USA, and the growing distress of those in a trap of welfare without the option of careers, prove how prescient he was.

Happily unrepentant, he says, 'One recent poll shows that people would give up income for leisure if they had the choice. Personally, I find this development wonderful. I have long been in favour of full *unemployment*, believing that job structures were not the best way to get the work of the culture done.' (My emphasis.)

The terms of Theobald's proposal were unequivocal:

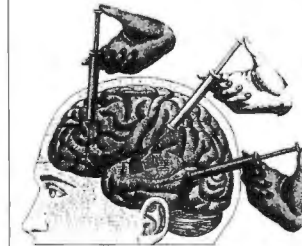
We need to adopt the concept of an absolute constitutional right to an income. This would guarantee to every citizen ... the right to an income from the Federal Government sufficient to enable him to live in dignity. No Government agency, judicial body, or other organisation whatsoever should have the power to suspend or limit any payments assured by these guarantees.

which neither parent held a job. Drawing on official estimates of a 'modest but adequate income' (since then wildly eroded by inflation), he suggested a basic income of \$1000 per adult and \$600 for each child. So the family would have earned, as a right, \$3200 annually with no strings attached. Today the equivalent might be, say, eight times that much: \$25,000 in all.

Enough to get by, in short, but hardly luxury. An important proviso to bear in mind is this: because basic income right has nothing to do with how you spend your time, you aren't *prohibited* from working for pay, or without it, if you can find a job. On the contrary.

Isn't this rampant socialism, the sort of error exploded in the fall of the Soviet empire? Curiously, the notion was being promoted in the 1960s not by leftist radicals but by such saints of the free-market as Milton Friedman, Nobel Economics laureate in 1976, who favoured direct payment to the poor as a way to slash the tangle of aid programs.

A *laissez-faire* conservative and monetarist, Friedman argued that a guaranteed income would return to all individuals the freedom to seek their own economic advantage. Once that process was rolling, the magic of the market would supervene. Scrapping the complicated



Force a generation of kids out of the loop, and expect them to trash your Porsche, murder each other, and burn out their furious grief with neurotoxins.

might lever them back into still-vital parts of the work force. 'Further, and of potentially great significance,' Cyert and Jacobs suggested, 'a guaranteed minimum income would make it more feasible for private industry to sponsor long training programs, for it would no longer be necessary to pay substantial wages through the period of training and low productivity.'

Theobald was more optimistic still. Productive groups, which he termed 'consentives', would come together on a voluntary basis, working *just because they wanted to*. Decades later, this is a pattern

we recognise from garage bands, high-tech garage start-ups, and Internet special interest groups. All those, of course, tend to be funded directly by doting, well-paid parents. Much of the arts in this nation is already produced under such a scheme, although Australia Council grants are uncertain and meagre, a year's grant usually budgeted frugally over four or five by dedicated artists who could get more on the dole.

Still, many will reject any redistribution of wealth, beyond a pittance paid for in humiliation. Poverty, it's supposed, is a character defect. If that claim were ever true, in today's era of structural unemployment it is no better than self-righteous cant.

The work ethic (better, the job ethic) cannot survive long while a culture of machine abundance disintegrates mores of austerity and fanatical toil—themselves only a few thousand years old. It's undeniable, though, that a guaranteed income would run straight into the hostile defensiveness of those committed to the work ethic. Societies remain stratified, after the fashion of a scarcity economy, according to the jobs its members hold. Since the policy of full employment is faltering and doomed, we must do an about-face and perceive the merits of unemployment.

Fear of being out of a job has two roots that need no longer be axiomatic. One is the loss of adequate income. The other is loss of meaningful activity. Without the framework of discipline and satisfaction that brains and hands obtain from meaningful work, people start running amok with boredom, diverting themselves with the ancient, arbitrary and zestful customs of tribal hierarchy and conflict. Force a generation of kids out of the loop, and expect them to trash your Porsche, murder each other, and burn out their furious grief with neurotoxins.

CONSERVATIVES MIGHT PRODUCE goods that embody, both in themselves and in the workers' sense of creative satisfaction, the virtues of hand-crafted design in a machine world. Brilliant computer 'shareware' does just that right now. Since wages and salaries would no longer be all-important, cost of purchasing such goods might be minimal, hardly greater than raw materials and transport—maybe comparable with computerised factory production.

The eventual rise of nanotechnology—building things cheaply, from the atom up—will make even these fond hopes passé. But that will not happen for at least another

decade, perhaps not until the 2030s. We need drastic cures for the social problems that exist now and will worsen in the decades before advanced technology makes them disappear for good.

National investment in a guaranteed income scheme might prove much more than a costly exercise in humane conscience-salving.

A corporation that downsizes its workforce in favour of robots is surviving as a parasite on the investment of the past. Its earnings, after all, are the product of every erg of human effort that went into creating the economy and the technological culture which made those robots possible.

So we can see a guaranteed income as an inheritance, something *owed* to all the children of a society whose ancestors for generations have together built, and purchased through their efforts, the resource base sustaining today's cornucopia. We are all stakeholders, in some minimal measure at least, in the common wealth. ■

Damien Broderick is a novelist and writer about science. This is an edited extract from his new book on the future of technology and work, *The Spike: Accelerating into the Unimaginable Future* (Reed Books).

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An article of faith for a sceptical democracy



Now is the time to design a constitution for the people of Australia. It is not a time to patch up the work of our grandfathers. The people must begin now to draft a constitution which will give every adult in our society an equal voice ... I believe the time has come to elect a convention to draft a constitution for the people of Australia ... the basis of all just power [and] the source of all wisdom.

—Manning Clark, Melbourne Town Hall, 10 November 1976

IN FEBRUARY 1990, MANNING CLARK wrote to NSW Labor MP Franca Arena, pledging his support for an Australian republic. When the Australian Republican Movement (ARM) was formally launched one year later, only two months after Clark's death, his name, together with those of over 100 prominent Australians, appeared on the back of the ARM's first flyer as one of the movement's founding supporters.

For Manning Clark, the journey from Australian Briton to Australian republican was not made easily. Like many Australians of his generation, he grew up knowing the 'temptation to become an Englishman'. A product of the Protestant establishment of Melbourne in the 1930s, he was an unlikely candidate for the office of Labor Party poet laureate in the 1980s. Throughout his life, he struggled to reconcile the overwhelming desire for the approval of his peers—some of whom would ultimately come to despise him as a traitor to his class, with his ever-increasing passion for Australian independence.

The figure of Clark, standing ghost-like in the Australian bush—wearing the signature 'hat with republican tilt', lies behind much of the Labor Party's mythology in the last two decades. His esteemed position is due in part to Labor's need for a sage who would lead them out of the wilderness of White Australia and invent a new tradition for the party. At Manning Clark's funeral, in March 1991, his eldest son Sebastian asked the following question: 'What should we ... try to do as a result of the spirit ... of my father? A truly independent republic by 2001, a treaty between the original inhabitants of Australia and their successors, and care for this great land of ours—the land, the air and the sea.' While Sebastian's words broadly reflect his father's beliefs, his statement has since been read by some on the Labor side as the words of Manning Clark himself. In life, as in death, it seemed Clark was often co-opted rather than self-appointed.

The media and Clark's publishers were keen to cash in on the image of the republican historian. The first illustrated edition of *A Short History of Australia* appeared in 1985 with the Eureka flag splashed on the front cover. Clark's republican status was also enhanced by Labor's opponents. For those on the

conservative side of politics, labelling Clark as a red republican served the convenient purpose of positioning him as an enemy, while also questioning his own, and by implication, the Labor Party's loyalty to Australia. Yet Manning Clark was not a 'life-long republican' nor was his republicanism as unequivocal as many in the labour movement might wish it to be.

Clark came to republicanism late in life, most probably in his sixty-first year, at the time of the dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975. It was not a distaste for monarchy, *à la* Thomas Paine, which was to drive his belief in Australian independence, but the destruction of a Labor government—a government which he saw as 'possibly ... the final chance for Australia to show the world it was capable of building a society free of the errors in both capitalist and communist societies'. Clark was more disturbed by the use which Sir John Kerr had made of the protective cloak of monarchy in dismissing an elected government than he was by the presence of the monarchy in Australia's Constitution. Writing in *The Age*, March 1977, and taking the republican side of the argument against the monarchist Sir Mark Oliphant, he clarified his position:

It was in Australia that men holding the office of Governor or Governor-General used their influence and their power to serve the interest of conservative forces. By comparison in the United Kingdom the reigning monarchy has behaved with a dignity and impartiality singularly lacking ... in the Antipodes.

Despite his appearance on many republican 'platforms' in the years following the dismissal, Manning Clark's particular brand of republicanism was idiosyncratic and elusive. As a public intellectual, he often spoke in the tongues of various historical actors. His prose was at once romantic, emotive and melancholy. It breathed both the fire and brimstone of a harsh God, and the Dostoyevsky-like compassion of the seer who took pity on the human condition. At times, it was difficult to discern who was speaking. In his public statements on the dismissal and his millenarian visions of Australian society—encouraged largely by the 'future industry' in the mass media, Clark did not frame his dreams of Australian independence under the banner of the republic. In fact, he rarely used the word, and on the few occasions when he did, he only nodded in the direction of the inevitability of the republic. To acknowledge his reticence to embrace the republican label is not to suggest that he was cold to the spirit of the term, but

it does raise interesting questions about his legacy and the true source of his inspiration for present-day republicans.

SURVEYING CLARK'S PUBLIC SPEECHES in the years following the dismissal, it is impossible to ignore their radical prescription for constitutional change. Manning Clark was not a minimalist. He spoke passionately about the need for a complete overhaul of the Constitution, and when detailing the precise form this constitutional change might take, his solutions were often drastic. In 1988, he called for the Senate to be deprived of all power, for an Australian President with purely ceremonial responsibilities, and a people's constitution which enshrined the principle of one man one vote. These sentiments were consistent with Clark's call in 1976 for a constitution to be drafted by the people. Until Clark's death in 1991, his perspective on constitutional change was fashioned largely as a response to the events of November 1975. His tendency to lean towards a uni-cameral system and the centralisation of federal power, places him at some distance from the more traditional notions of republican federalism which emphasise the dispersal of power. Yet in looking to Manning Clark for inspiration, we need not follow him blindfolded.

The power and relevance of Clark's voice to today's debate on the republic lies in its poetic sensibility—in the general direction which he pointed rather than the minutiae of his proposals for constitutional reform. Clark's political legacy is a reminder that there is more to an Australian republic than the postal address of the Head of State. It asks us to lift our minds above the level of insular pragmatism and shallow nationalist endeavour, and to imagine a republic founded on the principles of human equality, social justice, reconciliation and environmental protection. In this sense, a return to Clark's thoughts on the reform of Australia's Constitution might act as a healthy antidote to the conventional wisdom to be found at present in some sections of the labour movement, where there is an eagerness to proclaim the death of the big picture.

In the wake of the Senate's refusal to grant supply in 1975, Clark chastised the Labor Party for forgetting the vision which had brought Whitlam to power in 1972. He claimed that it was not sufficient for Labor merely to engage in an exchange of abuse with the conservative parties as to 'which party was the more competent in making capitalist society work'. Instead it ought rise above the armchair vision of comfortable consumers in blissful pursuit of personal wealth.

These aspirations are not simply feel-good statements; there are sections of the constitution which might be most effectively amended to ensure a truly inclusive Australian republic.



The model Republic:

For Australia to have a Governor-General is something like trying to sit down and eat a plum pudding on December 25 north of Cairns.

—Manning Clark, 1977

Since the modern debate on an Australian republic began in July 1991, we have heard much about the need for an Australian Head of State. The Australian Republican Movement and the Keating Government have made the case for an Australian President, stressing the anachronistic nature of the monarchy in Australia's Constitution and public culture. They have pointed to the undemocratic features of the British monarchy, such as male primogeniture, discrimination on the grounds of religion, and the nonsense of the hereditary principle—all of which are anathema to the Australian mythology of egalitarianism. The plum pudding of monarchy has always looked ridiculous on Australian soil. That much is common sense. Yet to reiterate the two-centuries-old arguments of Thomas Paine, and paste them together with a familiar brand of emotive nationalism, does not require a great deal of inventiveness.

THERE ARE TWO ARGUMENTS FOR AN AUSTRALIAN REPUBLIC—the nationalist and the democratic. To date, our republicans have discussed the nationalist argument with considerable force. They have also expressed the negative democratic arguments against monarchy. But in their official policy platform they have failed to explain the positive democratic arguments for an Australian republic. Rhetorically, the movement's vanguard pay lip service to the form of democratic community they hope the republic will usher in.

Robert Hughes offered an eloquent example in December 1996:

The republic wants the source of collective loyalty to be the Australian people as a whole, in all its variety of creed, race, origin and opinion. Republicans know that the old fantasy of the monoculture no longer works and cannot possibly be returned to.

