

Boots on the ground cannot replace faces in a community <i>Jack Waterford</i>	1
Suspect motivations behind stark Government rhetoric <i>Frank Brennan</i>	3
Emissions Task Group squibbed its challenge <i>Les Coleman</i>	5
Anti-corruption measures eclipse human rights in Cambodia <i>Allister Hayman</i>	7
Brendan Keilar points the way to a better world <i>Michael Mullins</i>	9
Ben Cousins not alone in the wasteland of addiction <i>Barbara Chapman</i>	11
Refugee policy still broken after Rau scandal fix <i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	12
Who has the fairest IR policy? <i>Keith Harvey</i>	14
'See, judge, act' more than truth by consensus <i>Stefan Gigacz</i>	16
Dialogue threatened with extinction <i>James McEvoy</i>	19
In search of Henry Lawson's mother's birthplace <i>Brian Matthews</i>	20
Empathetic and provocative parts of the sum <i>Tim Kroenert</i>	22
Knowing where the bodies are buried <i>Tony Smith</i>	23
Near the hallowed cricket ground <i>Brian Doyle</i>	25

Eureka Street is published fortnightly online, a minimum of 24 times per year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd

Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

Requests for permission to reprint material from the website and this edition should be addressed to the Editor.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned.

PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

Tel +61 3 9427 7311
Fax +61 3 9428 4450
Eureka@eurekastreet.com.au

©2007 EurekaStreet.com.au

©2007 EurekaStreet.com.au

Boots on the ground cannot replace faces in a communit

Columns - Capital Letter

Jack Waterford



More than 30 years ago a task force was commissioned by the Commonwealth to tackle a national disaster among Aborigines, which, particularly in remote areas such as the Northern Territory, was robbing young Aborigines of their childhoods and scarring them for life.

It was no mean expedition. Before it was over it had visited more than 600 Aboriginal communities and country towns in all parts of rural Australia, and seen over 110,000 people, including 60,000 Aborigines, at least once. Task force teams drove about 100,000 km. Each had had a substantial medical examination. From the results of the initial examination, about a fifth were given an more intensive specialist examination by some of Australia's most skilled doctors. Nearly 2000 people received surgical operations, a good number in special army hospitals in the middle of the Australian desert, and another 6000 mostly older people were given glasses.

Around 30,000 people in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia were involved in the month-long mass-treatment programs.

There had been no expedition on this scale before, and there has been none since. The model of its organisation, and its practical findings, were widely admired, and the model and the experience was later used overseas.

The task force approach was the National Trachoma and Eye Program, led by Professor Fred Hollows. It was focused on blinding eye disease, but neither the conditions it encountered nor the instincts of Fred Hollows limited it only to looking at eyeballs. Every person the program saw was given a general health examination, and, in particular areas visited, the program made extensive additional studies of particular problems being encountered, including the incidence of sexually transmitted disease, respiratory disease, skin infections and infestations, middle ear conditions, and diabetes.

The program was the genius of Gordon Briscoe, now Australia's most senior Aboriginal historian, who had earlier played a key role both in establishing the Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service and in recruiting the wild and irascible Fred Hollows to be its foundation medical director. Its establishment was also funded by a challenge that a bright doctor-come-politician, Peter Baume, threw at the various Australian medical specialist colleges - that, if they really were about the public interest rather than their self-interest, they ought to prove it by getting involved in improving Aboriginal health.



The College of Ophthalmologists took up the challenge, and not only with a tight salaried

task force, but with the additional and unpaid assistance of hundreds of ophthalmologists who volunteered. Many of these are still involved in providing ongoing services to Aboriginal communities.

The program cost the Commonwealth about \$4 million in 1979 dollars. At various stages, when, for one reason or another funding was in the balance, government was given to understand that, if needs be, the program could carry on by bulk-billing the Commonwealth a GP fee for each examination, and a specialist fee for each specialist examination, as well as surgical fees for all procedures. Had we operated on that basis, the cost to the Commonwealth would have been at least \$8 million.

I, and my wife, worked several years with the program. I first became involved, as a reporter, during funding negotiations in 1975, and, once the program began operating spent a month reporting (and pitching in) with task force teams the next year, inter alia recording Fred Hollows memorable phrase that "if the health services around here were organised for animals rather than Aborigines, the RSPCA would prosecute".

I was so bowled away by the disaster of Aboriginal health that I obtained a two-year leave of absence from *The Canberra Times* and went to work with an Aboriginal medical service in Central Australia, helping to set up new services. Then I went to work directly for Fred as an organiser, dogsbody and report writer. My wife, Susan, whom I met on the program, organised surgery programs in the wake of the main teams' progress, and mass treatment programs.

Trachoma is still around, but neither with the intensity and severity of old: in 1976 virtually every Aboriginal child in three quarters of geographical Australia had the infectious, conjunctivitis, stage of the disease, and about one in four old people (people aged 60 or more) were blind from trachoma, corneal eye disease or cataract. There is still too much Aboriginal blindness, but the likelihood of old-aged blindness among the middle-aged remote Aborigines of today (who were kids or young adults then) will be but a fraction of what it once was.

As now, the root of trachoma, and almost all the other illness we saw, was living conditions. Poor and over-crowded housing, if it could be called housing at all, inadequate water supplies, an inability to separate garbage and sewerage from the living environment, and poor diet. Inadequate or non-existent medical services made virtually every Aboriginal the host of what Dr Peter Moodie called "a wardful of diseases in each body". Treatment helped, but exposure did not create resistance, and those 'cured' were quickly sick again.

There were times when, in describing what we saw, we used phrases such as 'national disaster' and compared the national mobilisation to help the 1974 Darwin cyclone victims with the resources going into Aboriginal affairs. We made use of the army too, and had high praise for its style of operation. But the army's help, and what was needed, had very little in common with the impatient 'boots on the ground' approach and coercive methods which seem to be favoured by Mal Brough, the former soldier turned instant expert on Aboriginal affairs. Indeed it was as much the failure of Brough-style authoritarianism as the lack of investment which had created the mess with which we were dealing.

What made us different? We consulted, liaised, talked, reported back, and, so far as we could, we delivered too. Even in 1976 we found Aborigines weary of "yet another survey"

and "yet another lot coming through, making promises, never to be seen again".

The program employed Aboriginal liaison officers who went into communities, long before the teams arrived, to explain what we were doing and why, and to negotiate assistance. Local liaison officers were appointed to help organise the actual visits. We did not wait for people to come to clinics, but went out and looked for them in the camps. In one community, which had been the subject of regular visits by an eye doctor, (of his own initiative, free, but based on people presented by a clinic sister) the doctor told us that, because of his regular visits, there were no blind people here. We saw 30, from the camps, in one afternoon.

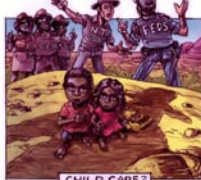
Some of the meetings we initiated metamorphised into standing groups, not least the Pitjantjatjarra Council, which was first convened, from Pitjantjatjarra groups in South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, in response to our request to discuss what people could do about our findings.

We worked hard, in short, to make the people partners in our program, and to give individuals, families and groups a strong sense of ownership. Most of the time, of course, we were heavily self-critical, thinking that we could have, or should have, done it better, but that we were doing it better than it had been done before we were always pretty confident.

