EUREKA STREET

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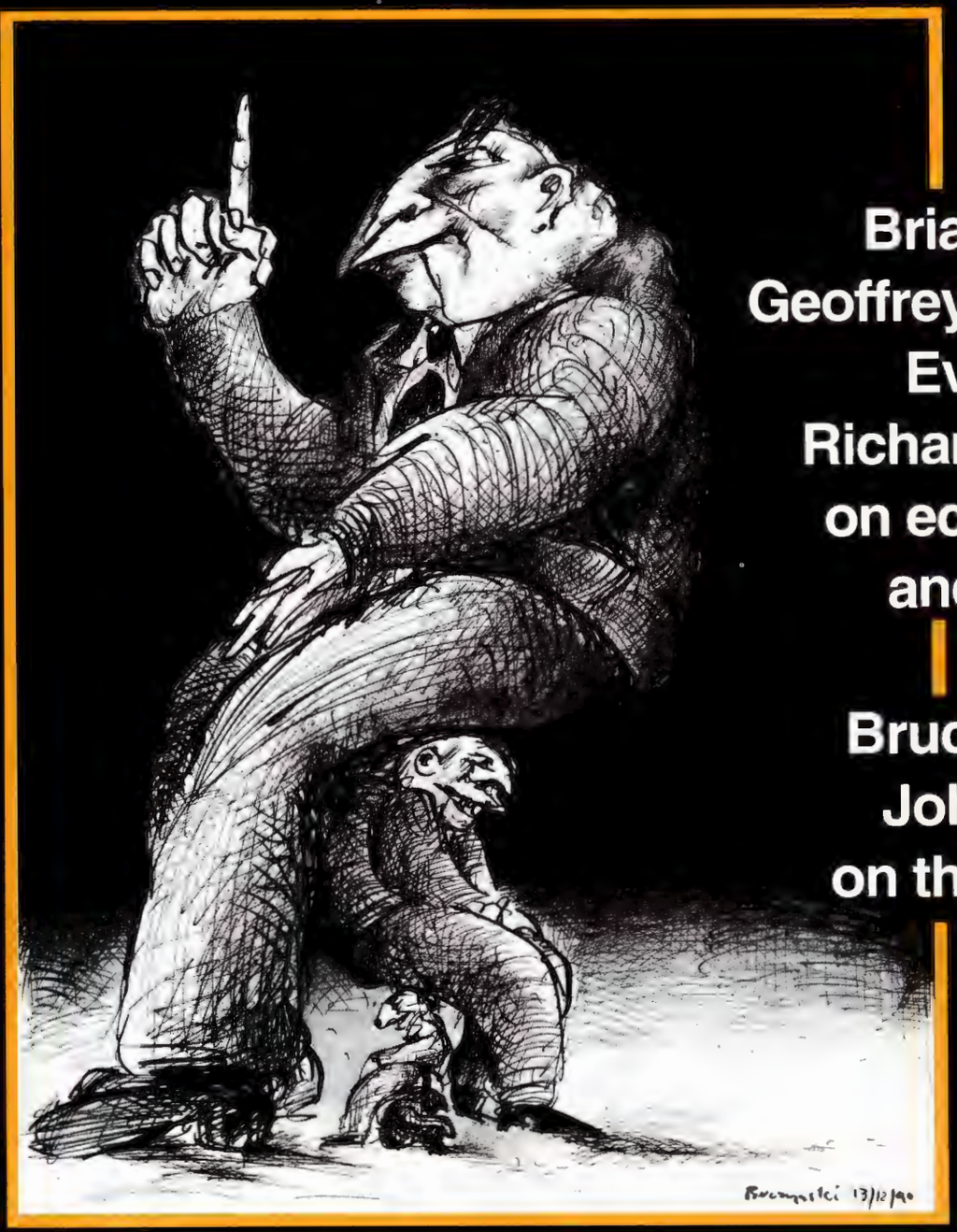
Now hear this

Ideas and power in Australia



Brian Toohey
Geoffrey Brennan
Evan Jones
Richard Curtain
on economists
and theories

Bruce Duncan
John Coulter
on the bishops

Margaret Simons on waterfront reform

Jim McClelland on Catholics and Communists

Helen Garner
on the
festival industry

THIS WOULD BE, WROTE JEFF DOYLE, the 'short-timers' endless monument'. The Vietnam War Memorial, in Anzac Parade, Canberra, was built with money largely raised by Australian veterans. It was erected without the delays and compromises in design of the Australian War Memorial; without the controversy of The Wall in Washington. The Canberra memorial, with its three concrete slabs or stelae inclining gently inwards, was dedicated on 3 October, the fifth anniversary of the Sydney 'Welcome Home March' for Australian veterans of Vietnam.