These sentiments speak directly to the positive democratic arguments for a republic. They emphasise respect for cultural diversity, and allude to an inclusive model of a republic. But it would take a considerable leap of faith to believe that this model can be achieved simply by the appointment of an Australian Head of State. Having an Australian President is an important first step in the process of constitutional reform, but alone, that cannot hope to solve the dilemma that lies at the heart of the post-colonial polity in Australia. In an age of globalisation, the great challenge for an Australian republic is to reconcile the desire for national identity with the reality of cultural diversity. We need a new way of thinking about ourselves as a people. The old notions of national identity which emerged from the spread of nationalism in nineteenth century Europe can no longer sustain us. Australians, of course, are not homogeneous—ethnically, culturally or linguistically. When we go in search of a common identity we are left with the principle of the fair go, scepticism, and a laconic appreciation of the good life—qualities which are by no means unique to human beings who live in *Terra Australis*. Our identity is fluid, fickle and gloriously diffuse. *Vale* Norm, Les Patterson, and other blokey representations of Australia. The challenge for republican Australia is to turn away from the search for national identity—this will be handled willingly by advertising agencies and the entertainment industry—and look instead to a political definition of national community.

The question which Manning Clark asked repeatedly of Australians in the last years of his life—'What do we believe and what do we stand for?' was one which related directly to constitutional reform in a multicultural society. 'We inherit from our past no professions of faith,' said Clark. 'No-one has written an Australian Declaration of Independence. No-one has drawn up for us a list of self-evident truths—that among these are the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness ... If anyone asks us who we are and what we want to be we lapse into the great Australian silence.' (*The Bulletin*, January 26, 1988) The minimalist republic will not fill Clark's hall of silence. If a republic is to replace the powerful symbolism of monarchy in Australia's Constitution, it requires an equally powerful articulation of democratic sovereignty to fill the void. An Australian Head of State is not enough.

The Preamble to the Australian Constitution is one possible repository of shared democratic principles and values. Both the Keating Government's 1995 blueprint for the republic, and the formal ARM platform, at least until February '98, fail to make any case for the alteration of the Preamble. In one sense, this is contradictory. We need only read the first paragraph of the present Preamble to understand why.

Whereas the people of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, and Tasmania, humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God, have agreed to unite in one indissoluble Federal Commonwealth under the Crown of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and under the Constitution hereby established ...

The Preamble does not speak of the sovereignty of the people but the agreement of the people. As we now know, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples did not give their consent to Federation. Except for the colonies of South Australia and Western Australia, women were ineligible to vote in the Federation referendums. In addition, the Preamble fails to include reference to Western Australia. On any reasonable test, the Preamble does not reflect the status of Australia as an independent nation—nor does it reflect the shared democratic principles which might act as a binding force in a culturally diverse society.

The question which Manning Clark asked repeatedly of Australians in the last years of his life—'What do we believe and what do we stand for?' was one which related directly to constitutional reform in a multicultural society. 'We inherit from our past no professions of faith,' said Clark. 'No-one has written an Australian Declaration of Independence. No-one has drawn up for us a list of self-evident truths—that among these are the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness ... If anyone asks us who we are and what we want to be we lapse into the great Australian silence.'

This Preamble is an appropriate reflection of the values and priorities which prevailed at the time of Australian federation. It contains no inspirational flourishes or rhetorical appeals to individual liberty. In dry, measured, and calculated prose, it embodies the three unifying features of Federation Australia—loyalty to the Crown, belief in God, and the shared need to provide national unity for white Australians through the introduction of federal government. These principles are no longer the unifying force they were in 1901. Leaving aside the more obvious incongruity which would result if a republic were to retain a monarchic Preamble, the present Preamble is inappropriate for other reasons.

The function of the Preamble is to articulate the intentions of the constitution that it precedes. It is not formally part of the Constitution, although it can potentially be relied upon by the High Court as a source of the principles which guide the Constitution. The current preamble indicates the agreement of the people of Australia to federation. Yet for Australians in 1998, the concept of the people expressed in the Preamble is too narrow. The Preamble does not speak of the sovereignty of the people but the agreement of the people. As we now know, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples did not give their consent to Federation. Except for the colonies of South Australia and Western Australia, women were ineligible to vote in the Federation referendums. In addition, the Preamble fails to include reference to Western Australia. On any reasonable test, the Preamble does not reflect the status of Australia as an independent nation—nor does it reflect the shared democratic principles which might act as a binding force in a culturally diverse society. In the 1990s, a republic that is genuinely inclusive must first address the issue of the Preamble. Not to do so would be to miss the enormous potential the Preamble carries to heal the injustices of the past and unite Australians in cultural diversity. The Preamble to the new South

African Constitution, with its language of reconciliation, 'social justice' and 'fundamental human rights', is one model which might prove useful for Australia.

BASED ON A READING OF THE REPUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT, the report of the 1988 Constitutional Commission, and the extraordinary bipartisan declaration made in Federal Parliament in October 1996, which affirmed Australia's commitment to the 'equal rights' of citizens, regardless of 'race, colour, creed, or origin', I have attempted to write a Preamble which distils the essence of those principles that have been most frequently mentioned as the core values of Australian democracy. These fall into seven broad categories—the sovereignty of the people, the equality of all Australians under the law, tolerance of difference and cultural diversity, and equality of men and women, equality of opportunity, respect for the Constitution and the rule of law, and respect for the environment. Out of respect for the framers of the original Preamble, to emphasise the evolutionary nature of the Constitution, and to avoid an unnecessary debate as to whether God's blessing should be sought for the new constitution, it is probably prudent to make appropriate historic references to the old Preamble, while remembering to insert Western Australia. After the words '**under the constitution hereby established**' (see original Preamble above) a bridging line is required. Professor George Winterton has suggested the following: '**And Whereas that Federal Commonwealth of Australia, evolved into an independent nation under the Crown of Australia.**' It is at this point that the new Preamble would follow on.

We, the people of Australia, have decided to constitute the Federal Commonwealth of Australia as an independent democratic republic.

In a spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that the territory of Australia was previously occupied by Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, Australia's indigenous people, many of whom suffered dispossession of their traditional lands.

As a people of many cultures, customs, and beliefs, we hereby declare the principles which bind us as a sovereign and free people.

We will uphold the Constitution and the rule of law.

We will respect the dignity of the human person, the equality of men and women and the right of all persons to equality under the law, regardless of colour, race, gender or creed.

We will promote the liberty and welfare of all Australians, and we will respect the land and environment which we share.

To these principles, and to this constitution, we, the people of Australia, agree to be bound.

(This preamble has been through many drafts, and I am indebted to George Winterton and John Hirst for suggestions.)

In this Preamble, I have tried to include those principles which were excluded from the original Preamble—especially the sovereignty of people, the equality of men and women, and the acknowledgement of Australia's indigenous people. Naturally, there will be those who remain sceptical of any attempt to articulate the shared democratic principles of 18 million people from over 140 different cultures. But

there may be a higher price to be paid for remaining silent. We share the same continent, the same institutions, and the same citizenship. Perhaps it is in the area of citizenship that the Preamble can play a positive and educative role—not to mention the benefit of explaining the rationale behind the move to the republic.

The above Preamble shares the same concerns and preoccupations that characterised the last years of Manning Clark's public life. The first and most important of these was reconciliation between black and white Australians. Although Clark accepted his Order of Australia from Queen Elizabeth in 1977, he declined the invitation of the Hawke government to attend the bicentennial celebrations at Circular Quay in 1988. In one of his last public lectures, delivered in Perth in 1991, Clark insisted that 'Europeans in Australia must accept and allow Aborigines to decide what sort of lives they want to lead.' The thought of a republic without reconciliation would have seemed incongruous to Clark—another white man's party.

A new Preamble could provide a meeting place for black and white Australians, thereby laying down the first principles of liberty, social justice, land rights, and genuine self-determination for Aboriginal people. From this meeting place, it may be possible to advance the process of reconciliation, and reform other sections of the Constitution that bear particular relevance to Aboriginal Australians. In particular, section 51 [xxvi], the so-called 'race power', should be amended to ensure that it can only be employed for the benefit of Aboriginal people, as Father Frank Brennan has recently argued. If the 1967 referendum ended constitutional discrimination against Aboriginal people, then the declaration of a republic should leave no doubt.

Finally, the existence of a new Preamble may lead to public debate on the issue of a Bill of Rights. The two issues are clearly related. One of the few human freedoms guaranteed in the Australian Constitution—the free exercise of religion [Section 116]—owes its existence in part to the insertion of the phrase 'humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God' in the original Preamble. Both clauses were added at the Federation Convention in Melbourne in 1898—Section 116 largely at the behest of the Victorian delegate Henry Bourne Higgins, while the inclusion of God's blessing in the Preamble was due to the efforts of the South Australian Patrick Glynn. According to Glynn, Higgins wished to ensure that the insertion of the phrase could not be read as a de facto authorisation of Christianity as 'the law of the land'.

Because the Preamble expresses the values and beliefs of the people, it can also set out the broad philosophical principles that will serve as a guide to the formulation of human rights and freedoms. For example, if a new Preamble speaks of the sovereignty, equality, and freedom of the people, then the principles of freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom from racial, cultural or religious discrimination are natural bedfellows. Whether these human rights and freedoms are enshrined in the Constitution or merely statutory, Australia has the advantage of being able to draw on the experience of several comparable nations which have recently adopted Bills of Rights, such as Canada, South Africa and New Zealand.



Radical change in Australia is as likely as a frog growing feathers.

—Manning Clark, 1977

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE, MANNING CLARK oscillated between optimism and despair. Although he called for Australians to 'keep alive the vision', he was aware that Australians were 'pragmatists, not ideologues, and certainly not revolutionaries'. Yet his knowledge of the fundamental scepticism of Australian democracy never deterred him from advancing ambitious proposals for constitutional reform. More than any other historian of his generation, Clark fulfilled his commitment to 'point to the questions of great moment so that they can be opened for debate'.

For Australian republicans, Manning Clark's public life serves as a constant reminder that constitutional change can never be minimal. Rather, it is an issue of belief and principle, inclusion, justice, and human rights. To say this is not to suggest that Australians should stand to attention with hand on heart and weep tears for the Constitution. That is not our way. But neither should we wallow in the grim realities of Section 128, or imagine naïvely that a republic is capable of 'speaking' to all Australians if it addresses only the question of the Head of State.

For too long now, we have approached the issue of the republic from the perspective of the pragmatist—mechanics first, rationale last. If more Australians are to become republicans, then the language of change must 'speak' and 'listen' to them in all their diversity. A new Preamble is one meeting place where this conversation can begin—an article of faith for a sceptical democracy. ■

Mark McKenna is a member of the Political Science Program in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University and author of *The Captive Republic*, CUP, 1996. In a slightly more extended version, this essay shared first prize in the H.V. Evatt Foundation Essay Prize for 1997.

I'll be watching you

Every breath you take	(breath analyser)
every move you make	(motion detector)
every bond you break	(polygraph)
every step you take	(electronic anklet)
every single day	(continuous monitoring)
every word you say	(bugs, wiretaps, mikes)
every night you stay	(light amplifier)
every vow you break	(voice stress analysis)
every smile you fake	(brain wave analysis)
every claim you stake	(computer matching)
I'll be watching you	(video surveillance)

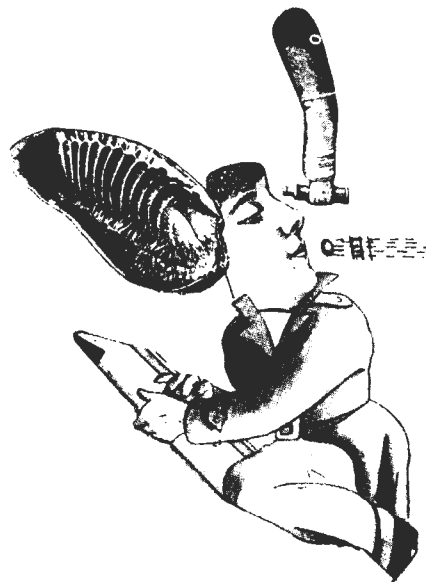
—Words from the prophetic song, 'Every Breath You Take', by The Police, adapted by G. Marx in 'I'll be Watching You, Reflections on the New Surveillance', *Dissent*, Winter 1985, pp26–34.

THE CONTINUOUS LOSS OF PRIVACY in Australia is happening surely but imperceptibly so that people don't realise what's happening to them—just like lobsters being boiled.'

This is how an expert in the field recently described to us the progressive erosion of the right to privacy which many had hoped had been stopped by public opposition to the Australia Card a decade ago.

At the time the Australia Card was mooted, a newspaper editor declared: 'There has never been such a cry of opposition from the nation over one topic.' The idea of each individual being assigned a personal number aroused such passionate and widespread opposition as to encourage hope in some quarters that Australian governments would think twice before attempting further infringements of people's right to privacy.

This optimism overlooked the technological and social-organisational



pressures of a less blatant kind which now undermine privacy in advanced industrial societies. Their extent has prompted the Canadian Privacy Commissioner to comment, 'I wouldn't go so far as to say privacy no longer exists, but it's certainly breathing hard to stay alive'. He had in mind the kind of consensual view of privacy

summarised by a recent parliamentary inquiry as the right to enjoy private space, to conduct private communications, to be free from surveillance and to be accorded respect for the sanctity of one's body.

The compromising of this right is not experienced equally throughout society. Around the world, evidence is accumulating that those who suffer disproportionately under the emerging regime are the poorly educated, social assistance beneficiaries, young persons, the homeless, and groups that have a cultural preference for communal, public activities.

Making surveillance routine may also advantage those who gain knowledge of the system and take action to circumvent it. For this reason, it seems likely that many of these systems will disproportionately net the marginal, amateur, occasional violator rather than the persistent offender.