I wish I could be as confident about the task forces starting out - first with cops, then with army officers, then some doctors not yet consulted or organised, with alienated state infrastructure and no sense of engagement with the service providers on the ground, let alone the objects of the attention. Complete with abuse by the minister of the people whose cooperation he needs, and the general implication that anyone who stands in his way, or doubts his good intentions, is an apologist for child molesters.

Suspect motivations behind stark Government rhetoric

Australia - Frank Brennan



Now that the politicians have flown out of Canberra and back home for the winter, it is time to take a deep breath and ask what can be achieved by John Howard's announcement of a Commonwealth takeover of Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

There can be no quarrel with the desire to act urgently to assist children in need. It has to be paternalism that actually helps. Everyone wants to heed Noel Pearson's wake up call to the nation: "Ask the terrified kid huddling in the corner when there is a binge drinking party going on down the hall if they want a bit of paternalism".

The Prime Minister has said, "We are dealing with children of the tenderest age who have

been exposed to the most terrible abuse". He asks, "What matters more: the constitutional niceties, or the care and protection of young children?" It is not a choice of one or the other. There are grounds for suspecting the complex motivations of government which puts the choice that starkly. Canberra cannot care for and protect these children if it rides rough shod over the constitutional niceties of relations with Darwin. Canberra must co-operate with Darwin. In the end, Canberra cannot deliver helpful paternalism to these terrified, huddled children without Darwin `s co-operation.

The children must come first in this analysis. The objective is the provision of a sustainable solution to this national scandal. While there can be no doubting John Howard's commitment to helping these children, we know that he also has an eye on his re-election.

In 1978, John Howard sat at the Cabinet table when Malcolm Fraser decided that the Commonwealth would intervene in Queensland. The Commonwealth Parliament passed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Queensland Reserves and Communities Self-Management) Act 1978. There was conflict with Joh Bjelke-Petersen's government over two Aboriginal communities, Aurukun and Mornington Island, which had been conducted as Presbyterian missions. In the end, Fraser had to back down because Joh called his bluff. Joh knew that the feds could not deliver teachers, nurses or police on the ground for just two remote Aboriginal communities in Queensland.

In those days there was a Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Now there is no Commonwealth department specialising in Aboriginal service delivery or policy. Back then, there was an elected National Aboriginal Conference set up by the Commonwealth Government to advise on these issues. Since the abolition of ATSIC, there has not been any elected Aboriginal advisory body to government in Canberra. Over the last eleven years many of the key indigenous leaders have felt burnt off by the Howard government.



Now without a Commonwealth Aboriginal Affairs department, without an elected Aboriginal advisory body, and without a bank of trust between the Commonwealth government and a broad cross-section of indigenous leaders, Canberra wants to help not two but 60 remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. The government has appointed the distinguished Western Australian magistrate, Sue Gordon, to assist with the task. It is no discourtesy to her to point out that the Northern Territory communities and their leaders are not her native turf.

Canberra cannot reach, let alone help or rescue, the terrified kids huddling in these remote corners without the full co-operation of the Northern Territory government, the Northern Territory community and the Northern Territory Aboriginal leaders.

The political edge is in the announced intention to amend the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 and the Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978. The Howard government would be much more likely to bring the NT government and community aboard if it were to leave the self-government law well alone. It would be much more likely to bring the NT Aboriginal leaders aboard if it were to leave the Land Rights Act well alone.

If children are to be helped in the long term, the NT players have to be treated respectfully by Canberra. If Canberra forces hands in the Northern Territory by amending these two key statutes without NT request and approval, there will be good grounds for suspecting that Canberra is not just on about helping the kids.

In the short term, Canberra may be able to co-ordinate a health audit of the children by flying in assistants from throughout Australia. But nothing sustained will be achieved unless Canberra and Darwin work hand in glove. Whatever the Northern Territory's past intransigence, everyone now admits the need for urgent action. It would be very regrettable if the children were made to suffer because of an ideological desire to amend the constitutional niceties of self-government and land rights in the Northern Territory.

Persons performing functions in accordance with Northern Territory laws already have guaranteed access to Aboriginal communities. There is no need to amend the land rights legislation. Canberra can gain access to the huddled children without winding back the self-government of the Northern Territory. Canberra will not reach children without the assistance of the self-governing Northern Territory.

It is not political cynicism to point out that John Howard has not always put the children first when his own political future has been at stake. Let's make sure that the children continue to be put first this time, regardless of other political agendas which might also be at play. Any request to amend land rights and self-government legislation should emanate from a joint press conference by Clare Martin and John Howard.

The children will not emerge from their terrified huddle unless the state and territory police, nurses and teachers are there at hand, regardless of what Canberra says or legislates. If John Howard wants to suggest that the children cannot be reached without forced changes to these constitutional niceties, we are right to be suspicious about other Canberra agendas at play. For once, even in election year, let's put the children first and ensure that any paternalism extended to them will actually deliver long term care, nurture and protection.

Emissions Task Group squibbed its challenge

Environment - Les Coleman



Last week the Prime Minister's Task Group [sic] on Emissions Trading released its Report. Given that even Malcom Turnbull has described climate change as "the great economic challenge of our times", the Report's 200-plus pages are decidedly thin on substance. In particular, for a document that recommends policy actions now, it squibbed the key issues.

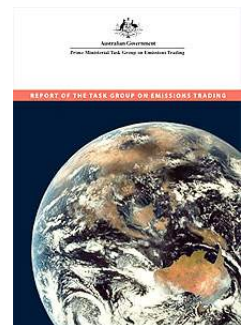
First the science. The Report repeated the mantra that scientific consensus supports climate change, although qualifying this with a comment about uncertainty in precise scale and consequences. There is no doubt that most climate models forecast significant warming and adverse environmental and economic impacts. The key question is: are the models of any value? This is not trivial because climate - like economies, markets and organisations - is a chaotic system and quite unpredictable.

The book *Ice*, published as recently as 1981 by the eminent astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle warned of an imminent ice age. It is a sobering reminder that we probably do not even know the direction of future climate change. That is not to say there are no reasons for concern over global warming. The latest issue of National Geographic Magazine, for instance, contains a sobering article about melting of glaciers and other ice packs.

Just as the 'facts' of climate change are quite uncertain, so are the proper actions. The Report should have had a considered position on how we can decide what to do about such a critical issue when it is surrounded by so much uncertainty. A second key issue that is glossed over in the Report is the philosophical approach to limiting carbon emissions.

It has been consistently shown that the most effective environmental policies are controls and taxes. The car, perhaps the most environmentally damaging technology of all time has had its externalities slashed using controls and taxes. The same is true for smokestack emissions, oil spills, pollution and a dozen other environmental problems.

The Report, however, came down firmly in favour of market mechanisms, particularly trading in carbon emissions. This is surprising as one of the few conclusions that most economists share is that markets have failed to protect natural resources. Climate change, depleted fisheries, salinity and other environmental problems are all said to be due to markets' failure to incorporate the costs of their externalities, or damaging by-products. Now, though, economists are advocating trading in emissions of carbon: markets have suddenly become the solution to climate change.