In the space inside the memorial, one is invited to read the slabs. Sanitised quotations about the war appear on one of them. Another uses a photograph of troops being evacuated by helicopter. The third is pointedly blank, as if asking the spectator to inscribe there his or her version of Vietnam. The names of the 504 men who died in the war are graven on a metal scroll, never to be read again, which is contained in a capsule suspended above the memorial's three massive but delicate walls.

The dawn service and the dedication were the essential events of the weekend. Humorous and sentimental accompaniments there were in plenty. Battalion reunions took place en masse, while officers dined together as well. Powers issued a Big Red beer to mark the occasion, and incidentally to celebrate 'the Australian tradition of larrikinism'. On Saturday afternoon the Lorrae Desmond Quality Handicap was run at the Canberra racetrack, while others who had entertained the troops decades before gathered again to perform on Sunday in the rain. Their venue was Old Parliament House, which was the headquarters for the Vietnam Memorial Organising Committee.

Tents were set up on school ovals to accommodate those who found no room in Canberra's inns. Veterans trickled steadily into the city during the previous week. Bikers, wearing the 'Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club' leather jacket, seemed to travel in pairs. More usually, one found groups of three or four veterans walking ruminatively about a city which many had probably never visited before, but where—almost 30 years ago—the decision to commit Australian troops to Vietnam was made.

As the dawn service proceeded, the morning grew colder. Hillocks left and right of the Australian War Memorial were covered with veterans (including several hundred from the United States) and their families. The principal chaplain's dedication mentioned 'freedom' 10 times and, in the polemical spirit of the early years of the war, spoke of the need 'to resist tyranny and aggression and to preserve freedom'. A scarlet-clad bugler materialised on the parapet of the war memorial as the chaplain spoke. After *The Last Post* and the silence, Brigadier Colin Kahn's address made a different emphasis from the chaplain's. He argued that all should 'put to rest the remaining phantoms from which some of our colleagues and next-of-kin still suffer.' And then a helicopter, rising from the lake, brought those phantoms back vividly into being as it skimmed up Anzac Parade, just over the heads of the crowd, and into the shadow of Mount Ainslie.

Although unwelcome, politicians came to the main service of dedication. While they spoke, many thousands of veterans mustered in order of march on the Reid sports ground. Peter Poulton, chairman of the memorial committee, briefly spoke to the crowd. Remarkably, its members were eclipsed by the 15,000 and more veterans who marched. Truly this was their show for one another, rather than for the benefit of live and television audiences.

All services and ancillary units were represented. Battalions marched at nearly full strength. Contingents of allied nations were there. Americans bore a wide black banner in memory of those Missing in Action. Normie Rowe took his place in the vanguard of the motorcycle contingent. All marched past the monument in the trees, most impressive of the architecturally and chronologically ill-assorted collection that studs Anzac Parade.

After the dedication, and the march, the veterans wandered quietly back into Civic, thence to other reunions. Their medals jingled. Again, they preferred small, squad-sized groups. By chance we found our way to a Vietnamese restaurant. A mildly pornographic video was playing over the heads of a dozen extended families. Men in the uniform of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam were present, besides others wearing the canary and mauve tie of their defunct nation. There was one other table of Australians: six veterans who sang *Saigon Tea* to the tune of *This Old Man*.

And on this long day the last words went to an ex-army engineer, who'd been sitting alone. Delighted to meet Ken Unsworth, architect of the memorial, he produced in turn one of his collection of artefacts of the war. It was a Zippo lighter, and carried its own heartfelt inscription:

If I had a farm
In Vietnam
And a house in Hell
I would sell the farm
And go home!

—Peter Pierce

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A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121.