Australia is a world leader in adopting new technology, in particular personal

information and communication devices. Surveillance technologies exist which are capable of recording conversations through walls and seeing around corners or in the dark. The number of applications for warrants for listening devices in NSW exceeds the number of applications for listening devices and wire taps in the whole of the USA. On a comparative population basis, in 1995, instead of 1341 such applications, the number for NSW should have been 26.

Closed circuit television (CCTV) is used extensively in places as varied as public transport, ATMs, large retail stores, shopping centres and malls, the foyers and lobbies of hotels and large offices, elevators, car parks and sporting arenas (with the capacity quickly to produce photos of an individual spectator in the crowd). Bits of information that, in the past, did not threaten an individual's privacy and anonymity, are now capable of being linked by computers.

The new surveillance triggers a shift from targeting a specific subject to categorical suspicion—of youth, ethnic groups, the family and friends of prisoners, to mention just three groups.

IN THE WORKPLACE, movements can be tracked by electronic devices, telephones monitored, speed of work measured, and workers observed—areas such as toilets, showers and change rooms—without their knowledge. Miniaturised 'tiny brother' cameras are used to do this. They are capable of catching detail in low light and are being installed anywhere and everywhere. The seeming imperative to adopt such technology as it becomes available is summarised in the phrase: 'have technology, must use'.

Should the adoption of such technology cause concern?

It has been argued that most people will accept some form of surveillance in exchange for a greater feeling of safety. After all, the argument runs, if you are doing nothing wrong, you have nothing to fear from surveillance.

This argument presupposes that nobody can have a good motive for wishing to protect information about their lives. The NSW Privacy Committee has rebutted this approach by showing that it involves an inversion of values. Instead of privacy being a valuable human right, it is depicted in the 'nothing to fear' approach as a shield for evil-doers which prevents unlawful activity from being brought to light. The presumption of innocence is reversed. Trust, the

most sacred and important element of the social bond, is damaged.

Consent cannot be inferred from passers-by being aware of signs indicating the presence of cameras. One concern is that some act, quite possibly harmless and best forgotten, once recorded, has the potential to become a source of humiliation and even blackmail. Equally important is the fact that some of our most important values, including the right of peaceful assembly and the right of freedom of association, are dependent to some extent on the right to privacy.

These arguments are not wasted on Australians, many of whom have shown in surveys that they are concerned about the intrusion of surveillance. Of great importance, in the longer term, is whether the exchange of privacy for alleged benefits, especially the prevention and detection of crime, actually results in the achievement of those aims. The point is crucial, because once the right to privacy is lost, whether intentionally or inadvertently, it can never be recaptured. Sir Zelman Cowen, in his 1969 Boyer Lectures ('The Private Man', ABC), warned us to beware of bald assertions about the efficacy of various forms of surveillance in the absence of tangible supporting evidence. He did not believe that such evidence existed and cautioned that almost any form of privacy invasion can be, and is, defended on the grounds of the public good. The onus of justification must always rest on the shoulders of the claimant, he said.

What Cowen suspected decades ago is still the working conclusion of several official inquiries into privacy in contemporary Australia, as well as authoritative overseas research. An ACT Government review, for example, has been unable to locate research showing the sustained usefulness of CCTV as an effective crime prevention measure.

A similar conclusion has been reached by the New South Wales Privacy Committee in relation to the CCTV system installed in the Sydney suburb of Cabramatta, at a cost of approximately \$700,000, and with annual operating costs of around \$300,000. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, in the

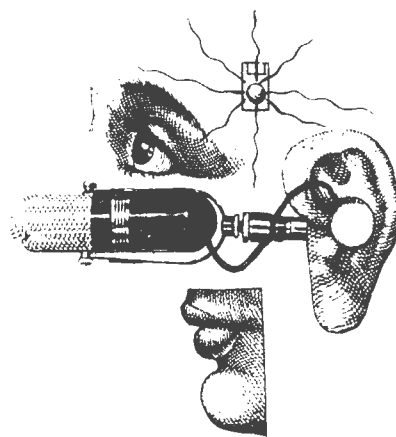
early stages of its operation, CCTV equipment sometimes provides assistance to the police in the prosecution of crime. However, the effectiveness appears to wear off over time and crime is often displaced to nearby streets not in camera range. Indeed, this was the police justification for recently instituting intensive photographic surveillance in Bankstown to deal with the 'fall out' from suppression of street

crime in Cabramatta. So far as the apprehending of offenders is concerned, in some places the equipment has operated for years without an arrest being made. The police in areas of surveillance are sometimes more concerned about keeping an eye on police officers than they are about monitoring members of the public.

Not that the police should be able to influence the operation of the cameras. According

to official guidelines, a videotape should only be released to a police officer on receipt of a signed request from the local police Patrol Commander. But the reality is that police are not kept at arm's length from the equipment and sometimes actually direct its operation at Cabramatta. Moreover, supposedly independent operators pass 'stills' of individuals and vehicles taken from the videotapes to police occupying the same premises for their evaluation and notation.

In the circumstances described, once it becomes clear that CCTV is not a simple solution to either the prevention or the solving of crime, councils may be forced to find further applications to justify the initial and continuing expenditure of surveillance systems. This is known as 'function creep'. The NSW Privacy Committee has found that a surveillance system in George Street, Sydney, has identified traffic offences and buskers as problems, while systems in Britain have been used to search out truants from school. While the George Street system was being trialled, a number of serious offences occurred—including a stabbing, a shooting and an armed holdup—which were not prevented by the presence of CCTV. The Cabramatta system has been used to target the parking of vehicles on footpaths, people sticking up posters and disposing of shop waste in unacceptable ways.



Writers have foreseen this electronic mediation of society—Orwell vividly depicted the potential for state domination, and in the technical implementation of Kafka's nightmare, modern society suspects everyone.

However, it is Jeremy Bentham's concept of the panopticon—in which prisoners are controlled by the constant sense that they are being watched by unseen eyes—which has the greater illuminative power as a descriptive metaphor.

The shift from investigating a specific subject to categorical suspicion is clearly illustrated by current control and surveillance practices in relation to young people. Some of those practices, heavy-handed in the extreme, can only be described as speculative information-gathering rather than investigation based on reasonable suspicion. In the process, time-honoured rights, such as the presumption of innocence, fall to one side.

Take the now fairly widespread practice of police photographing young people, frequently in the absence of any evidence of wrong-doing and sometimes in circumstances which are personally mortifying, for example, in front of other local residents

in shopping centres or at a railway station. These procedures not only represent a major invasion of privacy but, amazingly, photos of youths who have not been charged with offences—and bearing such nebulous inscriptions as 'seen talking to ...'—are displayed for the perusal of crime victims. The consequences of such actions include an implied criminality which may have disastrous effects if the photos are seen by family members and acquaintances.

BODY SEARCHING OF YOUNG PEOPLE raises similar issues. According to the relevant Commissioner's Instruction, searching should be conducted in a way which is respectful of privacy and away from the public view, 'in a manner that does not subject the person to unnecessary embarrassment or degrading treatment'. In fact, searches occur in public places, like shopping arcades and car parks at Cabramatta.

In one recent case, the young man who was apprehended was escorted a considerable distance through a busy area in his underclothes, before being placed in a paddy wagon. The *Drug Misuse and Trafficking Act 1985* (NSW) confers on police the right to search persons reasonably suspected of possessing a prohibited drug or plant. The trouble is that, as with the photographing of young people, the 'reasonable grounds' criterion is overridden by 'operations' (read intimidatory campaigns) which are indifferent to the need to preserve privacy. Such operations are also counterproductive, because they particularly alienate ethnic youth who desperately need health and social support.

Control based on categorical suspicion harms important human rights, but presumably the police take their lead from the governments they serve. The Government of NSW could hardly have set clearer expectations in this regard than by extending the reach of legislation which empowers police to remove unsupervised young people from the streets to prevent them from becoming involved in crime or incurring harm, and to break up groups of young people. There may be short-term political advantage in the categorical treatment of youth as a dangerous species, but we may all live to regret the harm done to the social fabric. How far off for Australia is the type of proposition put recently by a town in England seeking a CCTV system: 'there is a problem with a non-alcohol related disorder in the form of youths'.

Meanwhile, is there anything to show for the style of policing which has been adopted at Cabramatta?

After a year of operation there does not appear to be any evidence that the drug problem has been reduced, let alone eliminated. A senior police officer commented in March that the police 'had reached a standstill with the problem'. Although almost no CCTV evidence has been used to prosecute offenders, it is claimed that some have pleaded guilty after being told they have been 'caught' on video. This reflects experience in England where some people confess as soon as they are told of the tape's existence, without even seeing it, despite the fact that the quality of evidence provided by CCTV is often open to challenge.

Is anything being attained that could not have been achieved by more adequate policing? Probably the only tangible outcome of the Cabramatta surveillance project has been an increase in the number of police in the area. Now that the existing confrontational style of policing is beginning to be modified as part of a State and Local Government initiative, it is possible that the extra staff may be used for constructive community policing purposes.

Those who visit family members and friends in prison are also singled out for unbalanced, intrusive surveillance. If jailers' work were limited to the physical safe-keeping of those in their charge, then the ham-fisted intrusion on the privacy of prisoners' partners and children, which deters many of them from visiting loved ones, would be of small consequence. The situation is, however, that, in all civilised countries, it is considered a policy of self-interest for the community to encourage the maintenance of prisoners' relations with family and friends. Everyone benefits from such an approach.

THE PROBLEM IS that the 'have technology, must use' element of NSW Corrective Services has never outgrown that need for high-tech toys. In order to visit inmates in several maximum security prisons, one must now submit (when it is working) to a fingerprint scan. Naturally, a neutral-sounding name—biometric identification—has been given to the process. The traditional reassurances have been given that 'function creep' will not occur. Only those oblivious to the history of surveillance technology would be comforted by the Minister's reassurances that 'regulations have been prepared to the effect that, even

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if it were possible, it would be an offence to reconstruct the algorithm to a fingerprint.' Tell that to the partners, family members and friends who now decline to visit. One mother who does continue to visit has said of the procedures, 'Now I know that I too am a criminal'.

What can be done?

We have focused on New South Wales, but the trends are not confined to one state or one country. The question is whether Australians are going to allow technological and other cultural pressures, which promise simplistic, short-term improvements in social order, to erode established notions of justice and freedom?

This question is anything but abstract if you have absorbed the atmosphere of the town centre of Cabramatta. Older people avert their gaze to avoid seeing the deals taking place before them, under the eerie presence of the fishbowl lens which sees everything and yet sees nothing, and solves little. The natural—talking, socialising or simply resting—registers and causes apprehension, whereas the underhand goes undetected.

Of course, privacy rights are not absolute. Sometimes they have to be infringed in the name of some greater collective benefit. However, the potential for harm is so great that we must hesitate before creating even apparently justified surveillance systems. As international commentator G. Marx has said, 'Framing the policy debate around how to reform such systems may be misguided. The issue is instead, should the systems be there to begin with.' ('I'll be Watching You, Reflections on the "New Surveillance"', *Dissent*, Winter 1985.) Individuals should not be obliged to defend their rights; rather, those who violate the right to privacy should be obliged to defend their actions. The only acceptable justification would be concrete proof that the invasion serves a greater common good. The benefits achieved must outweigh the harm created. If such an analysis had been undertaken in relation to the surveillance systems introduced at Cabramatta and elsewhere, it is unlikely that a sufficiently good case could have been made for them to proceed. The same is true of the biometric identification system in the prisons. The test of 'benefits outweighing harm' must be applied retrospectively to these serious invasions of privacy.

This kind of analysis will only be undertaken in a coherent and consistent way if a firm framework is imposed. Therefore, the NSW Law Reform Commission's apparent

IN THE PAST FEW DECADES, the arts community has sold itself as an essential part of Australian life. All major cities, and many smaller communities, now have arts festivals and complexes. The arts, like sport, has become a part of everyday life.

Not so, the sciences. With the exception of science museums, and some fields of medical research, promotion of science and technology has been largely ineffectual. But there is a new push to raise general awareness of science in Australia.

Last year the Federal Government announced support for a National Science Week, from 2 to 10 May 1998. The idea is based on the British expansion of the Edinburgh Festival into a week of science-based events throughout the UK. In Australia, each state and community will organise its own activities during National Science Week.

A limited pilot last year was a success. It made unashamed use of Nobel Laureate and media natural, Peter Doherty, and had the active national involvement of the ABC. The event went far beyond egghead lectures to bespectacled audiences; one highlight which comes to mind was Doherty's encounter with Roy and H.G. at Club Buggery.

This year, it will be all stops out, and Melbourne will be a focus. On Australia Day, the Victorian Government announced it was providing \$200,000 towards the staging of *Science Now!*, a forum of public debates, media events, workshops and activities for youth designed to bring the freshest Australian science to public notice. *Science Now!* is supported by all the major science organisations in Australia—including the two academies, the federation of all the science professional organisations, and Australian Science Communicators. The Federal Government is also kicking in \$60,000. (At this point Archimedes has to admit his own interest, as a member of the organising committee.)

Why all the fuss and bother? Because, at a time when public interest in science is growing, Australia has been left without any regular, dependable forum for public discussion of advances in science, technology and medicine. In the past, that role was filled by the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS). For more than 100 years the ANZAAS Congress provided a convenient gathering where researchers could explain their discoveries to a lay audience and scientists from different disciplines could come together to swap ideas.