A third issue relates to the effectiveness of the proposed solution. Emissions trading has been tried already in Europe where it failed miserably, largely due to bureaucratic incompetence. This is not surprising as establishing an effective trading scheme requires a whole new supporting infrastructure. The security to be traded needs to be designed; their volume needs to be fixed, and scams such as carbon havens need to be policed. Then a market must be set up, administered and so on.

Emissions trading was popularised by the Kyoto Agreement, even though it merited only a few fairly limp lines. Subsequent discussions propose that the United Nations would set up a global market for emissions trading (of which Australia would be a part) that will be run by committees of diplomats, duly including representatives of small states and the like. These are the same officials who presided over the oil-for-food scandal in Iraq, ongoing massive wastage at the United Nations, and glacial progress in facilitating world trade. Who



in their right mind believes that the UN could run a global emissions trading system?

If an emissions trading regime is likely to prove wasteful, why would anyone support it? The answer comes from looking at submissions to the Task Group. The strongest advocates of emissions trading include financial markets groups who profit from the new market and coal interests who have spent decades lobbying intensively in favour of emissions- as-usual.

A fourth issue is why act now? The Report and many submissions point to deficiencies in other countries' trading schemes and detrimental impacts from unilateral actions. The Report also notes Australia is one of the few countries that will meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets. However, with little justification the Report says there are net benefits in early adoption of an appropriate emissions constraint and recommends action now. Anyone involved in making tough decisions in a rapidly changing environment knows the benefits of being a fast finishing second. Industry pioneers - even those with good products - who got too far ahead of their constituencies know the disadvantages of moving too far, too fast.

If Australia is serious about reducing carbon emissions, there is a low cost proven technique that can be easily implemented: a carbon tax. The impracticality and huge potential waste from an emissions trading scheme invite scepticism about its effectiveness, and demand a good deal more detail and justification before it can even be considered as worthy of consideration. More fundamentally the uncertainty surrounding this complex challenging issue requires a lot more than glib political, charades to justify action. Sadly it seems that symbols are becoming the preferred response to climate change, and there are no limits on funds available to waste on them.

Anti-corruption measures eclipse human rights in Cambodia

International - Allister Hayman

Eight foreign protesters were arrested in Phnom Penh at the opening of the annual Cambodian Development Co-operation Forum (CDCF). International donors and the government discussed the development of the impoverished South East Asian Kingdom at the forum, set performance benchmarks, and pledged aid for the coming year.



Protesting against what many rights groups consider the wrongful conviction of two men for the 2004 murder of union leader Chea Vichea, the demonstration and subsequent detention spotlighted two major issues on the forum's agenda: the notoriously corrupt political judiciary and an institutionalised practice of intimidation and at times lethal force.

Cambodia still ranks as one of the world's poorest nations. Despite three years of



double-digit economic growth, poverty reduction remains sluggish and the gulf between a wealthy urban elite and a destitute rural population is rising rapidly.

Since 1993 half the Cambodian government's budget has been underwritten by foreign aid - now amounting to billions of dollars - and the CDCF is meant to be the arena where the government is held accountable and donor leverage is used to expedite reform.

In previous meetings the government has regularly failed to meet its agreed benchmarks and this year was no exception. Last year, donors pledged US\$601 million - with Australia the third largest donor - and identified three essential areas for improvement: the passing of an anti-corruption law, the enactment of comprehensive judicial reform, and a commitment to natural resource management.

A year on and the anti-corruption law - which donors have demanded since 2002 - is languishing in the corridors of power; reform of the judiciary is proceeding at glacial pace, while the government's management of natural resources has been lambasted from all sides.

As the protestors were detained by military police, Prime Minister Hun Sen boasted of his government's achievements and furrowed his brow at the challenges the country still faced: rapidly rising inequality and the abject failure of development in the rural sector. These were obstacles that could be ameliorated, he said, by more donor money.

Hun Sen has been the autocratic ruler of Cambodia for more than 20 years. And despite a decade-long string of broken promises, donors have continued to front up for his regime.

Although corruption is deeply institutionalised in Cambodia and widely regarded as accepted practice, the Prime Minister played down the failure to pass the anti-corruption law.

Illegal land evictions and increasing land concentration were also on the agenda and Hun Sen talked about his self-declared "war on land grabbing" that has involved little more than cancelling some large-scale land concessions which are then promptly handed over to other members of the wealthy elite.

The process of allocating land concessions is shrouded in secrecy and has led to massive land consolidation in the Kingdom, with 70 per cent of the country now owned by the richest 20 per cent.

A 2006 UN report described this "as a major shift towards inequality, and one seldom observed in peace time anywhere in the world."

The policy is supported by the argument that large-scale plantations are more productive than small family-sized farms - contrary to evidence in Vietnam and Thailand where vibrant rural economies are founded on small-to-medium farms - but to date only about 72,000 hectares of the 800,000 hectares given over to concessions are in production.

Most concessions are simply denuded of their forests then left idle as speculative investments - creating a peculiar paradox of large tracts of uncultivated land in the countryside that are inaccessible to an increasingly landless rural poor.

Prior to the forum, a report by UK-based environmental watchdog Global Witness documented how the government's policy of land concessions had led to rampant illegal deforestation and implicated high-ranking government officials in the crimes.

The government described the detailed investigative report as "unacceptable rubbish" and promptly banned it, while Hun Neng, a provincial governor and Hun Sen's brother, said if Global Witness came to Cambodia he would "hit them until their heads are broken".

A similarly damning report by Yash Ghai, the UN's Human Rights envoy, was also refuted as ill-informed and inaccurate. Ghai's report stated that the abuse of human rights was a tool of governance in the Kingdom and little had changed over the past decade: namely, the judiciary is still used as an arm of political power; impunity is still exercised in favour of the elite; corruption remains widespread; there are continued restrictions on the freedom of speech, and nothing has been done to protect the collective rights of the indigenous peoples to land.

Hun Sen's response was to shun the UN representative, describing the quietly spoken Kenyan lawyer as "lazy" and "deranged" and likening him to a "barking dog".

But despite the broken promises and the barrage of criticism leading up to the forum, the donors once again came to Hun Sen's party, coughing up a grand total US\$690 million - with Australia contributing AUS\$54 million.

The message seems clear: the economic growth and the stability that Hun Sen's rule has engendered are more valuable in the current international climate than transparency, the rule of law, and human rights.

Now with revenue from Cambodia's off-shore oil reserves set to fill the government's coffers - possibly as early as next year - the opportunity for real donor pressure and true reform may have passed.

Brendan Keilar points the way to a better world

Editorial - Michael Mullins

"Just as cruelty and fear have a capacity to spread and affect others dreadfully, so too, can love and sacrifice spread and affect others. These can transform the world. Brendan died making the world a better place."

Those words are from the homily at last Friday's Requiem Mass for Brendan Keilar, the 43 year old solicitor who was fatally shot after going to aid of a woman involved in a scuffle in central Melbourne on 18 June.



Commentators have seized upon that moment to highlight the powerful effect that goodness can have on a society. Victorian Premier Steve Bracks has confirmed that his government is working on a permanent memorial in the Melbourne CBD for Brendan Keilar, whom he said "did the instinctive thing that many people around Australia would do". The point of a memorial is that such selfless acts of heroism will remain instinctive to Australians only to the extent that examples like that of Brendan Keilar remain in the public consciousness.