Justice and the bishops

IN LATE SEPTEMBER Dr Michael Costigan told a small audience in Sydney that one of his principal anxieties about *Common Wealth For the Common Good* was that the bishops' statement on the distribution of wealth in Australia would have brief notoriety and then sink like a stone. His worry—unfounded, as events have proven—condensed much of the history of the post-Split Catholic Church, a history that has combined the bishops' caution and reluctance to engage in broad political debate, with a degree of defensiveness which has inhibited social analysis and criticism..

Well now they have done it. And the statement has attracted even more attention and reaction than Michael Costigan might have dreamed of through the years of preparation. Radio, television, leader writers, economists, politicians, columnists, trade unionists have all had their say about the statement, some of it highly critical and polarising, some of it sectarian, some of it serious, some of it more affirmative than anyone could have expected. 'Never underestimate the power of the rough wooden cross' declared one journalist usually more given to Rawlsian analysis. Clearly the statement has helped to open a vein of dissent in Australian public life.

One of the most frequently voiced complaints we hear from journalists and political analysts is that this has been a decade of intellecual orthodoxy—some go so far as to call it tyranny—in Australia. Too few people advise Australia's decision makers and that the advice of those few is too narrow. *Commonwealth For The Common Good* will go on generating detailed discussion of policies like the Oppostion's proposed goods and services tax, but its more lasting effect may well be to help re-legitimse heterodoxy in public life and give heart to the dissenters a healthy society needs.

Report card

WITH SMALL MAGAZINES going down like skittles, and with influential sections of the mainstream media content to collapse the traditional distinction between reporting and political campaigning, it is heartening to learn that so many of our readers like what we're doing.

Forty per cent of *Eureka Street* subscribers replied to a readership survey sent to them in September. Their responses were detailed, encouraging and helpfully critical. We particularly enjoyed the comment of the reader who compared *Eureka Street* to a Japanese lunch box—a bit raw, a bit cooked, a bit sour, a bit sweet.

Full details of the survey will be published in our next issue.

Documenting Bougainville

As *Eureka Street* WENT TO PRESS Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) troops were moving into the rebel stronghold in central Bougainville, in what may be the final and bloodiest phase of the island's civil war. Three days earlier, journalist Sean Dorney and the ABC *Foreign Correspondent* team he was accompanying were ordered off the island by the PNGDF. Dorney, in a report that in the circumstance, was surprisingly measured, told ABC radio that the situation on Bougainville was 'a complex and difficult problem,'and in his view the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), was 'not much of an alternative'. The women on Bougainville, he said, probably held the key to getting some change in the political system because they would no longer tolerate a situation that has deprived their children of schooling for the past two to three years.

Dorney is unusual in his determination to focus on the main event. The push from Australia has more often been for the sensational—'Journalists thrown out' etc. Reporting of the war on Bougainville has been at best patchy, at worst partial. The PNGDF's violations of human rights on Bougainville have been well publicised, especially those in which Australian-supplied helicopters have been involved. Amnesty International, the Pacific branch of the World Council of Churches and other non-governmental organisations have been vocal in condemning Papua New Guinea and, like the Mamaloni government in Honiara (Solomons), have favoured the withdrawal of the military from Bougainville and self-determination for the island's people. These critics appear to be in no doubt about the outcome—a new mini-state or even, at some later stage, a union of Bougainville with the rest of the Solomons archipelago.

What has been less publicised has been the activity of the BRA and its impact on the lives of Bougainvilleans, friend or foe. In many accounts of the Bougainville tragedy the basic truths are rarely told. A degree of romanticism has enveloped the BRA, who have been portrayed as 'freedom fighters' battling a giant multinational company and an oppressive government in remote Port Moresby. The background is much more complex, as the literature on the subject shows.

In July this year the Archbishop of Port Moresby, Sir Peter Kurongku, who is himself a Bougainvillean, issued a pastoral letter in which he made very disturbing claims. The pastoral received scant attention from the Australian press. (Rowan Callick in *The Australian Financial Review*, 21 September 1992, and Sean Dorney on Radio Australia were exceptions.)