But last October, ANZAAS voted itself out of existence. It had not kept pace with the times and lacked support from scientists, who pragmatically decided there was more value in going to specialist meetings to talk to their peers than in trying to enlighten non-scientists. It lacked support from the public, who felt they were getting stale science at a hastily organised, often expensive conference which appeared in their city only once in a blue moon. What in the early 1980s had been the forum for the release of the preliminary findings of the Costigan Royal Commission into organised crime, was almost totally ignored in Adelaide last year.

But ANZAAS went out of business just when it was needed most. Most research money is now distributed on a competitive basis. Scientists have to win their own funding—the greater the support they can gather for their work, the better their chances. Hence, for the first time in living memory, scientists are actively seeking publicity.

This movement happens to coincide with news editors' realisation that readers, listeners and viewers are interested in learning about science and medicine. The polls show there is more enthusiasm for news about science than about politics and economics and, in some areas, even sport. *Science Now!* is hoping to capture some of this spirit. It will seek out young, active researchers who have fresh things to say about the latest Australian work. The organisers want to assemble panels of experts from Australia and elsewhere to debate the potential ramifications of the latest research—Dolly the Sheep, emerging diseases, nanotechnology.

In the next two months, we'll see if science get its act together. The bill of entertainment may not be as immediately appealing as the arts, but the long term implications for our lives could be equally profound. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance scientific writer.

intention to recommend the creation of a set of standards in legislation, is to be encouraged. Given the prevailing (blind) faith in technological solutions to society's ills, there must be sanctions for breaches and a confirmed regulator in the form of a Privacy Commissioner to ensure the application of the standards. The present situation is that a future position of Commissioner has been identified in a ministerial press release. The circumstances we have described, however, are too urgent to tolerate further delay in actually creating the position.

What about the policing practices which show such scant regard for the privacy rights of youth, ethnic people and other groups? The present procedure of complaints to the Ombudsman, resulting in conciliation of the parties, is quite unsatisfactory.

Such an approach starts from the position that questioning and photographing people going about their business is acceptable and that what is required is

more discussion at the fringe of the issue—the nature of the 'operation', how long photos can be retained, and like matters. There must be scope for questioning the entire legitimacy of the procedures used, and this is more likely to occur when the relevant inquiries are directed by a Privacy Commissioner alive to the dangers of cumulatively undermining privacy standards in our society.

Jurisdictional boundaries must be rearranged to give primacy to the role of the Privacy Commissioner in such matters. Even while we await the enshrinement of standards in legislation, there is ample guidance already available in the form of a set of principles, such as those contained in the 1994 *Australian Privacy Charter*.

The charter presents eighteen principles and declares that exceptions to them '... should be clearly stated, made in accordance with law, proportional to the necessities giving rise to the exception, and


compatible with the requirements of a democratic society'.

The important thing now is to get on and vigorously apply these principles before we find ourselves rationalising an irreversible situation with Newspeak in the fashion of one English Chief Constable: 'We do not fear an Orwellian future. Big Brother has arrived and we love him.' ■

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Recrimination and redemption

The Reader, Bernhard Schlink, trans. Carol Brown Janeway, Phoenix House, Orion, 1997. ISBN 1 861 59063 6, RRP \$20

BERNHARD SCHLINK'S *The Reader* comes with some of the highest recommendations around. Ruth Rendell says, on the inside cover, that it stands as far above a Holocaust genre book as *Crime and Punishment* does above the average thriller. It has been singled out for its excellence by people as different as literary critic, George Steiner, and Timothy Garton Ash, political commentator on Germany and Eastern Europe.

After such credentials, what forgiveness?

I should say that I picked up *The Reader* knowing the book's reputation but nothing about how the story unfolded, and I found it by turns riveting, astonishing and very moving. I also wondered about my reaction.

It begins as a kind of love story, a sort of tense, erotically terse episode in what seems to be a *Bildungsroman*. A fifteen-year-old boy meets, by chance, a woman in her mid-thirties. He happens to see her getting changed. They become lovers. She is a tram conductress and he is a smart young high school boy.

She's keen for him to keep up with his schoolwork and he reads books to her, the kind of books he's discovering himself, like *War and Peace*. Their relationship, as Bernhard Schlink depicts it, is full of a baffled, physically exact but psychologically unexplained, mystery.

This woman is beautiful; she is down-to-earth and unpretentious. The writing here, capturing the boy's sense of wonderment and the woman's bemusement and privacy and silence, in the midst of attachment, is wonderfully done. It reads with the veracity of spellbound memoir, so quiet that it takes the reader some time to realise how the narrative has crept up on him.

Like the first person narrator, Bernhard Schlink is a legal academic, but he is apparently also a writer of crime novels. *The Reader* has what looks like an open plot. The central clue (which I won't reveal) is on show for the dimmest reader, but as the action unfolds the blows it delivers are staggering.

The Reader is centrally concerned with how someone might or might not have been involved in the Holocaust. And with whatever private foibles or disabilities might colour and complicate what it sounds like nonsense to call a complicity with

history. It is a book about guilt and the way in which images of guilt complicate an entire iconography of the world.

I don't know when I last read a short book that had this kind of fit between its shape and its reverberating moral. This is also a deeply dialectical book which brings to mind a writer like Camus.



Krieg, by Gerd Arntz, 1931.

Schlink seems to know precisely the story he has to tell and he has the writer's equivalent of perfect pitch. A belt slashing across a face, a working woman's pride, lovers asleep on top of one another, the assumption of an SS uniform, kindness in the midst of atrocity and what price or moral calculus could possibly be applied to it.

The Reader is a novel about the individual face of an historical outrage, the Holocaust, which is also, for never less than explicable reasons, one of the fundamental myths of our own dispensation.

I said before that I wondered at my own reaction to it because it is a work of enormous poignancy and power which occupies the space, at least to some extent, that Helen Darville-Demidenko's *The Hand That Signed the Paper* might have, had it been a coherent work of art based on a proper sense of history and a sense of the necessary scale between any fiction (the

mere tracing of an action) and the terrible arch of history.

The question which *The Reader* raises is whether Schlink is manipulating the Holocaust in order to dazzle the reader and turn his heart upside down. I don't really think he is. He is clearly a master of suspense and a writer with a style so bare it's shaming. But he does seem to have written—weird though it sounds to say it—one of the great political novels of our period.

He has achieved this by never deviating from realism and by never losing focus on the enigmatic female face at the book's centre and the shadowy face implied by the narrator as he sketches his own development.

The Reader is about potential love and desecration in the vicinity of history. It is a book of considerable intelligence and subtlety which manages to encompass a theatre of subjects, from the asinine quality of law to the grey area of underage sex, without ever losing its power of moral implication.

It is, among other things, a book about tracing the lineaments of the face of modern Germany, but if it succeeds in this grand aim it does so by virtue of its modesty, its short views, its thriller writer's sense of form.

Every year is a strange year in fiction but nothing else I read published in 1997 would be more guaranteed to make every kind of reader sit up very straight indeed. *The Reader* is that rarest of all things these days: a short popular novel, artistically on the level, which has the electric quality of a great film. ■

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The old stable ego

D.H. Lawrence: *Dying Game 1922-1930*,
David Ellis, Cambridge University Press,
1998. ISBN 0 521 25421 3. RRP \$69.95

WHO COULD HAVE IMAGINED in 1910 that a miner's son, a young schoolteacher named D. H. Lawrence, would die two decades later (in Vence, France, of tuberculosis) a famous (or infamous) and well-travelled author, regarded as both a devilish and a messianic figure? This question partly accounts for the Cambridge biography's major novelty: its three volumes are written by different authors. There are, though, unifying features: their size; their inclusion of chronologies, Herculean indexes and appendices; and their reliance on the Cambridge editions of Lawrence's works and letters. Given Lawrence's short life the biography's length is notable. As Kinkead-Weekes, the slightly more flamboyant author of volume II, puts it: 'summary and generalisation should go to the (admittedly more economical) devil, since the life of things tends to be found in detail'.

This is certainly so with a figure such as Lawrence, not only for 'ideological' reasons, such as his strong belief in spontaneity, but also for more pragmatic reasons such as his

peripatetic life, his enormous number of acquaintances and correspondents, and his prodigious output. *Dying Game* shows just how much—and how quickly—Lawrence wrote, despite illness and displacement. This volume covers the publication of *Kangaroo*, *The Plumed Serpent*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (recognised as Lawrence's best book of poems), as well as Lawrence's renewed interest in painting. It was also the time of Lawrence's greatest mobility, living in Ceylon, Australia, Mexico, the USA, and Europe. (Ellis reports that when biographical responsibilities were divided, John Worthen, author of volume I, complained that while Ellis 'would be able to request travel grants for exotic places, all he could apply for was the bus fare to Eastwood').

There is something impressively isolationist about the Cambridge biography, relying as it does almost completely on primary sources while being almost wholly indifferent to modern critics and biographers. An instance of this is the

coverage of 'The Woman Who Rode Away'. Kate Millett's attack on this story in *Sexual Politics* (1970), it would be fair to say, turned a generation of feminists off Lawrence. Millett, however, is not mentioned in the Cambridge biography, and Ellis never loses his equanimity in the face of a white woman's auto-sacrifice to a tribe of Indians. Nor does he seek the consolation of an allegorical reading, as Brenda Maddox does in her life of D. H. Lawrence, *The Married Man*, which presents the tale as one about artistic creativity.

Despite the authors' postmodernist nod in their Preface to the untenability of what Lawrence famously called 'the old stable ego', a number of characteristics become apparent in Ellis's narrative (as they must). This is the period in which, disgusted by the Great War and his treatment in England, Lawrence is concerned with 'Western decadence' and communal living (both containing traces of the puritanism that never really left Lawrence). There is the wavering between the 'East' and 'West',



and Lawrence's occasional messianic sense of himself coupled with his millenarianism (Lawrence is at his most tedious when at his most prophetic). More humanly, we see his oft-noted gift for mimicry, and his generosity to younger writers. We also see his temper, the product of his conscious decision to cast off bourgeois propriety and inhibition (though I don't suppose the dog he savagely belted and kicked for going on heat would have found any consolation in that piece of sophistry).

These rages were often explained by Lawrence's early memoirists as 'tubercular'. Ellis rejects 'tubercular' theories of Lawrence's personality, arguing that Lawrence contracted TB later than most believed (dating it to 1924). This makes Claire Tomalin's theory that Lawrence gave Katherine Mansfield the disease an unlikely proposition (and his comment—'You revolt me stewing in your consumption'—horrible, but not pathological). For the last years, though, Lawrence was sick, and the physical changes are apparent in the photographic record.

No matter how sympathetic his biographer, Lawrence's foolishness doesn't fail to shine through: his dalliance with fascism, his irritability, his casual racism, and his authoritarianism. Even his ideas on love (at least in 1925) were centred on power (the idea that 'the act of love itself is an act of power' is strangely akin to some of the ideas of that generation of feminists who rejected Lawrence). But Ellis demonstrates that Lawrence's interests and beliefs often changed, like his ideas on miscegenation, which moved from disapproval to acceptance. While Lawrence is often viewed as a modernist, Ellis shows how uncomfortable he was with the modernist project (he described the Penelope section of *Ulysses* as 'filthy'). Moreover, Lawrence's Romanticism didn't mean an unhealthy interest in subjectivity:

'Did I feel a twinge in my right toe, or didn't I?' asks every character in Mr Joyce or Miss Richardson or Monsieur Proust. 'Is the odour of my perspiration a blend of frankincense and orange pekoe and boot-blackening, or is it myrrh and bacon-fat and Shetland tweed?'

This, from a man who argued against what he called 'sex in the head', suggests something of his complicated relationship with bodily matters.

While Lawrence's limitations are made plain (and his rages were real, whether tubercular or not), he remains somewhat

heroic. A paradoxical feature of large biographies is that while their size and attention to detail makes the subject more human than before, the heroic nature of such a project reflects some of that heroism back onto the subject. While this is true for Lawrence, Frieda tends to come across less well: long suffering, for sure, but also faintly comic in her attempts to fight off other women who saw themselves as Lawrence's muse; not quite able to handle Lawrence's illnesses; and not worried about rushing off to her lover (with a brief stop for Middleton Murray first) shortly after Lawrence's death.

Perhaps it is simply that we do not see Frieda dying gamely.

ELLIS'S BIOGRAPHY IS EXHAUSTIVE, though it never falls into the trap of turning supposition into fact, and the narrative and literary criticism sit together well. Although the readings are biographical, they are critically illuminating at crucial times. This is particularly so with the account of the three *Lady Chatterleys*. Ellis also shows, without undue digression, Lawrence's milieu, and while the world's reaction to Lawrence during his lifetime is often only implied it is nevertheless clearly felt when required.

What Lawrence has to offer today is less clear, and it is not something with which this biography deals (though its ambition suggests that the answer must still be 'quite a lot'). Certainly, Lawrence's stocks have been higher (but they have also been lower). Some of his interests (occultism, theosophy, primitivism) have little to do with contemporary interests, and some (perhaps quite a lot) of his writing is merely blathering. His ideas on sex seem to come from a radically different context. But this means, at the least, he is of historical interest. A more 'applied' reason is the vestigial urgency of the dramas that his fiction seeks to play out. In particular, Lawrence is concerned with that ancient concern: how to live. The uncomfortable power of some of Lawrence's answers can be seen in a comment made by Ellis: 'In all Lawrence's major novels there is this pattern of offering powerful reasons for despair but not then allowing his characters to abandon hope'.