The public also needs to know of the existence of acts or cruelty, which do indeed "affect others dreadfully". Last week, we became acutely aware of how human cruelty and fear can take root in Aboriginal communities and destroy their sense of human purpose. The report of the Northern Territory Government's Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse seemed to suggest that it's time to reflect upon the consequences of our latter-day abhorrence of paternalism.

As Frank Brennan says in his article for this issue of *Eureka Street*, everyone wants to heed Noel Pearson's wake up call to the nation. Pearson had said on ABC Radio: "Ask the terrified kid huddling in the corner when there is a binge drinking party going on down the hall if they want a bit of paternalism."



Brennan speaks of a "helpful paternalism" that can be delivered if there is good motivation and co-operation on the part of the Federal and Northern Territory Governments.

This working together for a better world is what is behind the *See Judge Act* template of a strand of Catholic social activism, which Stefan Gigacz writes about in this issue of *Eureka Street*. It's clear how we might apply this formula to incidences of cruelty, or other ills we come across. Obviously Brendan Keilar did exactly this, in very fast motion. But Brennan and Gigacz are stressing that *acting together* is the further requirement for a positive outcome.

Gigacz says that *See Judge Act* is about "a *common* search for the truth at different levels - facts, values and action - by people of diverse faiths, beliefs and ideologies". Similarly, Frank Brennan argues with regard to the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse, that "nothing sustained will be achieved unless Canberra and Darwin work hand in glove".

Ben Cousins not alone in the wasteland of addiction

Features - Barbara Chapman

Although distant from football culture, I have followed Ben Cousins's case with interest. My attention was piqued not so much by the prominent parading of Ben's situation in the daily media as by its synchronicity to the case of a young man I know. Let's call him John.



John shares the same city and roughly the same age as Ben. However, beyond that, our man may as well inhabit a spartan, parallel universe.

John's father was killed when he was a young child, and his family later broke down, abandoning him altogether in his early teens. He speaks of the terror of being alone on the streets in a big, strange city with no home, no food, no friends, no family and no money. Predatory drug dealers soon filled the void with a free smorgasbord of heroin, speed and 'pills' to numb the pain. As soon as he was addicted, he had to earn his fix. So began John's criminal record, for which some may condemn him.

Uneducated, illiterate and unsupported, John later fought his drug addiction; however, alcohol - safe, legal, omnipresent alcohol - remained a problem that caused him more trouble than all the rest put together.



Despite skilfully prepared psychological reports that attest to chronic trauma and debilitating brain injury John has been righteously berated, even vilified, by some in authority who would struggle to imagine a day in his shoes. The reports have been shelved, with negligible action on recommendations that would have given him a fighting chance.

Many have made money out of John, legally and illegally. The illicit drug trade has had its cut, as have the legal breweries. He has contributed handsomely to the keep of many professionals ancillary and central to the criminal justice system: doctors, psychologists, disability case workers, public servants, wardens, and judicial and legal staff. However, aside from the committed and caring work of his lawyers, there have been negligible effective outcomes from this small but expensive army. For almost ten years, John has languished in the shadows of systematic indifference.

Not for John the luxury rehab of the stars, or any rehab at all. So far, despite the efforts of concerned humanitarians to whose attention he finally came, the professional rehab support he has desperately needed for a decade has never materialised.

Yet, each time the criminal justice system comes down on John, it does so more emphatically and with more vociferous castigation for his drinking, no matter its blotting out of trauma, abuse and neglect. The system sees not his kind-heartedness, his respectful

courtesy towards women and children, nor his earnest struggle for redemption. It seemingly cares not for the sincerity in his eyes. Thus, internal bruises are reinforced, along with acute senses of failure, worthlessness, and shamefulness, further burdening this invisibly disabled man at his next round of trying to help himself. For, most assuredly, he is ultimately always left to his own devices.

This is a true story, but the man's name isn't John or anything like it. He has an Arab name and his skin isn't milky white. His family won't forgive him for drinking alcohol and taking drugs, no matter what inner devastation he has sought to imperfectly assuage by doing so. If this changes your reaction to John's story, we may be part of the way to understanding how our society has failed the bright young refugee boy who arrived, imbued with modest childhood hopes and dreams, with two exhausted female relatives, innocently trusting the war was left far behind.

In fact, the war was just beginning. Muscling up against the hopeful little boy in a sunny new land were the potent saboteurs of poverty; family fragility under unrelenting stress; and a system so apparently indifferent to its most vulnerable, invisibly injured citizens that a young man can live and die under a Melbourne railway bridge with his body going undiscovered for months.

Ben and John could have dovetailed on one more score, none other than a sporting pun intended. John is a star at soccer, and could have been a champion sportsman if somebody had detected his early potential, and found him a loving foster home years ago. As it stands, John won't be accepting the honour of the guernsey offered by the Street Socceros to represent Australia in Europe this year. He will be on the futile treadmill of revolving doors between alcohol and prison. Unless somebody, somewhere can open the doors John most needs to a new life of fulfilled sporting and life potential: an effective rehab program and a secure, healthy home.

Surely, big-hearted, sports-loving, egalitarian Australia can bring back its sons from the wasteland of addiction, particularly this one who was too poor to fulfil his potential, but so rich in spirit as to have already beaten the worst demons from a starting point of virtually unimaginable disadvantage light years behind the eight ball. If John can haul himself this far with nothing, literally, imagine what he could do for soccer, for Australia, for himself, if he gets the support he has long deserved.

Refugee policy still broken after Rau scandal fix

Features - Andrew Hamilton

Australian treatment of refugees has been out of the headlines for some months. That may suggest that the changes introduced to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship after the Cornelia Rau scandal have eradicated abuses. But despite some improvements, Australian refugee policy is still destructive.



Let us begin with the improvements. The most encouraging changes have been to the detention regime. The conditions under which detainees live have generally improved, children are not detained, and the government may allow some detainees to live, although under harsh conditions, outside detention centres.

The Department, too, treated with exemplary speed and professionalism the claims for asylum of the first group of West Papuans to arrive by boat.

These improvements are welcome. But Australian policy towards asylum seekers continues to be vitiated by an internal contradiction that expresses itself in the cruel and disrespectful treatment of those who are its objects. It also weakens in Australia the principles on which this nation was built.

The contradiction is this. The only point of signing the refugee convention, as Australia has, is to construct a policy that ensures that those whose human dignity is at serious risk in their own nations find protection. But in reality Australian policy is designed to ensure that asylum seekers who arrive by boat, regardless of the justice of their claims, can make no claim on Australia for protection. Nor, if it can be avoided, will they find protection in Australia. By the treatment meted to those who manage to arrive, too, others will be deterred.



The workings of this policy have been most evident in the travails of the Burmese asylum seekers sent to Nauru. They claimed protection from the persecution they say they have suffered both in Burma and in Malaysia. Australian representatives told them that they would never be allowed to live in Australia, and encouraged them to return to Malaysia without any guarantee that they would not be persecuted there or that they would find any meaningful resettlement to future safety. In effect, Australia was denying them protection and was working for their repatriation to an unsafe place, in contradiction of the Convention.

Government representatives also insisted that their claims for protection would only be heard by Australian officials in a process whose justice and freedom from bias was not reviewable by Australian courts (nor, for that matter, subject to scrutiny and safeguards under any legal system at all).