The archbishop's statement, 'Bougainville crisis from the churches' point of view' accuses the BRA of:

- not representing the people of Bougainville;
- having 'many times' committed atrocities worse than those of the PNGDF, including wanton murder, rape, the 'burning of whole villages', the torture and detention of civilians, widespread destruction of property etc.;
- frustrating the supply of medicines to BRA-controlled areas; causing shortages by misappropriating supplies for its own supporters; murdering Charles Loubai, the doctor in charge of Arawa hospital; burning the MV *Cosmaris*, which was bringing Red Cross supplies to Arawa etc.;
- being led by men who are motivated in the first instance by greed rather than by a genuine sense of injustice, and who are practising extortion and theft on their own people;
- misleading the media and the Pacific branch of the World Council of Churches, and, through Radio Free Bougainville, spreading falsehoods.

The archbishop's pastoral goes on to say that the Catholic Bishop of Bougainville, Gregory Singkai, who initially was Minister for Education in the rebel Bougainville Interim Government (BIG), had withdrawn support for the BRA. For his own safety, Bishop Singkai has had to abandon his episcopal residence and retreat to his home village. The pastoral criticises the Uniting Church's former bishop-elect, John Zale, a minister in the BIG, as 'once a good man' but now ' ... completely cut off from his own people.' Zale has recently had his preferment withdrawn by his church.

The BRA has had a ruthless way with peacemakers. In September 1989 it murdered John Bika, a provincial government minister, in front of his young family. Bika had sought virtual autonomy for Bougainville, though his proposals stopped short of secession. This year the BRA murdered Anthony Anugu, a former MP and leader in South Bougainville, and a one-time supporter of secession who had negotiated a compromise with Port Moresby for his district. His murder turned much of the south against the BRA.

Archbishop Kurongku , as a Bougainvillean, necessarily has strong ties and his pastoral must be read with that in mind. But it nonetheless testifies to the extreme complexity of the situation on Bougainville and the shifts in alliance. In its recent incursion the PNGDF can only have moved with the cooperation of many of the villagers, and although it would be foolish to think that this means that eventual secession is not the aim of many—or most—Bougainvilleans, the BRA/BIG has been decisively rejected.

What must follow will be a painful process in which there are likely to be abuses on both sides. Nor is it certain that the new Highlands-dominated government in Port Moresby will handle this process sensitively. But it is to be hoped that, whatever happens, commentators will take into account the full context of events. Archbishop Kurongku's pastoral is an important document in explaining that context.

Wren territory revisited

From Don Rawson, division of economics and politics, Research School of Social Sciences, ANU.

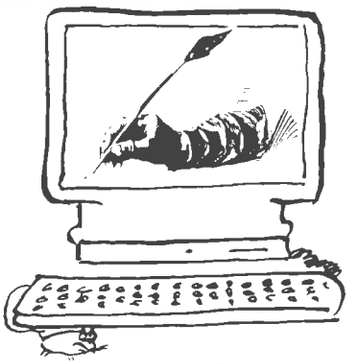
The value of the correspondence between John Wren and H.V. Evatt and others, as set out and analysed by Professor James Griffin in the three most recent issues of *Eureka Street*, is obvious and requires no additional praise from me.

Professor Griffin's quite favourable view of Wren, and the doubts he raises against Frank Hardy's many dubious charges, deserve to be put. But since in the last of these articles he kindly cites an ancient thesis of mine as source for a statement of fact, I should like to make one point reported in that thesis and add a couple of childhood recollections.

The fact that the liberal and idiosyncratically radical Maurice Blackburn was member for the state seats of Fitzroy and later Clifton Hill, in 'Wren' territory, certainly shows, as Professor Griffin says, that Wren's influence was far from unlimited. Blackburn, by all accounts an honest man, certainly believed that Wren was behind his opponents in the Labor Party and that, as he told the state parliament in 1931, the party in his electorate was controlled by 'sinister parasitic interests, which are much worse than the interests represented by my [conservative] friends on the Opposition side of the house'. This was strong language from the usually placid Blackburn.

The 'childhood recollections' are these. From the 1920s to the 1950s my father, Roy Rawson, was the proprietor of a radical bookshop in Melbourne and, as such, the friend of a number of members of the state and federal parliaments including Blackburn, by then a federal MP, and, at the state level, William Slater and John Holland. The latter, a member of the Legislative Assembly from 1924 to 1955, was a sceptical and independent Catholic of the 'I take my religion from Rome but not my politics' school.