And for Australians? Thankfully we no longer suffer youthful professors (shipped out from Oxbridge) beginning a lecture on Australian literature by denying the existence of such a subject, and turning in relief to *Kangaroo* (as J. I. M. Stewart once did). Ellis's account of *Kangaroo* usefully shows how the two things do and don't intersect. Certainly Lawrence's reactions to Australia are as expressive of his own pathology as of this country's. Ellis also proves Lawrence didn't actually meet Australian right-wingers.

In 1924 Lawrence wrote to E. M. Forster: 'To me you are the last Englishman. And I am the one after that'. It is a characteristic phrase, but surely only half true, since this biography shows that despite the differences between the young and the old Lawrences, Lawrence never wholly kicked himself free of his biography: his background, his parents, and his Englishness (Tony Tanner calls him a 'strangely English genius' in a recent *Times Literary Supplement* review of *Dying Game*). For all his desire to break out of conventionality, and to broaden the ways of talking about sex, Englishness stuck to him, right down to the policemen who, in deference to class, let the Aga Khan view at leisure Lawrence's paintings that they were in the process of confiscating. And the most 'shocking' parts of *Lady Chatterley* are spoken in a broad Derbyshire dialect (and the class conflict *within* Mellors that this represents is similarly expressive of a kind of Englishness). It is somewhat ironic that Lawrence expressed the dictum 'Never trust the artist, trust the tale', since—in his case at least—making such a distinction is not really possible. It was Lawrence, after all, who spoke of 'shedding sicknesses' in his books. ■

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Walk on the tame side

SINCE THE DEMISE of J. C. Williamson's in 1977, the principal trading currency in the unsubsidised commercial sector of the Australian theatre has been the large-scale, spectacle-based musical rather than the greater intimacies and intricacies of the spoken-word drama. True, in recent years, we have seen the geriatric Rex Harrison and Claudette Colbert touring in 1987 (with 'Australian' actors in the second-string roles) in Frederick Lonsdale's long-forgotten light comedy *Aren't We All?* and Paul Eddington and various 'Australians' going round the country in Terence Rattigan's equally light drama *The Browning Version* and its accompanying confectioner's fluff, *Harlequinade*, in 1988. There have also been more recent commercial revivals and touring productions of 'dramas' like *Steaming* (as recently as 1990) and *Trainspotting* (last year), while there is still a vestigial enthusiasm in those parts of Australia that still call England home (especially Perth and Adelaide) for Ray Cooney's farces of the *Run For Your Wives* stable.

A common factor in this genre of production in days gone by was the tendency to import a second-string English director to reproduce the West End production in a 'local' production with imported actors in the lead roles (preferably known to local audiences through British or American TV shows for the purposes of the marketing campaign) and with 'Australian' actors in the supporting roles.

The preferred locals tended to be either émigré poms who had made the resting place of their undistinguished English careers in Australia, Australians who have made their names

abroad (like Lewis Fiander, Madge Ryan and old heart-throbs like John McCallum or Keith Michell), up-and-coming stars of TV, film and stage or occasionally even actors of genuine reputation on the Australian stage (like Patricia Kennedy and Julia Blake).

Another common tendency in this kind of commercial touring production is that they often looked suspiciously like the West End or Broadway version that preceded the

Australian 'opening night' by several rather tired years.

In the heyday of JCWs and the other commercial managements in post-war Australia, there might have been some excuse for this kind of approach: a dearth of locally-trained professional Australian actors meant that stars had to be imported from abroad in order to fulfil the artistic needs of the play. The excuse (if not the commercial imperative) changed somewhat when the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust came into being in 1955 and entered into semi-commercial deals with the international impresarios of the day: then, the idea was that we had to import the directors and the stars from abroad in order to 'raise the standards' of a promising but as yet unfulfilled talent base in this 'young country'.

But by the time the Trust-created state drama companies came of age in the 1970s and 1980s (drawing upon a strong pool of trained actors from NIDA and elsewhere and upon an equally strong pool of drawcard celluloid personalities), the Trust largely gave up importing drama productions—especially since it couldn't pick a commercial winner to save its life. At about the same time, the old JCW 'Firm' packed it in and was replaced by the likes of Harry M. Miller (with the brash new American hits *Hair* and *Jesus Christ, Superstar*) and in turn the foreign multinationals, Cameron Mackintosh and the Really Useful Group, with their franchised productions of *Evita*, *Cats*, *Les Misérables*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Miss Saigon*, *Sunset Boulevard* and so on, dutifully facsimiled to the Australian public from head office in London and Broadway in productions cast almost entirely with Australian performers.

It was thus with some interest that I went along to the Melbourne



'opening' at Her Majesty's Theatre of Peter Hall's production of Oscar Wilde's 1894 play *An Ideal Husband*, fresh (so to speak) from its performances in Brisbane last December and Sydney in January. This is actually an Australian remount of Hall's 1993 production for his own company at the Old Vic (and later on Broadway) by a conglomerate of producers, including John McCallum (late of JCWs and the British film industry), the prolific Sydney producer John Frost, the well-subsidised Queensland Performing Arts Trust and British entrepreneur Bill Kenwright.

In brief, little seems to have changed in commercial drama production in England since about 1955. To see this in 'the Maj' in Melbourne in February 1998 (or at the Lyric in Brisbane or Sydney) is to enter a time-warp that takes us back something like 40 years. After watching a mixed cast of English and Australian actors posing about mostly in straight lines in expensive but oddly dowdy-looking costumes, delivering their lines often out front and putting most of their energies into the craftsmanlike but old-fashioned task of building up to climactic exits (and the carefully contrived exit-line rounds of applause, at least from those in the audience old enough to remember such old acting tricks), I wondered if this was an exercise in faithful museum theatre or some peculiar kind of post-modern turn.

Carl Toms' set design, admittedly, makes some concessions to the modern economies of stage production. The three fully-flown box sets of yesteryear here give way to nicely minimal representations of bits of Sir Robert Chiltern's reception room and morning room and Lord Goring's library, adroitly changed behind a front-drop representing an English bronze penny bearing the august portrait of Queen Victoria (signifying the ultimate monetary value of the less than ideal husband Chiltern's moral sell-out? Or the austere gaze of Victorian England's moral values?). The fluid staging so achieved is about the only thing that shakes us out of the *déjà vu* feeling of the production as a whole. Hall has obviously decided that in reviving this little-performed play around the time of its centenary, the production style of his earliest years in the English theatre (he made his directorial debut at Stratford in 1956) was the appropriate way to go. Radio microphones for all of the cast are the other modern innovation.

For the older members of the audience who have flocked to this, it is a warmly

nostalgic trip down memory lane to the English rep of the 1950s or the Elizabethan Trust of the 1960s (the same thing, really) and I looked around at the curtain call to see if Hugh Hunt, Robin Lovejoy or Professor Quentin would leap to his feet and applaud the standard-raising performance we had just seen. For younger audiences, it is of some interest as a curiosity piece: an indication of where the modern theatre has come from, not to say a mark of how far it has come.

In the event, English-born Australian music-theatre performer-turned-straight actor John Waters does a creditable job in the stiff-necked and rather thankless role of Chiltern, while local Josephine Byrnes seems to find it harder to master the artificiality of the style as his pure and idealising wife. Englishman Nicky Henson (an Oscar Wilde look-alike as the foppish Lord Goring) gives what is ultimately the most interesting performance in the show, while transatlantic Stephanie Beacham is suitably (if rather two-dimensionally) wicked as the thieving and scheming Mrs Cheveley. As Wilde's rather interesting embodiment of 'the New Woman' as *femme fatale*, she certainly gets to wear the best frocks!

AN IDEAL HUSBAND is a curious play. Partly in the style of an Ibsen or Shaw morality drama, partly melodramatic struggle between the forces of good and evil and the power of love and forgiveness and partly domestic farce in a style recalling Feydeau, it is as often tediously long-winded as it is shot through with Wilde's trademark perverse wit. I say 'perverse' in the way he turns the accepted tenets of Victorian morality and society into epigrammatic barbs of well-aimed satire at Victorian hypocrisy—not in the sense the English justice system applied to Wilde's off-stage behaviour.

And here is the pay-off. The play is about a man with a dark secret which—if found out—would lead to a scandal; he is being blackmailed by someone who threatens to reveal all. It was written at a time when Wilde was also being blackmailed, his own dark secret about to provoke a huge scandal. In the play, Sir Robert gets away with his, thanks to the love of his wife and friends; alas for the author, real life was not so kind. To this extent, the play is partly autobiographical. But it goes further.

In the person of the perennially trivial, effete and useless Lord Goring ('the idlest

man in London' as his father calls him) Wilde also invests something of himself, but in a carefully encoded kind of way.

Resolutely unmarried at 43 (though he 'looks weeks younger') and looking unlikely ever to achieve that happy estate, he is harangued by his father to get engaged by lunchtime or he'll be cut off with a shilling. When he finally proposes to Mabel Chiltern, her guardian (Sir Robert, just now saved by Goring's intervention) refuses on the grounds that he 'cannot bring Mabel the love that she deserves.'

When Goring asks why, there is a grim pause before Chiltern asks: 'Do you really require me to tell you?'

Here, we too pause for a moment: observing his ambiguous look, and suspecting that Chiltern knows some dark secret hinted at by Goring's camp behaviour for most of the evening, we half-expect the obvious revelation of moral perversion.

Happily, the matter is resolved by one of the twists in the marital-farce plot, but there would have been many a sharp, knowing intake of breath from the closet gay audience of the day. Likewise, when asked what kind of 'ideal' husband Mabel expects Lord Goring to be, she replies (again, knowingly, it would seem, in this performance): 'He can be ... [tantalising pause, with glance at fiancé, striking dandified pose] ... what he chooses.'

But Wilde has earlier (in the third and fourth acts) shown us another, more sympathetic side of Lord Goring's behaviour; for all his camp flippancy, he is the only character to know really what should be done in the circumstances faced by Robert and Gertrude Chiltern. 'You must tell the truth' and 'you will be forgiven', he says repeatedly. This is the way things turn out in the play, as Wilde no doubt wished they would in his own life.

Goring is thus portrayed as Shakespearean 'wise fool', or even as Molièresque 'voice of reason'; either way, Wilde has struck a telling blow against perceptions of the frivolous gay stereotype, however cryptically encoded in the text it might be.

For this subtle but poignant insight, Peter Hall (along with the actor Nicky Henson) earns considerable credit. It is a pity that the artificial, old-fashioned, commercial style of his production as a whole allows us no further insights into the rest of the play. ■

Geoffrey Milne is head of theatre and drama at La Trobe University.

Cumulative effect

Cloudstreet, adapted by Nick Enright and Justin Monjo
from the novel by Tim Winton. Directed by Neil Armfield.

SYDNEY'S LOWER NORTH SHORE has no shortage of restaurants. Its annual production of cafe latte is sufficient to float the *Titanic*.

One of the newer restaurants, opened this time last year, is called *Cloudstreet*, and takes its name from the novel by Tim Winton, a paperback copy of which stands on the counter. One food reviewer warned gourmands on their way to the establishment against trying to find Cloud Street in their street directories.

The curious thing is not that *Cloudstreet*, the restaurant, features a cuisine so different from that available in the rest of latte land. You can have risotto with spinach and gorgonzola, followed by Tilbaroo veal, linguini, hokkien noodles and caramelised orange with marscapone custard, all adding up to a pretty hefty calorie count. The curious thing is that the cuisine in the restaurant is totally different from the diet familiar to the unruly cast of characters in Winton's novel, *Cloudstreet*. And it is a book in which food plays an important role.

Cloudstreet tells the story of two families, the Lambs and the Pickles, who come to share an enormous run-down house somewhere within earshot of the railway that runs from Perth to Fremantle towards the end of World War II. 'It's gunna sound like a counter lunch—lamb and pickles', says Sam Pickles when the families first meet. Over the decades, the feckless Pickles survive on chops and stews coaxed out of their wood-fuel stove; the industrious Lambs make a little money by selling the birthday cake off their children's table and producing vanilla ice-cream. *Cloudstreet*, the restaurant, belongs to a totally different world.

So do the crowds that sat through the five-hour stage adaptation of *Cloudstreet*, one of the stand-out successes of January's Sydney Festival. The show deserved its popularity. It was superbly acted and directed. But the venue, a disused container terminal at the bottom of Sussex Street,

was about as uncomfortable on a steamy summer's night in Sydney as anyone could imagine. Even so, at the end of the performance, the audience peeled themselves off their plastic chairs and clapped and cheered with a level of appreciation which must have left the resident bird life longing for the quiet days when the stevedores had the run of the premises.

In a way, the venue chosen by Perth's Black Swan Theatre Company and Sydney's Company B Belvoir for this co-production did suggest reasons why Winton's story continues to appeal so profoundly. The terminal was vast and empty. The play curtained off only a fraction of it for its use and left the remainder to mock the efforts of a bar, food outlet and souvenir stall to fill such a cavernous space.

If you stepped outside, immediately opposite, the bright lights of Darling Harbour and Sydney's casino, *Star City*, hung over the water. It is rare that a theatre space does so much to allow you to experience your own emptiness before you even sit down. Once the story begins to unfold, its richness of language and character

creates an aching nostalgia for a time and place which few of those in the audience could ever have known.