Understandably, they had little trust in the fairness of this process. They have legitimately lodged visa applications under the Australian legal rules, and insisted on being interviewed under these rules, not outside them. Their appeal to have their applications adjudicated under the rule of law has been taken to the High Court of Australia. The case was adjourned when the Minister's representative guaranteed that departmental officers and interpreters would travel to Nauru to interview the men between July 12 and 20. A delegate of the Minister would then decide on the applications.

Similar issues have arisen in the case of Sri Lankan asylum seekers who have also been

sent to Nauru. They have been put under additional pressure to take part in an extra-legal process, by the announcement that they may be eligible for settlement in the United States. An agreement between the United States and Australia might in return allow some Haitian or Cuban asylum seekers to be resettled here. Even those Sri Lankans found to be refugees under this arbitrary process, however, have no guarantee of resettlement. Their treatment does not reflect a commitment to protect refugees but a determination that they will not be resettled in Australia.

The treatment of the two groups illustrates the destructive nature of Australian refugee policy. It claims to support the international community in ensuring that refugees are protected, but simultaneously removes them from the protection of law and works to repatriate them. It is Australia's version of the Guantanamo Bay solution. Both allow national representatives to decide the fate of other nationals outside the rule of law.

The hypocrisy involved in this conflict between humanitarian commitments and brutal practice inevitably affects a nation's sensitivity to human dignity. In particular, it makes it more tempting for a government to exclude other aspects of its own citizens' lives from the effective protection offered by the rule of law. The changes in Australian security laws reflect this slide.

In the case of refugee policy it also becomes more likely that callousness will infect other decisions and practices. The root of the abuses revealed at the time of the controversy over Cornelia Rau lay less in Department procedures than in Government policy.

This callousness is also reflected in the expulsion from Australia of people without permanent residence who are convicted of serious crime. As with other punitive measures the principle may seem attractive, but the human reality is often pathetic. Young men, for example, who came unaccompanied to Australia as refugee children, form a drug habit that they feed by selling drugs. Their crime is considered serious. So they face deportation back to their own lands despite having no connections with the country, no education, nothing gained from Australia except drug dependence, and no resources to begin a new life. Australia can do better than this.

Who has the fairest IR policy?

FEATURES
Industrial relations

Keith Harvey

Fairness is in the air. The Australian Labor Party's National Conference, held in April, endorsed a new industrial relations policy - [Forward with Fairness](#) - the centrepiece of which is the abolition of Australian Workplace Agreements.

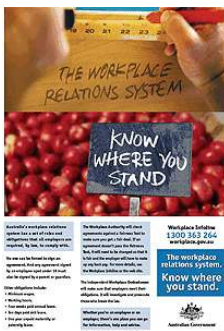
Forward with Fairness
 Labor's plan for fairer and more productive Australian workplaces

Having denied for months that it had an alternative plan for Industrial Relations and soon after Joe Hockey declared that the Government's policy was set, the Prime Minister revealed a new Fairness Test in early May .



The Government also dropped the WorkChoices name, effectively admitting that its \$55 million advertising campaign had failed. However, the new test addresses just one aspect of the 2006 legislation: compensation for the loss of award conditions previously said to be protected by law.

In fact and in law, these special award conditions could be - and were - lost by employees at the stroke of a pen when they were asked or required as a condition of employment to sign an individual contract modifying or removing these conditions.



The Federal Government's Bill provided that new agreements should compensate employees for any loss of these particular award conditions, such as overtime, but the compensation is limited, and subject to various 'let out' clauses.

Although the ALP announced support for the Bill in Parliament, it declared that it did not go far enough and moved a number of amendments in the House of Representatives and the Senate. These included seeking to protect the right of employees not to work on special holy days, Christmas Day and Good Friday, which the Government rejected in both Houses.

In the now familiar manner, the Bill went to a Senate Committee for a review which left interested parties and the Committee itself little time to consider its ramifications.

The Committee reported along predictable party lines: Government Senators supported the Bill, subject to a few technical amendments, while ALP, Democrats, Greens and Family First Senators excoriated the proposed legislation.

The Senate passed only the Government's own largely technical amendments. It compromised with Family First's extension on the protection of redundancy entitlement from 12 months to two years, but refused to make redundancy a protected award matter subject to the Fairness Test itself. Employees can thus lose this right at any time by being required to sign an agreement excluding it.

The legislation has serious flaws. It offers compensation for the loss of only some award conditions - the 'protected' ones. It does not compensate for the loss of unfair dismissal rights, redundancy pay or long service leave amongst other important entitlements.

Australia's largest employer group, ACCI, opposed the introduction of the Fairness Test as an unnecessary burden on employers. They may have a point, since the test is applied by a Government agency after the agreement is made. If it fails, the employer must

retrospectively reimburse the employee for the value of lost conditions.

Administratively, the operation of the test is extraordinary: the Government is hiring another 570 staff to vet around 400,000 agreements each year at an additional cost of \$370 million. Added to the costs already present in the Government's 'simpler' system, it amounts to a deregulated system that costs a small fortune to run - the Pacific Solution applied to industrial relations!

The Coalition came to power supporting smaller Government and privatisation but has now 'in-sourced' at huge cost many functions previously performed by unions and employer associations at little cost to the taxpayer.

The only Church body to make a submission to the Senate inquiry was the Sydney Anglican Church. The Church expressed a range of concerns. However, even with the new Test, WorkChoices Mark II still fails any fairness test based on Christian social teaching.

Since individual agreements remain the cornerstone of the Government's laws - and these can still be forced on new employees as a condition of employment - the fundamental right of employees to bargain collectively and be represented by their union remains absent.

As Parramatta's Bishop Manning said: "The right of workers to act collectively is central to Catholic Social Teaching. It was stated explicitly in the great encyclical [Rerum Novarum](#). The great injustice of the WorkChoices legislation is that it obliterates the principal instrument of collective action which is collective bargaining. Let us be very clear about this: there is no right to collective bargaining under the legislation. Any collective bargaining that may take place is entirely at the whim of the employer. This is manifestly unjust!"

The Government's new laws require employees to be given Fact Sheets explaining their rights under the new legislation. Early indications are that employees are not buying the Government's pre-election change of heart.

'See, judge, act' more than truth by consensus

Theology - Stefan Gigacz

Latin American bishops met with Pope Benedict in Aparecida, Brazil last month to prepare their next assembly in Havana, Cuba in July. They insisted on preparing a three part report in line with the *See Judge Act* method that they have followed since their famous Medellin conference in Colombia in 1968.

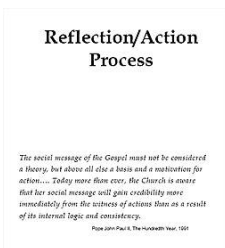
Perhaps this would not be remarkable, except for the fact that the use of the method was apparently a cause of controversy at Aparecida.



Writing in the [National Catholic Reporter](#), Vatican observer John L Allen linked the use of this methodology to what he described as “a cautious embrace of the core legacy of liberation theology, including the option for the poor, the concept of structural sin, ecclesial base communities, and the *See Judge Act* method of social discernment”.

According to Allen, “critics see in the method an implied relativism as if truth can be manufactured by consensus employing the ‘see-judge-act’ process”.