In 1938 the communist-led New Theatre league attempted to stage Clifford Odets' anti-Nazi play, *Till the Day I Die*, in the Collingwood Town Hall. This arrangement was cancelled at short notice by the Council administration. In informing my father of this by telephone, Holland said, 'The Voice has spoken'. On being asked for elucidation, he said, 'I won't say more over the phone, but you know his daughters'. Wren's daughters Mary and Margaret were also among my father's customers.



Much later, in 1948, the family of Tom Tunnecliffe, the member for Collingwood, which the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry on Tunnecliffe describes as 'at the heart of John Wren's patronage network', followed Tunnecliffe's wish to have a non-religious, 'Rationalist' funeral. Again according to Holland, Wren was so strongly opposed to this, and presumably was taken so seriously, that it was in doubt whether John Cain, the Labor parliamentary leader, would feel it prudent to take part.

The matter was of serious concern to the party's leaders though at a later stage Holland was informed by Pat Kennelly, then the party's state secretary, that the matter had been resolved and Cain would indeed speak. It is a fact that the service itself was held at Tunnecliffe's house, prior to the more formal state occasion at the crematorium, which may or may not be relevant to this story.

I shall say no more since I do not want to give such fragments any greater authority than they deserve. But on this subject perhaps even fragments are of some value.

Don Rawson
Canberra, ACT

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

Church's wealth a stumbling block

From Chris McGillion

In a 1991 progress report on their inquiry into the distribution of wealth in Australia, the Catholic bishops devoted an entire chapter to a discussion of the church's own wealth, wrestled with some touchy matters arising from it, and gave an undertaking that this 'vitally important area' would 'not be ignored in the present consultation'. But in their final report, the subject gets a cursory three pages, the tone is defensive rather than sympathetic, and the bishops leave it to St Basil to remind the faithful that ultimately it is their responsibility to ensure that the needy go neither hungry nor naked.

No one would disagree with St Basil but why is this the bishops' last word on the subject? They say it is because an investigation into the church's wealth is a complex task given that different bodies are responsible for different material and financial resources and that not all of those resources are 'owned' in the usual sense of the word. Apologists for the bishops are even more coy. They dismiss the whole question as a non-issue, suggesting that no one in their right mind could expect the church to sell off its assets, give the money to the poor and start again.

But both lines of argument miss the point. The Australian Catholic Church may not exist as a single entity in any legal sense but it does exist in a moral sense. Surely that's what the bishops' wealth enquiry was all about. It is true that, as a moral entity, the church doesn't have much influence in most people's lives, and even less in the public arena. But whose fault is that? To a large extent it is the bishops' and they are guilty of it again on the subject of wealth.

The Australian bishops are never going to have much impact until they put the devotional aspect of the faith into proper perspective and convince people that the church has relevance to the whole of their lives. A first step is to develop a national profile for the church in the way of the Americans or the Brazilians. Our bishops haven't done that because it's easier not to. A

national profile would mean updating many of the church's pre-federation legacies—not the least of them the tacit pre-eminence accorded to each state's archbishop—and infusing the semi-annual bishops' conference with a little consensus decision-making. A national profile would reflect something of the national culture, perhaps the egalitarianism and 'fair go' approach of ordinary Australians that bishops laud in their wealth report but which is very far removed from the aloofness, secretiveness, and overriding sense of hierarchy in the church. Moreover, any church which has a strong sense of its own national identity is suspect in Rome these days. And as the Australian bishops, collectively, are more Roman than most, this is a strong mark against experimentation or adventure.

Consequently, the bishops have a poorly developed sense of national leadership. As their wealth report demonstrates, they are prepared to point the way to a better future for this country but unprepared to demonstrate by their own actions how we might get there together. They prefer the shelter of legal complexities to the vulnerability of prophetic witness.

The Australian Catholic Church exists in a sociological sense as well. And in this sense it is no longer a church of impoverished immigrants, as it was for most of the 19th century, or of the socially marginalised, as it was for most of the 20th century. Most Catholics now are as middle class as anyone else, they are no longer discriminated against in any way, and their church is the largest and arguably the most powerful in the country.