Some readers of *Cloudstreet* have wondered why the book doesn't end when the two families are finally united in the marriage of Rose Pickles and Quick Lamb. But it continues into a darker sequence in which the Nedlands Monster, Australia's first serial killer, the man whom not even the assassination of JFK could get off Perth's front page, creates a line in the sand between two worlds: then and now.

Cloudstreet is not a familiar saga about the loss of innocence. But it does deal on many levels with different kinds of loss, and to do this it makes use of what somebody once called the most fascinating historical period: the one just beyond our fingertips. Rose's world begins to change when a boyfriend, Toby Raven, tries to change her eating habits. He introduces her to spaghetti.

Justin Monjo worked with Nick Enright to adapt *Cloudstreet* for the stage. Monjo had previously adapted, with Richard Roxburgh, another Winton book, *That Eye The Sky*. He is drawn to Winton's work



because, he says, it deals with human emotions and spirituality in a strongly physical way. 'That Eye The Sky is much more plot-driven than *Cloudstreet*,' he explains. 'It has a strong spine.'

'*Cloudstreet* is about finding much deeper answers. It is about the passage of time and living through experiences ... we realised we would have to take the audience through a long experience. There is no other way to get at the core themes of the work'.

Winton's work continues to fascinate the Australian public. Hardly a syllable he

has written remains unclaimed for either stage or film adaptations. In the middle of 1998, James Vogel's film version of *In The Winter Dark*, starring Miranda Otto, Richard Roxburgh, Brenda Blethner and Ray Barrett, will reach our screens. But it is *Cloudstreet* which has lodged in Australian culture in a way that few novels succeed in doing.

If you go buying carpet, for example, one manufacturer now has a product on the market called Cloudstreet, a deep-piled, soft-coloured weave, available in a range of tones, all of which could be called 'pink.'

But the house in *Cloudstreet* has bare boards and one of its inhabitants, Oriel Lamb, lives in a tent in the back yard. Cloudstreet, the carpet, boasts its effectiveness in noise reduction. An essential part of the personality of the house is the noises it makes. It's fine for a book to have a life beyond its own pages. As long as what the characters in *Cloudstreet* live through, and what happens around their table, doesn't get swept under the carpet at the same time. ■

Michael McGirr SJ is *Eureka Street's* consulting editor.

THEATRE: 3

PETER CRAVEN

Rude botanicals

The Herbal Bed, by Peter Whelan. Melbourne Theatre Company with Frances O'Connor, Robert Menzies, Charles Tingwell, Mandy McElhinney. Directed by Simon Phillips.

Into the Woods, by Steven Sondheim. Melbourne Theatre Company with Rhonda Burchmore, Lisa McCune, Gina Riley, Anthony Weigh and Tamsin Carroll. Directed by Roger Hodgeman.

A NEW PLAY CENTRED ON Shakespeare's daughter, no less, fresh from British acclaim and starring that bright young star Frances O'Connor, seemed the kind of thing likely to pack out the Playhouse for months. Why on earth was the Melbourne Theatre Company putting it on for a bare four weeks in the Fairfax Theatre which can seat two hundred people at best?

Well, the proof was in the pudding and *The Herbal Bed* turned out to be indigestible and half-baked fare. Peter Whelan seems to have had the happy idea that a dialectical costume drama somewhat along the lines of such modern classics as *The Crucible* and *Saint Joan*—a high-sounding, eloquent historical play—might be written about Shakespeare's daughter. And well it might. An excavation of history which also doffed the cap to feminism in the vicinity of the great Bard himself. After all, Susanna Hall, daughter of W.S., had been accused of lewdness and the case had come before some antechamber of the ecclesiastical court in Winchester in 1613, the year Shakespeare downed his last pint and read his last book.

It sounds like a fair enough idea, a jolly enough attempt to turn the clock back, but the result is so drivellingly silly that it should put people off costume drama for another generation.

The Herbal Bed has one bearably dramatic scene when John and Susanna Hall, together with her putative lover, appear before the vicar-general of the Bishop of Winchester, a puritan layman. There the drama crackles for an instant like a shred of cellophane on a summer's day. For the rest what we get is tosh of the most footling kind, a kind of aimless, agglutinative, garrulous approximation to seventeenth-century soap.

The Herbal Bed is a dreadful caution, a caveat to anyone who even thinks of writing in anything but the style of the day except for very good reasons. There is nothing to it but the accumulation of local colour and mock archaisms, these two false antiques highlighted with modulated hideousness by the assumption of 'Crucible' accents, those kinds of West Country sub-American voices which actors are forced to assume when they are afflicted with the prospect of false accusation or the wearing of Puritan peaked hats.

I should add that the Melbourne Theatre Company's production of *The Herbal Bed* manages to be a crushingly dull show despite the good offices of Simon Phillips (who is inclined to direct everything like the feyer kind of production of *Peter Pan*) and a cast half of whom could be seen without shame on any stage in the world. Phillips' personal

signature is discernible in the casting and direction of Marton Csokas as Susanna's would-be lover (a wooden and external performance which would only pass muster if the play amounted to more) and Leigh Russell in a truly ghastly piece of campery as her accuser, the rake and drunk, Jack Lane. Otherwise the production galumphs along with occasional epiphanies of camp hysterics (the vicar-general clasping his hands above his head in hallelujah fashion at the end of his scene). Amid the banalities Phillips specialises in the kind of *coups de théâtre* which would drive anyone to a steady diet of *Xena: Warrior Princess* and remain gratified that they had made the better choice.

The effect is murder on his weaker actors, left naked in the midst of the cheap tinsel, and murder on the audience who have to endure them in the first place. None of which is to deny that Shaun Gurton has produced an efficient, attractive set and that Jamieson Lewis has lit it effectively in Melbourne's most flexible theatre space. It should be a mercy that the cast of *The Herbal Bed* is as strong as it is but somehow that strength (which is formidable) proves to be not nearly enough.

Robert Menzies as John Hall is patient, passionate, bitterly harassed and decently loving. It is not his fault that one moment he

is wide-eyed with horror at what his wife and friend are accused of and the next moment full of passionate intensity at their betrayal. Dramatic exposition just isn't Peter Whelan's strong suit and *The Herbal Bed* lurches from one rag of a bright idea to another.

Bud Tingwell as the Bishop, a cameo relief, is a monument of surprised churchmanly bewilderment. He is superb, full of smiling public concern and mildness and he does succeed in lifting a piece which seems to be sinking steadily, like a very slow stone.

That is also true of Barnabus Goche as the vicar-general, who gives a performance which is within an inch of magnetic menace but which Phillips allows to shriek bat-like around its own shadow. Goche is obviously a terrific actor but this is a demonstration of histrionic skill that dips in and out of reality, and leaves the audience diverted, but dizzy. On the other hand, Mandy McElhinney as the maid gives a beautifully observed performance, full of surface warmth and shrewd coolness. She fleshes out her character so that the strongest suggestion of personality is imposed by dint of the actor's will. Mandy McElhinney, who has been seen in the youth offerings at the Fairfax in recent months—*The Balcony* and *The Three Sisters*—is a superb character actress who should do great things.

This leaves Frances O'Connor, who has already done great things and who was the reason some of us were there in the first place. O'Connor had an extraordinary stillness when she first appeared on the MTC stage in *Lady Windermere's Fan* a few years ago and she followed it up with a bright, burning performance as Olive in Ray Lawler's *Kid Stakes* under Robyn Nevin's direction. Her film work, especially the recent *Kiss or Kill*, is so remarkable that there is at least a case for saying she is the finest actress we have produced for years. She looks like a naturalist until you realise what she is doing naturally is something you have never seen on stage or screen before; and that, apart from anything else, is a high feat of style.

I have no doubt that Frances O'Connor could get to the bottom of any good part she was handed, but this is the least interesting performance she has given for some time simply because the material is so slender. Whelan's characterisation of Susanna makes gestures towards a night world of necromancy and an amoral world where all imaginable loves are satiated but he does not have the courage to act out such possibilities, leaving Susanna a walking

hypothesis of a character which O'Connor animates very beautifully but she is too honest an actress to create a runaway figure of her own imagining.

The only explanation of the high and mighty reputation of *The Herbal Bed* is that a sufficiently brilliant director must have invented a drama round this husk of rumination and gossip and wishful dramatic thinking. It's just possible—because it's always possible—that with enough tinkering and enough imaginative animation even these haystacks of theatrical excrescence might burn with light. Who knows.

Into the Woods, by contrast, was vibrant enough in the hearts and minds of the first night audience, which was pleasing to see because the production was a kind of swansong for the departing director Roger Hodgeman. I have not been a consistent admirer of Hodgeman's work, but this was a solid, inventive production of the Sondheim musical, with the same surging quality as Hodgeman's 1997 production of *A Little Night Music*.

Admittedly, the Sondheim of *Into the Woods* is not the Sondheim of *A Little Night Music*, which not only includes his one show-stopping tune ('Send in the Clowns') but has—via the adaptation of Bergman's *Smiles on a Summer Night*—one of the best books ever to grace a Broadway musical.

When *Into the Woods* was written, Sondheim was deep into his minimalism, concocting a kind of serialistic adaptation of Schoenberg that can make jazz opera sound like an endless plain of recitative, a bit like Andrew Lloyd Webber minus the pastiche tunes.

This is unfair, of course, because Sondheim has the courage of his minimalism and the toughness and imagination to create a kind of theatrical language out of his melodic impoverishment. And in the case of *Into the Woods*, the text—which consists of a kind of portmanteau of the maximum number of fairy tale motifs—can seem like an allegory of the composer's predicament. The title song, which has a certain bounce, is repeated so often that the audience comes out with it stomping through their heads the way things might move inexorably through the head of a parrot.

None of which stops Hodgeman's production of *Into the Woods* from being a stimulating experience. Sondheim's musical is skilfully constructed (particularly in its euphoric first half) and the Melbourne Theatre Company cast is without a weak

link. Rhonda Burchmore, as the smothering mother Witch wanting to keep her Rapunzel safe from the world, has the necessary magnetism to lift the show from being simply an ensemble piece. She sings dashingly—handling the elaborate bits of rap with élan—and there is enough dramatic presence to make this singer's performance a special thing.

Lisa McCune doesn't put a foot wrong as Cinderella: she seems to have deepened her sense of Sondheim's idiom in the last year and the singing is adroit too. In a largish cast Gina Riley is especially bright and real as the Baker's wife and both the newcomers Anthony Weigh as Jack and Tamsin Carroll as Little Red Riding Hood bounce along without being excessively camp. Old troupers like Peter Carroll as the storyteller and Old Man, and Robert Grubb as the Wolf and Prince, added flair.

The second half of the show, in which the resolved archetypes more or less fall apart, is less successful writing because it exhibits a dark streak of pessimism which is brightened only by sentimentality at the end. Hodgeman handles this well without melodramatising a dramatic development that goes to the edge of anarchy.

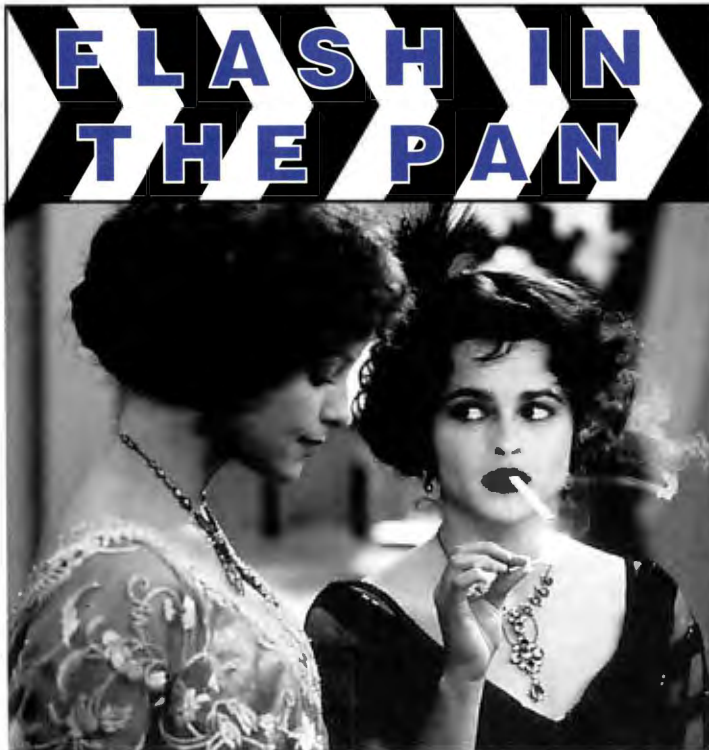
Although Tony Tripp's sets—with their Romantic Grimm-style designs in massed cut-out—look good enough, there are moments in this production where it could be lifted by more scenic magic. This *Into the Woods* diverts the eye but it doesn't ravish it.

Still, that is in keeping with the pace, humanity and energy of Hodgeman's production. *Into the Woods* is not quite as subtle a piece of theatrical magic as *A Little Night Music* nor does this production have, or call for, performances à la Helen Morse's or Pamela Rabe's, but it is at the same level of achievement.

Hodgeman has his limitations as a director, but they are least evident in the American repertoire for which he has an affinity. It is good to see him so completely on top of a 'commercial' production of a piece of nearly avant-garde frippery like this. *Into the Woods* is a gallivanting but worried piece of work and Hodgeman does justice to its moodiness.