And yet the Latin American bishops in 1968 and in 2007 were doing nothing more than following a course that Pope John XXIII had outlined for them in his 1961 encyclical, [Mater et Magistra](#) in which he described *See Judge Act* as a method for “the reduction of social principles into practice”.



First, one reviews the concrete situation; second, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; third, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles.

In this context, it is perhaps appropriate to consider the origins of this method which will forever be associated with the late Belgian priest, Father (later Cardinal) Joseph Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Workers (YCW) movement, who actually coined the term *See Judge Act*.

Cardijn himself clearly considered *See Judge Act* to be a core component of his legacy to the Church. Significantly, in his speech to Vatican II fathers on the schema of the future Declaration on Religious Freedom, [Dignitatis Humanae](#), he described the method as a key means for developing the “interior freedom” that “exists in germ in every human person as a natural gift” but which requires a “long education”. “I have shown confidence in [young people’s] freedom so as to better educate that freedom”, Cardijn told the Council.

I helped them to see, judge and act by themselves, by undertaking social and cultural action themselves, freely obeying authorities in order to become adult witnesses of Christ and the Gospel, conscious of being responsible for their sisters and brothers in the whole world.

Cardijn’s use of the term “conscious of being responsible”, a phrase that reappears in various guises in nearly all his major speeches, is also highly significant. It is a reference to the definition of democracy promoted by Marc Sangnier’s early 20th century *Sillon* (Furrow) movement as the form of social organisation that tended “to maximise the civic consciousness and responsibility” of each person.

To achieve this, the *Sillon* also developed a “method of democratic education” carried out in “study circles” that examined “the realities of life”. “Every citizen must know the state of the nation; when the situation is bad, he must seek solutions; and lastly, having found the solutions, he must act, “founder Marc Sangnier said outlining the *Sillon* method in 1899.

Marianist Brother Louis Cousin, a 'counselor' of the movement was even more precise in a *Sillon* manual published in 1906.

Drawing on the "social observation" method developed by Frederic Le Play, a mining engineer turned social reformer, Cousin characterised the *Sillon's* approach as going beyond "observation" to "consciousness".

Whereas LePlay's method was based on studies by outside social researchers, the *Sillon* brought together young people in study circles "where no aspect of life would escape notice". Thus, said Cousin, "external observation" was transformed into "consciousness" in what he called the "distinguishing mark of the *Sillon*".

In developing their consciousness-raising method, the *Sillon* also drew on the work of the Catholic philosopher and Ozanam disciple, Leon Olle-Laprune, whose major work, *Le Prix de la Vie* (meaning The Price and/or the Prize of Life), went through fifty editions from its first publication in 1894 until the outbreak of World War II.

For Olle-Laprune, whose students included the pioneer sociologist Emile Durkheim as well as the philosophers, Maurice Blondel and Henri Bergson, life was defined as 'action', as Aristotle had written. Each person, Olle-Laprune said, must therefore endeavour "to courageously and faithfully look at the principles and the facts in order to see, judge and conclude ever more clearly". "In order to act well, it is necessary to see and judge well," he wrote in 1896, anticipating the phrase that Cardijn would later make famous.

For Olle-Laprune, the method was important to "avoid pre-judgments and errors" but also in order "to find the consistency to bring people closer and to reunite". In other words, it was a method well adapted to a pluralist modern society founded on a diversity of views. Cardijn also understood *See Judge Act* in precisely this sense, citing the "peaceful unification of a pluralist world" as his first argument in favour of religious freedom. "Our great task is to unite ourselves with all men of good will to build a more human world together based on 'truth, justice, liberty and love'", he told the Council, quoting Pope John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris*.

In other words, *See Judge Act* has nothing to do with a relativistic approach to the truth but everything to do with a common search for the truth at different levels - facts, values and action - by people of diverse faiths, beliefs and ideologies.

Over the last few weeks, the stem cell debate in various Australian states has shown how difficult it is to arrive at agreement on fundamental issues - even among Catholics of presumably good will. With the emergence of a renewed questioning of the role of religion by philosophers like Richard Dawkins and others, issues of 'intellectual' conflict that concerned Olle-Laprune in the late 19th century are on the rise again.

With the fortieth anniversary of Cardijn's death on 24 July 1967 approaching it may also be time to re-examine the lay apostolate heritage that he did not pioneer but which he joined to the heritage of the whole church.

Dialogue threatened with extinction

Columns - James McEvoy

One strong theme of both philosophy and social science in the twentieth century is the recognition that as humans we are 'dialogical' beings - people who come to a sense of self only in relationship with others. An indispensable aspect of the process of dialogue is the task of understanding the other on his or her own terms. This dialogical theme has worked its way into wider culture: the aspiration to understand other cultures on their own terms is commonplace today. If we slipped into the assumption that our culture is the norm toward which others should aspire, we would not be surprised to be confronted by our prejudice.



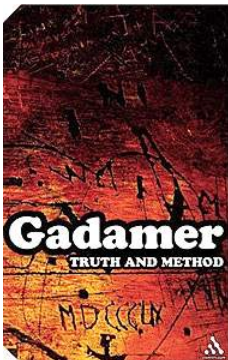
But in recent years, this dialogical view of the world seems at risk. It is certainly contested within the Catholic Church, which at the Second Vatican Council spoke of the church-world relationship as one of dialogue.

Some within the church raise questions such as: when dialogue requires participants to be radically open to the other, recognising and respecting the fundamental differences between cultures, doesn't that put at risk the truths to which the church should adhere? These people fear that the notion of dialogue is loaded with relativist assumptions. They point out the influence of liberal culture on contemporary concepts of dialogue, arguing that in liberal cultures, open dialogue requires participants to set aside metaphysical or religious commitments. And with commitments off the agenda, dialogue becomes the purely procedural exercise of establishing an arrangement with which all parties can live.

From the opposite perspective, others are suspicious about what the church might mean by dialogue when it holds that Jesus of Nazareth is the definitive revelation of God. Can a dialogue in which one party is convinced about the rightness of its position meaningfully be called a dialogue?

What is in dispute is the meaning of dialogue itself. Those who raise the first set of questions are keen to hold on to some notion of truth in dialogue, contending that it is possible to get closer to or further away from the truth. They want to avoid relativist views. Those who raise the second set of questions want to set aside ethnocentric views, in which one's own culture is seen as the norm to which other cultures should aspire. This second group hope to remain open to other people and cultures in dialogue, understanding them on their own terms.

The work of a significant twentieth-century philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer, can shed some light on this dispute and on the broader dispute about dialogue. Gadamer's major work, *Truth and Method*, examines the nature of the human sciences. He argues that the dominance of the natural sciences in our age has led us to misunderstand the human sciences. For Gadamer, the task of understanding other people, cultures, histories and texts is best understood as a dialogue - a dialogue which avoids ethnocentrism while at the same time valuing the ideal of truth in human affairs.



A couple of Gadamer's sentences express this view of dialogue. He says: "In a successful conversation [the dialogue partners] come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding in dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were."

In brief, Gadamer's understanding of dialogue means that conversation partners must deeply value both their own tradition and that of the other. Firstly, dialogue requires that partners come to understand the other in language appropriate to the other's self-understanding. Obviously, this will vary according to the culture studied.