To suggest that the church look at its own wealth, then, is not to covet the gold in its chalices or to try to engineer some sense of guilt over its success. It is to raise questions about the economic and social interests of the church in the 1990s, and how these interests determine the way church resources are used. Once that is done, those uses can be put to the test of Gospel imperatives. Is it still appropriate, for instance, for so many of the resources and so much of the energy of the church to be channelled into education when most Catholics can avail themselves of a quality education in public schools? If a substantial investment is appropriate, should it be across the board or concentrated in areas of endemic disadvantage? The same questions could be asked about church hospitals and nursing homes.

Again, apologists will point to the good works in which the church is already engaged to suggest that such questions are unnecessary or misplaced. But it is one thing to treat the poor on the fringes of the church, using a charity model that gives them no power over their predicament. This is the approach the bishops take in their wealth report. It is another thing again to invite the underprivileged and the oppressed into the mainstream life of the church, to make them feel at home there, and to take seriously the preferential option for the poor.

Chris McGillion
Sydney, NSW

From Fr Ted Kennedy, parish priest of Redfern.

The bishops' statement was nearly five years in the making. When it was begun, the really poor Australian Catholics felt uncomfortable in the church. Pat Dodson, the one and only Aboriginal Catholic priest, had not long withdrawn from the priesthood, finding church authorities too abrasive on Aboriginal culture.

It is not insignificant that this statement has been published by Collins-Dove, a company acquired by Rupert Murdoch.

The universal church was, and still is, seething with an underlying theological tension. The majority poor church (Latin America, Asia and Africa) has adopted 'liberation theology' as its theological matrix; it rejects most traditional European theology as bearing the indelible stamp of theological colonialism, bent genetically to favour the rich. The document draws unmistakeably from the received language of European theology, but it does incorporate one single contribution from the poor church—the concept of preferential option for the poor. But this is handled clumsily by the bishops.

In trying to come to terms with this phrase, the bishops never get past the conception of a church *for* the poor to a church *of* the poor. They do not betray any inkling that it must involve prioritising the spiritual initiative that lies in the hands of the poor, from whom the rich are called to receive. They still fall back on the false image of a one-way street whereby material and spiritual resources are despatched in the direction of the poor. One might have hoped that such an image of throwing goods at the poor would have been finally dismissed by the Apostle Paul as in itself profitless as early as the year 54.

At the launch of his book in the National Press Club, Cardinal Clancy, in toasting the affluent for their astuteness and donations, turned the meaning of a noble concept on its head by pedanticising and thereby trivialising it. Michael Costigan seemed caught off-guard when called on to second the 'toast' to the rich. He offered the fatuous example of a shadowy figure anonymously despatching a large cache of notes across an ever-

widening gulf—in a brown paper bag! (shades of the Bjelke-Petersen inquiry!). We are a long way here from the thought that the poor should have a voice in the way that church finances are spent, and that we should make personal friends of the poor, using the mammon of iniquity so that they (the poor) will make us welcome in an everlasting dwelling place.

The poor are demanding the gospel-right of a *direct* voice in the essential life of the church, not just to be spoken for. They do not trust a select company of exclusively male, exclusively unpoor, uncoloured and unoppressed, even to understand what they want said. The poor intuitively know that this document is not written by soul-friends, bearing, as it does, such a remarkable resemblance to the familiar tired rhetoric of politicians. For them, this document carries all the disillusioned promise of a bounced cheque.

Harvard professor John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* has been one of the most challenging books in legal and philosophical circles for 20 years. It has a crispness and freshness lacking in the statement, which disparages Rawls' work in favour of a set of church concepts so faded that they cannot provide elbow-room for the poor to act with their own initiative.

There is still the comforting assurance for the wealthy that they are entitled to use their wealth according to their calling (or station in life) (p40). Cardinal Clancy made ample use of this theological period piece, a relic especially designed for the old Catholic aristocracies.

Aboriginal people feel particularly let down because the bishops make no reference whatsoever to the crux of Aboriginal pauperisation—the question of land. No wonder that the poorest of the poor consistently find that such attempts to represent them end up severely unnuanced and suffering from an unbelievably radical omission.

Mister man
Have you looked at your face
Like mine that is mirrored in land?
Yours reflects only on pools.
My image goes deep in the sand.