Whether *Into the Woods* can ever be more than an interesting failure, there is a lot of interest in its fizz and fireworks and rather steady contemplation of potential failure. By comparison, *The Herbal Bed* looks like a ready-made period piece. ■

Peter Craven writes a column for *The Australian*.



Flying high

The Wings of the Dove, dir. Iain Softley (independent cinemas). This fine film starts with gusto and never looks back. The opening credits roll across a brittle dance of oval lights on dark water. It is a brilliant pre-emptive coup—Shakespearean prologue in Venetian glass. Watch me, it says, I glitter and dissemble; I'm always more than I seem—worse, better, more dangerous. This is subtle, grand cinema, with every sombre or gorgeous visual element a servant of meaning.

Henry James' late novel of the same name (published 1902) is a convoluted tale of Janus-faced adult love. Softley, whose casting and direction does James justice, takes astute risks: for example, he gives the prodigiously talented Michael Gambon just two short scenes to establish the degraded authority of the father of the film's heroine, Kate Croy (Helena Bonham Carter). Croy is human night soil but appallingly sympathetic. And unforgettable. Softley uses his scenes—all opium and greasy smoking caps—to generate the familial context of Kate's own desperate manipulations of the two people she loves. Money complicates affections, in Kate's case fatally. Or tragically—the story of Kate's triangular attachment to a déclassé journalist (Linus Roache) and an American heiress (Alison Elliott) comes close to tragedy, and allows

Bonham Carter the chance to play in a darker register than usual, turning her crisp beauty to sombre account. (She is an Oscar nominee, deservedly.)

The film starts on a train, the London underground, with its pulse of modernity and death. Softley has shifted James forward by a decade; this is a London of late-period orientalism—all Arts and Crafts Movement curves—and industrial incursion. So the metallic beading on Bonham Carter's gowns is never merely beautiful (although it certainly is that too—*The Wings of the Dove* is sumptuous beyond Peter Greenaway's reach and

Merchant Ivory's imagining). When the action shifts to Venice, decay and splendour become the visual corollary of the tumult of the characters' lives.

This is ensemble cinema of the best kind, cinematography, acting, script and directing—even costuming—all concerted to complex story-telling ends.

—Morag Fraser

Stock heroics

Amistad, dir. Steven Spielberg (general release). It could fairly be said that this is Spielberg's attempt to do an African version of *Schindler's List*. *Amistad* is a partly fictionalised account of the extraordinary revolt of 53 Africans in 1839 against their slave-trading kidnappers. The story is full of brutality, tension and pity as you would expect, but suffers from that curious Hollywood malaise—piety mingled with predictability. Was it too much to ask that Baldwin (Matthew McConaughey), the Africans' defence lawyer, should not be played as a cute young brilliant maverick? That John Quincy Adams (Anthony Hopkins) should not be played as a cute old brilliant maverick? That the courtroom scenes should have some gravitas instead of the tired repartee of goodie lawyer versus baddie lawyer (an over-directed and very subdued Pete Postlethwaite)?

The story is a great and inspiring one, and deserves a better script. It will pass all

the worthiness tests and even succeeds in being moving, particularly when Djimon Hounsou as Cinque, the Africans' leader, is on screen. Hounsou has a wonderful presence, and it is his performance along with Nigel Hawthorne's (as Martin Van Buren, the pro-slavery president) that lifts this movie out of banality. *Amistad* is really interesting when it tracks the history of Van Buren's determined attempts to force a verdict against the Africans, even dismissing a too-favourable judge and jury, and installing a judge thought to be more complaisant. When that fails, Van Buren appeals to the Supreme Court, stacked with Southern planters, providing a fascinating lesson about the desirability of separation of powers. Political interference by the executive in the highest court of the land? It could never happen here.

—Juliette Hughes

Pale pink

Ma Vie En Rose, dir. Alain Berliner (independent cinemas). Hanna (Michele Laroque) and Pierre (Jean-Philippe Ecoffey) are new to the neighbourhood. They hold a housewarming party at which they introduce their four children. Ludovic, aged seven, makes his appearance dressed as a girl, complete with earrings and lipstick applied more competently than most seven-year-old girls could manage. 'This is Ludovic,' say his parents. 'He's the joker in the family.' But he's not joking. Some time later, he is visiting the house of Pierre's boss, Albert (Daniel Hanssens), for a play date with Albert's son, Jerome (Julien Riviere). Ludovic dresses up as a girl, appoints a teddy bear as vicar and pretends to get married to Jerome. Unfortunately, the clothes Ludovic wears belong to Jerome's sister who is recently deceased.

This is the beginning of a long series of incidents in which Ludovic's behaviour, however unconventional in its own right, manages to touch raw nerves in the adults around him. His father is retrenched and Ludovic gets the blame. His mother becomes emotionally frayed and Ludovic is again held responsible. They move house and Ludovic is again the villain. Most stories of this type go to great lengths to show how the behaviour of parents affects children. This one is the other way round. At no point is it explained why Ludovic insists that he is a girl. Only that his parents can't cope.

Of course, there are dozens of films in which the right person is trapped in the

wrong body. It could be an adult in a baby's form, a child in a dog's, a child in an adult's, a giant in a small person's, etc. *Ma Vie En Rose* shares the same opportunities for comedy as films such as *Look Who's Talking*, *Big and Honey*, *I Blew Up the Kids* and it uses plenty of them. Unfortunately, as far as gender is concerned, many of us have forgotten how to laugh and there are times when this film realises it should be taking itself more seriously and falls a little flat.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Get down

Boogie Nights, dir. Paul Thomas Anderson (general release). Its sartorial sleaze and splendour alone would make *Boogie Nights* an important historical document. Seventies' Italian nylon and eighties' diagonal-zip shirt fronts may suggest a film with more style than substance, but far from it: *Boogie Nights* is a surprisingly subtle film with a quality that slowly soaks you right to the bone.

Jack Horner (Burt Reynolds) makes 'exotic' films, and while he is quite happy for people to enjoy them for the sex alone, he also dreams of powerful narratives and classy characters that will keep audiences in their seats beyond the first strip. Meanwhile a young night-club employee who dreams of being a 'big, bright shining star' walks by Jack's table. Quicker than you can say 'pants down', Dirk Diggler is born.

While tracing the rise and fall and rise of this young stud, *Boogie Nights* also affords a look at the surrounding world of coke-snorting girls on roller skates, porn-queen

mothers who miss the children they have lost, and fat men with lots of cash. But the film is not a simple list of losers who can do little besides drop their flares; it explores the importance of self-respect in the face of exploitation, and the appreciation of art in a base, but lively, form. When all is said and done, the characters are looking for the same things most of us crave: recognition and community, some of which they find, some of which they don't. Anderson directs *Boogie Nights* with enormous good humour and stark simplicity, which make for thoughtful, dark, humane cinema.

All the performances work. Reynolds is seventies man incarnate, Wahlberg is intelligently brainless and Julianne Moore plays porn star Amber Waves with enormous compassion. The stand-out performance—brief but brilliant—is Alfred Molina as a madly menacing playboy, dancing about in tight jocks and a silky gown to the strains of Rick Springfield's *Jesse's Girl*.

Don't be put off by the R rating: all the surprises in *Boogie Nights* are welcome.

—Siobhan Jackson

Cider with Bosie

Wilde, dir. Brian Gilbert (general release). There is one thing that really cannot be disputed about *Wilde*. Stephen Fry was born to play the part, and is absolutely perfect as Oscar. And yet, in some ways, Stephen Fry is the only good thing about *Wilde*. Of course his role is more than considerable, he is in practically every frame of the film, and being so good, he pretty much carries the film.

And this is not really to suggest that no-one else can act, or that the production is somehow shonky. In fact, the acting is good and the production is sumptuous. But I think that it has all been poorly served by the writing and the direction. I was looking forward to a complex exploration of Wilde and his circle, but the writer and director chose only surface areas to explore Wilde's life. For example, at times it felt as if there were some plan afoot for the audience to be treated to a recreation of every famous photo ever

taken of Wilde (and Lord Alfred Douglas). This suggests a genuine delight in the way things looked, and a lesser interest in the things under the surface.

Because of this visual imperative, the stories of Oscar Wilde's life are reduced to vignettes. His marriage to Constance, for example, is almost told through montage. His passion for Douglas (and other men) seemed to be only available to us through sexual encounters.

Perhaps Wilde really was too glib, too anecdotal, too extravagant, too dazzling in his public life, so that anything else about his life seems banal and a bit of a bore. The makers of *Wilde* are certainly great admirers of the dazzle.

—Annelise Balsamo

Picture book

Oscar and Lucinda, dir. Gillian Armstrong (independent cinemas). Something is missing in the heart of this film. It has spectacular performances, grand cinematography and broad sweep, but the piano wire with which Peter Carey kept his original magic-realist novel together has slackened under Gillian Armstrong's direction. Bits drop off into incoherence, or confusion.

Carey's was a risky novel, anyway, with its blend of harsh religion, sombre father-and-son narrative (deriving from Edmund Gosse's famous autobiography) and Dickensian cavalcade. Armstrong is faithful to the detail but not quite mad enough perhaps, or ruthless enough, to keep the wild shimmer of the story as she translates it to film. Odd, really, considering the material there to be worked with. Even the fantastic church drawn up the river to remote outpost of Bellingen seems to have more lead than glass in it.

Part of the problem lies with the lack of balance in performances. Ralph Fiennes' strung-up Oscar is a craftsman's cadenza, but it has an isolating effect—the other performances seem to bounce away from it into a different order of being. And not always a very interesting one. Cate Blanchett, as Lucinda, is left to compete with Fiennes' compulsive arthritic postures and the result is a kind of frantic grimacing. Sometimes the two characters spark and you get a rush of understanding of their shared obsessions and their angular passion. But mostly they miss one another. It is a curiously disappointing film.

—Morag Fraser



Morgan Freeman in *Amistad*



Festival of Australian Film. The first festival of Australian film passed with smaller fanfare than it deserved during January in Melbourne.

The earlier films had a fascination: the immersion in another time was often gripping in a way that even really good later films such as *The Castle*, *Mad Max 2* and *The Year My Voice Broke* could not match, because the older films had the power of things half-remembered being rediscovered. The older films give us now far more than their directors intended: rehearsals of sensibilities that never pass unexamined or unlayered today. This was evident in the fact that all the films were organised into groups: 'The Place'; 'Those Who Were Here First'; and so on.

Floating Life, directed by Clara Law (in the category 'Those Who Came Later'), tells about migration generally and Australia particularly, by sensitive exploration of a multi-generational Chinese family's experience. Leaving Hong Kong for obvious reasons, they attempt (and fail) to recreate their family's harmonious balance in Australia. They are wealthy and educated, which brings issues other than physical survival into sharp focus. One of their daughters has already established her career and set up a home in a place like Templestowe or some equivalent Ultima Thule in Sydney.

The term 'trackless suburbia' takes on a new twist as her ageing parents attempt to go for a walk in their new neighbourhood, not knowing that there's nothing, no-one anywhere. They lovingly admire their daughter's huge white house until she terrifies them with her litany of things wrong—shoddy building, venomous insects. She means to educate them in what she has had to learn, but she has quietly come undone here alone in this utterly foreign place. This is a fine and complex film, showing the indissolubility of a family scattered among continents, yet still with power to bring healing and sanity.

Jedda (directed by Charles Chauvel, 1955) is to look at: the bright colours of the processing give it an Albert Namatjira quality; the aerial shots of Northern Territory are given a containment, a palatability to European senses. We know people can look 1950s but the Chauvels

managed to make the Top End look it too. This film is definitely one of Europeans telling tales to other Europeans about one kind

of Australia, of the way white people live with Aborigines on outback stations. The adoption of orphaned Jedda by Sarah McMann (Betty Suttor), the 'Missus' of Buffalo Station, is explained by the recent loss of her own baby, but there is a disturbing feeling that it is as though she had adopted a young wild animal rather than a child. A tight-faced icon of pioneering white womanhood toughing it out alone on the station (only with about 25 'native women' servants), she does manage somehow to excite pity as she bosses everyone around.

There are saving graces in the telling, though—a continual acknowledgement of the whites' lack of understanding and of true mystery as opposed to the manufactured 'mysterious otherness' of non-European culture as expressed by a Somerset Maugham or a Kipling. It is as though the Australian story is trying to establish kinship with the grand British colonialist myth but cannot prevent the bastard truth popping its head up all the time.

Jedda grows from a 'funny little scrap' to a voluptuously nubile maiden of no tribe whose sexuality must be correctly placed with the 'half-caste' head stockman narrator. Missus' husband, 'Boss Dad' to Jedda) is always dubious about his wife's plans; his racism is real but less oppressive to the girl than the neurotic patronage of her adoptive 'mother'. Marriage to the head stockman and life near Missus, playing house in a cabin with frilly curtains, is the only possible future. The adolescent Jedda (Ngarla Kunoth) is thus primed to fall for Marbuck (Robert Tudawali), a doomed stranger from another tribe who comes to work on the station. Denied her real heritage, she is drawn to him in a way that makes you cringe at Chauvel's implication that she is reverting to 'primitivism'. But its sheer vividness and complexity make this a film that should be on all film study courses.