But secondly, the process of accurately understanding the other will involve each partner in attending to his or her own path toward the other. That is, dialogue will engage each partner in clarifying misperceptions of him- or herself. Recognising that I had previously misunderstood the other will bring to light my own prejudices and allow me to put them aside. In the process of dialogue, therefore, conversation partners will come to a clearer understanding of the other's difference and will in turn understand him- or herself anew. As Gadamer puts it, in dialogue "we do not remain what we were".

For the believer this must mean that in the process of dialogue he or she will discover that God is at work in the other in ways that he or she had not previously known. Surely this is what the Vatican Council means when it speaks of the Holy Spirit working in the various voices of our day. When understood as dialogue, the task of proclamation will necessarily lead the believer into a deeper knowledge of God through encounter with the other.

In search of Henry Lawson's mother's birthplace

Columns - Brian Matthews

I notice some twenty-year anniversaries being cited as 2007 edges to the half-way mark. Twenty years ago, speaking at the Brandenburg Gate, President Ronald Regan memorably invited "General Secretary Gorbachev to tear down this wall!" In the same month, in Britain, his bosom buddy, Prime Minister Maggie Thatcher, won her third successive election. And a week or so later Teddy Seymour cruised into the harbour at Frederiksted, St Croix, to become the first black man to officially circumnavigate the world.



Meanwhile, though curiously unremarked upon by local or international media, my

friends, Rick Hosking, Syd Harrex and I set out from Adelaide to drive to Newcastle where we would attend a special gathering of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature. ASAL, as it was known (the founders having abandoned attempts to denote its national reach because the acronym would have been on the nose) was running a three-day conference to mark the 120th anniversary of the birth of Henry Lawson (born 17 June 1867).

We would meet up with other scholarly mates on the way - Peter Pierce, Rob Gerster, Bruce Bennett and Barry Andrews - in Wellington, New South Wales. Since none of us had ever been to Wellington, we agreed to meet at the nearest pub to the TAB. This arrangement worked perfectly and, after a lunch at the pub and a flutter at the TAB, we set off to do some touring in the 'Lawson country' before heading for Newcastle.

I was agonising my way through the final months of writing a book about Louisa Lawson-Henry's mother- so I was keen to see Eurunderee, where the Lawsons had lived for several years, and Guntawang, where Louisa was born on 'Hungry' Rouse's station in February 1848.



Eurunderee was easy. A spare, ivy-wrapped monument marked the spot on that "old hilly corner" and the symmetry of vineyards had mostly replaced the drought-blasted paddocks that Louisa finally abandoned in 1883. But Guntawang was a different matter. Our two-car convoy nudged its tentative way through the network of tracks- at least so they were twenty years ago- in the country of Ratscastle Creek, Slasher's Flat, Two Mile Flat and Guntawang. Yet somehow it was hard to feel confident that we were approaching any kind of actual settlement. "There are signs that lead you on [I later wrote]. You turn this way and that between the long, taut wire fences, the black or green posts that march precisely past, the sighing undulations of grasses and crops on which the late afternoon sun falls with dusty, dramatic grace. At a roadside gate, a man sitting on a tractor yarns with a mate leaning on its mudguard, and both wave you amiably on your way as you bump slowly by. 'Guntawang' said a sign a mile or so back; 'Guntawang' said another small, beaten-up looking piece of board nailed to a handy fence-strainer. But- navigating no matter how carefully- you never arrive: there is no pub, no post office, no CWA; no change in the benign parquetry of land ploughed, harvested, under crop, straggling with native scrub.

There is nothing else. Nothing else at all."

That's how I ended the book. The 'discovery' of Guntawang was a curious experience and none of us was sure whether it was a good thing or not that the birthplace of a woman like Louisa Lawson remained so anonymous.

I was reminded of this expedition when Stephanie, the daughter of a friend in the next town, asked if I would help her with a school literature project. Naturally, I was happy to do so and happier still when I discovered the topic was Henry Lawson.

She had chosen Lawson, however, because no one else had. No one was interested, she explained. There was nothing there for them, apparently, nothing there at all. Her teacher, she later told me, seemed unhappy with her choice, as if it was in some way maverick, and berated her when she revealed she had consulted "a professor" who "knew lots about Henry Lawson."

As an old Irishman in Dublin once said to me, when he discovered that the fax machine in the office he was minding was not, as he'd thought, a photocopier but that it didn't matter because he couldn't work either of them, "It's a remarkable world we live in." Remarkable indeed when one of our seminal writers is scarcely studied, hardly mentioned any more in schools and universities; when you can "get into trouble" for having an inoffensive shot at a bit of Lawsonian research.

Lawson will turn 140 this year; his Russian contemporary, Chekhov, with whom as a short story writer he has been honourably compared, will be 147. I bet old Anton's moment creates more official ripples and waves in the Ukraine than Henry's does here.

Empathetic and provocative parts of the sum

Film Review- Tim Kroenert

The Dead Girl. Rated: MA. Director: Karen Moncrieff. Starring: Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Mary Beth Hurt, Marcia Gay Harden, Brittany Murphy. 94 minutes. [website](#) .



The success of Alejandro González Iñárritu's trilogy *Amores Perros*, *21 Grams* and *Babel* has illustrated the power of multi-story films, which examine the lives of seemingly unrelated people whose fates become potently, albeit incidentally, connected.

Writer/director Moncrieff's *The Dead Girl* utilises that same kind of multi-faceted structure, although the overall impact is less profound than Iñárritu's films.

That said, her intentions are less lofty. While Iñárritu tends to focus on such grand themes as fate and the global community, Moncrieff seems to be simply interested in people- in particular, women- who are seeking liberation from circumstances that oppress them.

The Dead Girl takes the form of five mini-films, fused by the circumstances surrounding the murder of a young woman. This crime pervades the film like an unpleasant stench, meaning that even the most innocuous moments are grimed with a sense of unease.

Collette is the heroine of the first story, "The Stranger". She's the one who stumbles upon the dead girl's body; ironically, the macabre discovery proves to be a catalyst to her escape



(of sorts) from her emotionally abusive mother (Piper Laurie).

In "The Sister", Byrne portrays the forensic scientist who examines the girl's body. Leah believes the body is that of her long-lost sister, whom her parents- particularly her mother (Mary Steenburgen, in a superb performance)- have been obsessed over for 15 years. The apparent discovery offers Leah both the chance to grieve, and to move on. "The Wife" is arguably the most tragic and affecting of the five stories; the woman in question (Hurt) is the wife of the killer, and the film portrays her in the process of learning her husband's terrible secret. The knowledge she uncovers provides her with the upper hand, and her first taste of real power, over her neglectful and repressive husband.

In "The Mother", the oppressive force in the life of the mother herself (Harden) is guilt. She is searching for answers to fill in the blanks of her estranged daughter's final, difficult years of life.

In "The Dead Girl", we are finally privy to the events that led up to the murder that set all the other stories in motion. Compared with the poignant character sketches that preceded it, this final segment seems merely obligatory, with Murphy overacting and Moncrieff providing a compassionate but trite extrapolation of a life that's utterly down-and-out.

This misstep in the final act hardly diminishes the impact of the rest of the film, which is empathetic and provocative from first to last. What it fails to provide (and the lack of which causes it to fall short of Irwin's films) is a resonant climax or thematic lynchpin.