—Kevin Gilbert

The first Catholic Archbishop of Sydney was an English Benedictine monk, John Bede Polding. In the select committee on Aborigines (10 September 1845), to the question: 'Do you think Aborigines have such a idea of the value of land, as to lead them to view its settlement as an act of aggression?' he answered (and Catholics can be proud in, at least, the memory): 'I am convinced of it, and I think that is the root of the evil.'

In the draft document the bishops promised that they would not resile from an honest self-scrutiny as to the just use of church wealth. The final document reveals that they in fact have done just that.

It falls short of the solemn Christian duty to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. It would seen that, though some bishops are courageous enough in their own individual voice, the dangerous memory of Jesus has become too much to carry their corporate spirit along.

Their noisy dying world
Deafens them like the last lapse
of blood.
Corpses which, in other days,
Would have greened their crops
Block the city's drains.
Their public speeches dwell
on private morals.
Neither hating nor approving
great evils.
Surprised in attitudes of prayer
They struggle to remember
which they chose.
A scorched-earth policy or
The laying on of hands

—Vincent Buckley

E. Kennedy
Redfern, NSW.

Caught on the back foot

From Thomas Lumley

Your Archimedes column in the September issue asks if right-footers should be able to kick a football further because the angular momentum vector points in the direction of motion when they use a torpedo kick. This is rather like asking if it is easier to go from Brisbane to Melbourne than back again because Brisbane is at the top of Australia and Melbourne is at the bottom.

The 'right-hand rule' which specifies whether the angular momentum vector points forward or backward is just as arbitrary as the choice of north as the top of a map, and stems from the fact that most physicists are right-handed. If the grand final were watched in a mirror, left and right would be reversed, but the motion of the football would look just as correct. The laws of physics governing the grand final are completely indifferent to this sort of mirror-reversal.

If you want a question about left and right to ponder, I would suggest this: Why does your mirror image have left and right interchanged and not up and down?

Thomas Lumley
Ormond, VIC

Recipe for honeyed speech

From Fr John Doyle SJ

Difficulty in understanding what others are saying erects a barrier that is often regarded as an instance of classism or racism, things quite different from class or race.

It is very important for us to speak an intelligible variety of English that does not require constant translation. This is not a matter of purist, plum-in-the-mouth, Henry Higgins sounds, but of ordinary clear diction. At a deeper level, it is a way of avoiding awkwardness, hostility and violence—of fostering harmony and peace in multicultural societies like ours.

In support of this bold assertion, I cite Professor John Honey's *Does Accent Matter?* Republished last year by Faber and Faber, this provocative paperback should be on every teacher's reading list ... if only to stimulate staffroom discussion and hasten the hunt for learning materials.

John W. Doyle
Campion House, Kew, VIC.