In the hilarious 1937 *Tall Timbers* (directed by Ken G. Hall), the same quality, of trying to interpret Australian life through the European (and American) paradigm, fails in an endearingly ridiculous way. Showcasing the Glorious Australian Timber Industry and the Enchanting Australian Bush simultaneously, it attempts to pack dramatic stereotypes from English light

romantic comedy and Hollywood westerns together with a few low-comic Aussies thrown in. Our hero manages to be a Bondi lifesaver in the opening scene, as well as a fearless pioneering logger working for a 'good' timber company. The 'bad' timber company is headed by Ludwig Rich, who mugs the Jewish-businessman-villain turn (one's political correctness muscle gets a fair workout in these older films). *Tall Timbers* would certainly have earned the approval of Mrs. Humphries when she took young Barry out from Christowel Street to see this picture. There is no other way to account for the hero's prophetic similarity to Bazza McKenzie, in spite of his being so *nicely spoken*.

The stereotypes are so juicy and blatant that you enjoy them as they dive beyond cliché to something rich and strange: the prissy Southern English accents of the principals ('Ay thawt yaw'd nivah cahm. '); the nutty Irish-Aussie servant-class pastorage; the English playboy cad with the little moustache and distressing teeth; the resentful Pommie employee who tries to bring in Union Troublemakers, then resorts to bombs and who is in the pay of Ludwig Rich—who also employs the playboy cad who is the roguish but goofy heroine's fiancé and who has seduced and abandoned the intelligent-and-saturnine-looking sister of the aforesaid resentful Pom ... The real problem, the one continuously disturbing fact about this film, was the hero's suit. Why did they go to all this trouble to establish him as the finest flower of colonial manhood and not find him a suit that was remotely big enough for him?

Let George Do It (1938, directed by Ken G. Hall) is densely significant with *What Made People Laugh Then and Why Isn't It So Funny Now*. Some of the humour is too dated and simple for our multi-layered referential systems. But it is never soft—there is a grittiness about it: you can smell the beer and tobacco and BO across the stalls and sixty years. The pace and chaos are like the Marx Brothers: who doesn't like a good laugh at a cross-eyed chemist while George and his mate are drunkenly trying to buy poison for him to kill himself on the crying-jag end of a spree? The music halls taught the incredible George Wallace how to get laughs and he puts every bit of schtick he's learned out there. No-one in this film is straining to present Australia to the world, only to amuse Australians, and consequently it tells a great deal about us, something that one sees all too rarely.

—Lucille Hughes

WATCHING
BRIEF



JULIETTE HUGHES

Of snakes and saints and pompous gits

MONDAYS ARE DIFFERENT this year. *Media Watch* is no more. It was so perfectly placed after *Four Corners*. You'd be sitting there with your mug of tea (or indeed chardonnay) at 9.15pm after yet another fearless investigation, pondering the

perfidy of those in high places and feeling a tad ineffectual, when on would come that cock-a-snook theme. Immediately you cheered up: some horrible bastards were going to get a bit of a boot up the backside, and you were going to get a good laugh. 'Pompous', 'pedantic'—the epithets were displayed as badges of honour, because no matter what Littlemore's faults might have been (and these have been pointed out to us exhaustively by Ross Warneke and various other housecarls of the media barons whom Littlemore's 15 minutes so affrighted), he was not bothered by the thought that powerful people didn't like him. I am going to miss him dreadfully. Wouldn't he have had a field day with the appointment of Michael Kroger!

Four Corners was pretty good again in its first program for the 1998 ratings season on February 9, as it demonstrated that quite a few Victorian coppers were not exactly Victoria's finest. In the same week *Today Tonight* hit a new low as it went for the time-dishonoured formula of pillorying some poor bloody youth as a dole bludger. I suppose they'd figured well, Singer's gone and Littlemore's gone so they might as well have a burl at beating *A Current Affair* in the hypocrisy stakes. Not easy, but they gave it a real effort. Somehow I doubt that *Frontline* will ever make the crossover to commercial channels as the D-Generation did.

Seven gambled heavily on the Nagano Winter Olympics to pull its ratings up, but on the second day it was beaten by Nine's *The Shawshank Redemption*. When people would rather watch a five-year-old movie than the Olympics there has to be a reason, probably several. It couldn't be a revolt against ads intruding because Seven has been reasonably restrained, and the filleting of movies by slews of ads would have turned *Shawshank* into the usual surreal collage that has made Australian commercial television such a hissing and byword among visitors from countries with rules about that sort of thing. So no, it wasn't the commercial interruptions. I think it's something to do with what the Olympics are becoming.

It's a shock to realise just how long it is since Sarajevo meant only the 1984 Winter Olympics—and Torvill & Dean. (Only history teachers and your old Dad ever thought of the start of World War I.) By Lillehammer in '94 there was a scramble by the skating judges to make sure that they couldn't be ravished again by art on ice. The bronze medal awarded to the British pair was a joke as the gold went to the usual plain-label Russians, and the lights went out on ice-dancing. Nagano was both better and worse than Lillehammer. Better because of the opening ceremony and the well-justified inclusion of snowboarding. Akebono, the sumo grand champion, chased away the evil spirits with a mighty stamp on the *dojo* at the start. There was a great deal of frantic chanting of the kind that made you think of Ned Seagoon being Bulgarian. Lots of fervent scrambling up sacred poles and stuff like that. I enjoyed it, and the

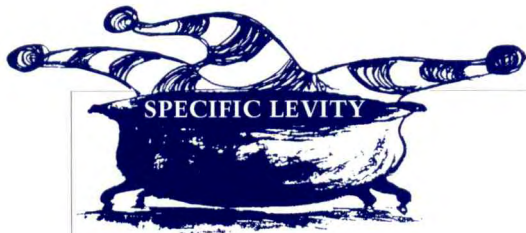
Beethoven Choral Symphony was a nice touch, although the playing was rough in spots. The drawbacks were more nebulous. Without a Torvill & Dean, or even a knee-capping, how are Australians going to be riveted by sports where for divers reasons their athletes have as much chance of winning as, well, T & D at Lillehammer? ('And here is Kylie Rafferty, fresh from her triumphant rise to sixteenth place in the grand slalom ...') We were up against Norwegians and Swiss and Austrians who ski all day and skate all night and luge in between times. They could never beat us at swimming, or even at lighting a barbecue, but I think it was telling on the stamina of the Aussie viewer.

There is good stuff around if you're prepared to dig, and to learn how to set the video: the ratings season has seen the return of *The X-Files*, *The Simpsons* and *Good News Week*. There is a one-off on SBS—very appropriately on March 17—an interesting and sometimes slyly funny documentary on St Patrick. The only drawback is the title: *Patrick; His Life, His Legend* sounds like the sort of book the school library threw out in the 1970s on the grounds that it hadn't been taken out since 1949, but don't be put off. There is knowledgeable stuff here and some terrific photography. The writings of the legendary saint are compared with the hype prepared some centuries later by Vatican spin doctors, and the result is worth a watch, especially (with its revelations concerning the origins of St Brigid) for old Brigidine girls like *moi*.

WE USED TO SING A SPECIAL HYMN to St Brigid, a really glutinous one called 'May Brigid Bless the House Wherein You Dwell'. Its musical style sat somewhere between 'But Only God Can Make a Tree' and 'Mammy', while the lyrics were quite impossible to enunciate without going into an Irish brogue. We would spend the rest of the day with a terrible urge to say 'begorra'. Now, the documentary informs us, St Brigid owes her existence (as does Patrick his legends) to some eighth-century scribes who got to work on the Druid deities of the Irish people to effect a Christian takeover as stealthy and complete as economic rationalism's takeover of the Labor party. Brigid was a contraction/confabulation of the triple Celtic goddess, and some of the things those goddesses got up to would not have impressed the Brigidine nuns I knew in the sixties. Mother Basil would have called them bold-faced hussies. ('With painted faces and stove-pipe trousers—you'd think that butter wouldn't melt in their mouths ...')

There was a different spin going on in *Papabile*—*The Men Who Could Be Pope* (*Compass*, ABC, February 8). Seeing the processions of grey-haired stone-faced bachelors in robes of varying sumptuosity made me wish that there were a Stuart Littlemore to cheer us all up afterwards. There was one particularly dandyish specimen who was a real worry. A positive Beau Brummel of a cardinal he was, in an alb as diaphanous as a Dinnigan, under a chasuble that Lacroix would think over-ornamental. If that one gets up, then we can all look forward to an *ex cathedra* pronouncement concerning the grievous sin of shabbiness. (The Franciscans will just have to go.) ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer and critic.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 61, March 1998

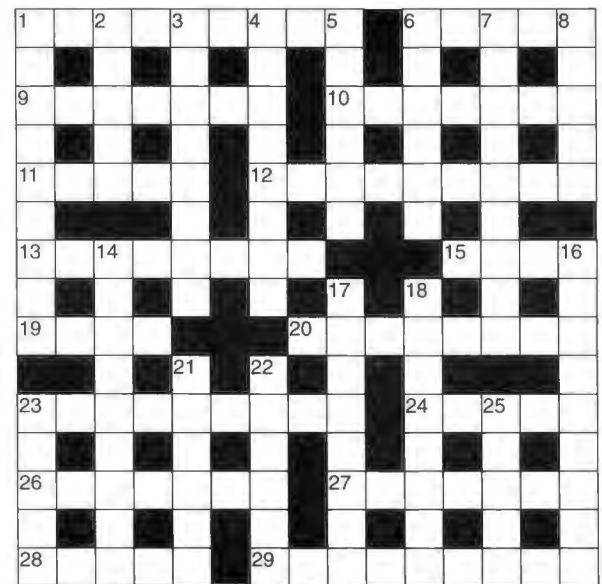
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

1. Break down what was written for 13-across, perhaps. Strange mood creeps upon us without reasonable beginning. (9)
6. Who holds 15-across at the pearly gates? (5)
9. Giant in charge of the sinking ship. (7)
10. See 4-down.
11. Tears out to find the blockheads. (5)
12. Take umbrage about forty-nine I had expected to be able to bounce back. (9)
13. The quiet movie could have been called 'On the Beach' for its visual effects—or sound system? (3, 5)
15. Found in 13-across, they sometimes point to the solution. (4)
19. Repeat act! (4)
20. Frustration shared as nitpicking continued. (8)
23. Would such a one crave iron in the diet? A juicy steak, more like! (9)
24. One mile per litre? Not right to apply force! (5)
26. Smuggled old wine as part of the plunder. (7)
27. Being hard of it is a trial. (7)
28. Admit defeat and hand over the profits. (5)
29. Now and again, provide a deputy. (9)

DOWN

1. Duty list put back and seen by staff, possibly. Could cause an explosion! (9)
2. Treat the queen to the cold shoulder even though she is more attractive than most. (5)
3. Scottish fellow almost a stick-in-the-mud. He'd be better off in the Benedictine way, say. (8)
- 4 & 10-across. He, well-known in the movie world, and I, unclad perhaps, could be called a bookish couple. (5, 3, 7)
5. Measure tilt and call for support. (6)
6. To choose the French garnish could bring trouble. (6)
7. State of the past or present? Could cause strain! (9)
8. Severely criticise the leg of lamb, for instance. (5)
14. Patience and perseverance could have cured Anne. (9)
16. Incidental allusion to the car's right flicker, perhaps. (9)
17. Tim went through a strange phase—espousing an Australian philosophy of life. (8)
18. My friend is adept at fencing, even without any physical training. She has a stake in it! (8)
21. Special brand I use for the trimming. (6)
22. & 25. 6-across and 23-down, as leading Personal Investors, broke zero order, with this award for 4-down and 10-across. (6, 5)
23. Novelist exercises caution with the unknown. (5)
25. See 22-down.

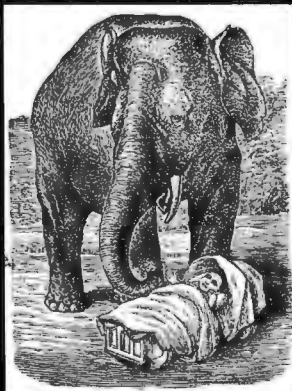


Solution to Crossword no. 60, January/February 1998



Our mistake! Missing clue for Crossword no. 60, January-February 1998, no. 22 down: 'A feature to be found in, perhaps, every church. (4)'

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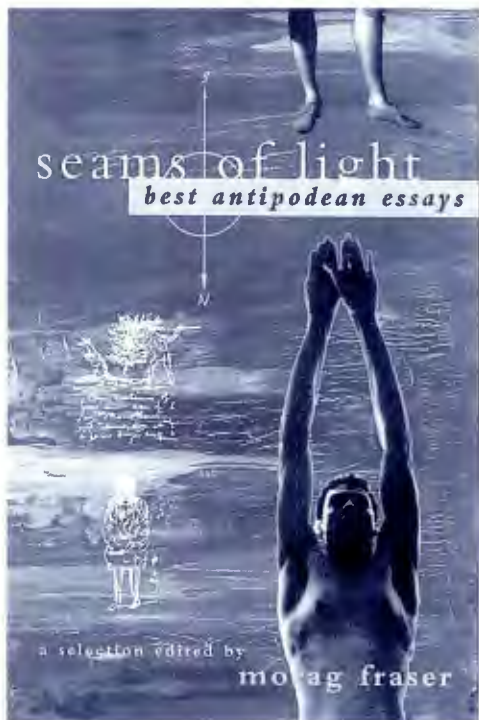
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