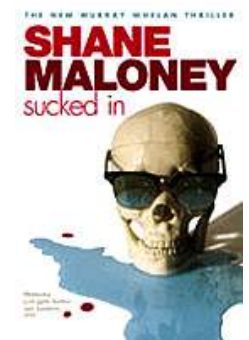
In short, it prevents *The Dead Girl* from becoming more than the sum of its parts, so that ultimately it is simply a collection of strong short films, rather than a powerful feature.

Knowing where the bodies are buried

Book Review- Tony Smith

Sucked In by Shane Maloney. Text, Melbourne, 2007, 276pp. Paperback, RRP \$32.95, ISBN 978-1-921145-44-5, [website](#).

Winston Churchill described democracy as the worst political system- except for all the others. The same could be said about the Australian Labor Party amongst Australia's political parties. Shane Maloney has recognised the potential for drama and farce within this historically significant institution, and created Murray Whelan as the vehicle through which these traits can be expressed. *Sucked In* sees Whelan reach a cynical peak, working the numbers to his advantage and as he Truly Believes, to the long term benefit of the party and nation.



Over the course of six novels, Whelan has risen through the ranks from

trade union researcher to electorate secretary, to ministerial adviser and on into the Victorian Legislative Council. His seat of Melbourne Upper centres on Sydney Road where "rusted-on-blue-collar meets multicultural melting-pot". Whelan skilfully balances the interests of local branches that are predominantly Greek, Turkish and Lebanese. It is 1997 and the demand on everyone's lips is 'please explain!' Whelan and his mentor Charlie Talbot, federal opposition frontbencher and "elder of the tribe" are on a bush tour called Labor Listens. As they dine in the Grand Hotel Mildura, Charlie dies suddenly while reading the Melbourne *Herald Sun*.

The intertwining stories of *Sucked In* involve Whelan's attempts to protect Charlie's reputation and to ensure that Coolaroo, Charlie's seat in Canberra, which overlaps with Whelan's state seat, goes to a suitable successor. The police are inquisitive because it seems possible that Charlie's death was caused by a newspaper report that a body has been uncovered from Lake Nillahcootie. The body is likely that of Mervyn Cutlett, who disappeared at the lake in 1978 while on a fishing expedition with Charlie and other labour movement heavyweights to discuss union amalgamations.

Knowing where the bodies are buried is one means to ensure a successful career in the Labor Party, but Cutlett's old associate Sid Gilpin is interested in blackmail of a financial kind. Whelan must tread carefully to ensure that no blame attaches to his deceased comrade Charlie, while maintaining some leverage with his companions at Lake Nillahcootie, and especially with Senator Barry Quinlan. By factional agreement, the Left, despite splitting more often than a "hyperactive amoeba", is to fill Charlie's seat. Quinlan, the Left's influential powerbroker, plans to parachute his staffer into the seat.

Whelan observes that "by long-established custom, the ALP is loath to pass up any opportunity to erupt into a full-fledged public brawl, particularly with a safe seat at stake". To manipulate the pre-selection process Whelan uses his knowledge of "the five basic moves in Labor decision-making- the stack and whack, the roll and fold, the shift and shaft, the Brereton variation and the whoops-a-daisy". It helps of course that he pays the annual dues of half the branch members.



While Labor might come across as full of contradictions, other parties are dismissed as uninteresting. Premier Kenneth Jeffries, with his "trademark cowlick...comb of a strutting cockerel" heads a government claiming to have 'Victoria- On the Move'. Whelan says "On the take more likely, I thought. You could smell the greed in the air". The major parties consider the Greens "fruit bats in the political canopy".

Once a political fringe dweller, Whelan is now absorbed in the party and parliament. Maloney paints a comprehensive picture of political life, particularly its paradoxes and extravagances. One chapter deals with the aphrodisiac of power as Whelan and television journalist Kelly Cusack engage in quick sex, excitement heightened by the possibility of discovery, in this case on the despatch table in the Legislative Council.

While *Sucked In* is solid on the work of the MP, it is perhaps less of the thriller than the

previous Whelan novels. Initially a likeable muddler, Murray Whelan has become very slick. Perhaps he could not have survived without developing his ruthlessness and cunning, but the mature Murray seems less appealing. So it is that his relationship with his son Red provides some relief from the political grind. Now finishing high school and begging driving lessons at every opportunity, Red has developed into a responsible lad despite being torn between his separated parents in Melbourne and Sydney. Murray thinks Red is fine considering he has a politician for a father and a "loser politician" at that. However, Red is often a few steps ahead of Murray.

Whelan too is learning. He studies Greek conversation, mainly to woo classmate Andrea Lane. Curiously, Maloney renders some phrases in Greek script without further explanation. Generally however, Maloney needs no translation for lovers of breezy prose crammed with contemporary references. *Sucked In* is an easy, entertaining read as we approach yet another federal election in which the leaders' images provide the only real choice against a background of policy convergence. But for its indubitable basis in reality, *Sucked In* would be fine therapy for those jaded Australians who desperately hope to see some idealism erupt in affairs of state.

Near the hallowed cricket ground

Poetry - Brian Doyle

Two Melbourne Poems in Miltonics

On Wurundjeri Way In Melbourne,

A guy asks me if I know what street this is.
He's sitting by the wall at the train station.
I say I'm a Yank and don't know a thing.
It's named for the people who were here
For maybe sixty thousand years, he says.
See those gum trees down by the river?
Those're white gums, wurund is the word,
And they harboured grubs you could eat,
Jeri, they were called, so the people here,
They were called the Wurundjeri. Get it?
That's the one blackfella name in the city,
And it's not even a street you can walk on.
It's a highway just for cars. Four big lanes.
We got streets named for judges, mayors,
Princes, merchants, governors, brewers,
Butchers, graziers, soldiers, pawnbrokers,
Chemists, architects, engineers, bakers,
Kings, queens, coppersmiths, bakers,
Horse-sellers, Germans, and late wives.

We even have a street named for a ship,
Niagara, by Lonsdale and Little Bourke.
But for the people here thousands of years
We have a street where there are no people.
You have to admire the neatness of that, eh?

On Punt Road In Melbourne,

Near the hallowed Cricket Ground,
A man walking his dog tells a story.
We are standing in a thicket of gums
Not far from the languid Yarra River.
He tells me that when he was a child
There was a man living by the river
In a tiny hut made of leaf and thatch.

You Yanks would call him a hobo,
He says. People just let him alone.
He scrounged around in the park.
Lord knows what he did at night.
This was no sweet old man either.
He was dirty and he smelled bad.

He'd come roaring out of that hut
If anyone got too close, you know.
For a while he had a mean dog too.
God knows what happened to him.
When we were kids we thought he
Was ancient beyond all reckoning
But he was probably all of thirty.

You wonder what he was all about.
Just back from Vietnam, maybe, or
The wife dumped him, or a kid died,
Or he spent his days sucking bottle,
Who knows what put him in his hut?
We didn't think about stuff like that.
He was just the old fella on the river,
The crazy man, the man in the bush.

Haven't thought about him in years.
They came to get him out of there,
Of course, eventually, a complaint,
One complaint too many, Cremorne
Threatened by armies of vagrancy!
And his hut fell apart after a while.
It was right down there. I remember.