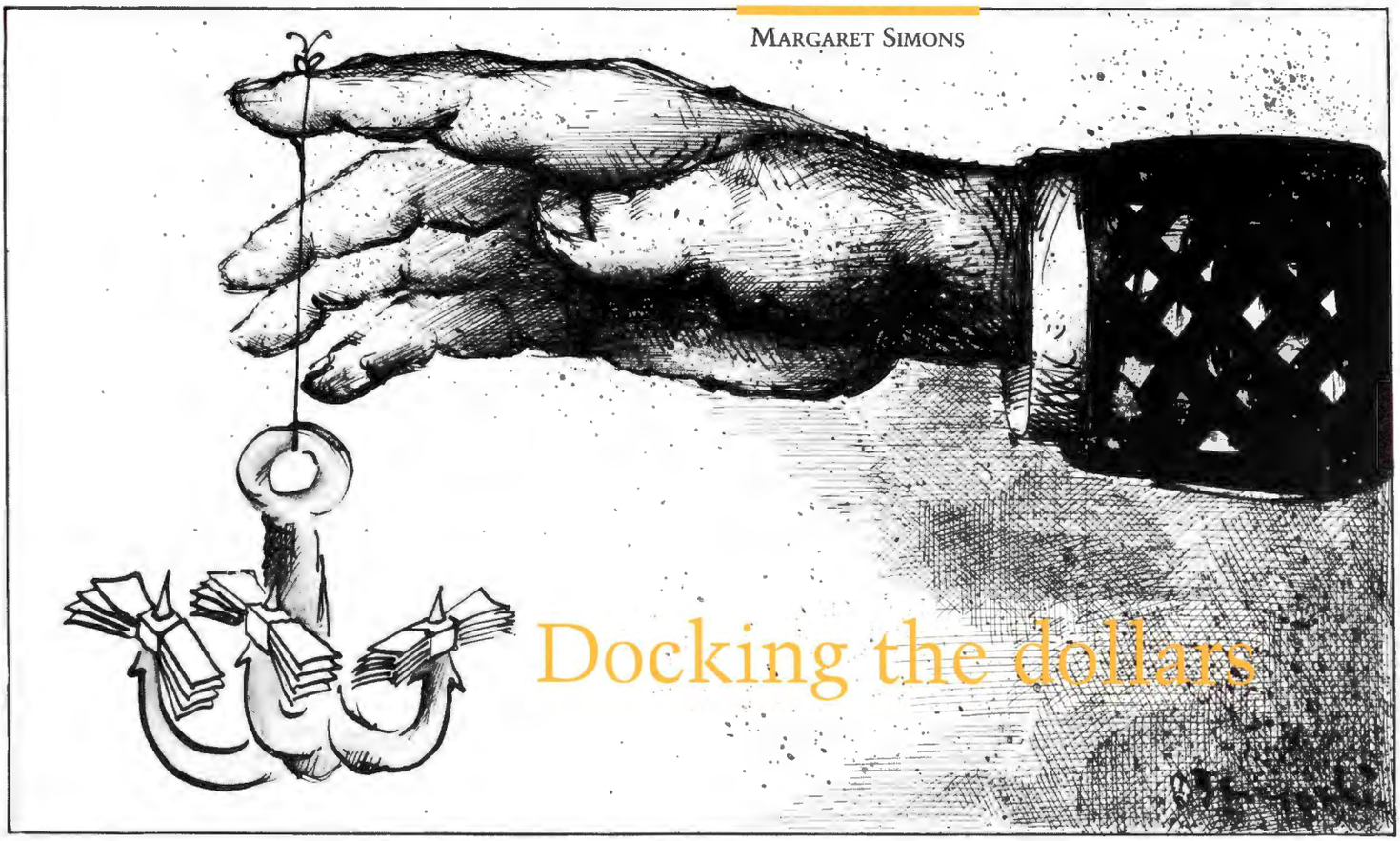
In a different market

From Anthony Cappello

In your magazine there are many religious orders advertising vocations. The Jesuits and Christian Brothers are two, for example. But with the attitude the magazine portrays I think I'll become a prenovitiate with Opus Dei.

Anthony Cappello
Reservoir, VIC

MARGARET SIMONS



Docking the dollars

THERE IS AN IRONY IN THE STORY of waterfront reform. On the one hand, it is the sort of success story one would expect the federal government to be crowing about: there has been enormous change and, looked at in isolation, the waterfront is possibly the most startling example of thriving, radical microeconomic reform. Yet at the same time, the waterfront—vital to export competitiveness—remains Australia's Achilles heel.

Contrary to popular perception, the waterfront is no longer a haven of inefficiency and feather-bedding, and the average wharfie is no slacker. During the past three years efficiency in stevedoring has improved to match some of the most competitive ports overseas. By the end of this year, the wharfside workforce will have been reduced by almost 50 per cent, meaning savings of up to $220 million a year, or $70-100 per container.

Yet it is no cheaper to export a tonne of metal or onions now than it was three years ago. So what has happened to the savings?

The government wants to find out, and there is now a battle between those who are determined to deliver the benefits of waterfront reform to the community—preferably in time for the federal election—and powerful international shipping cartels that, so far, seem to have pocketed most of the benefits of reform. The fight illustrates the complexities behind the rhetoric of microeconomic reform, and the risk that a small country like Australia runs of delivering the benefits of increased efficiency to the wolves of the international market.

As Mark Rayner, chairman of the Australian Mining Industry Council's transport group, points out, developments on the waterfront raise the question of why Australia is putting so much effort into microeconomic reform. 'It is not for the sake of structural reform itself,' Rayner says, 'or because we find challenging the idea of introducing fundamentally different systems into industries which have not seen much in the way of innovation or efficiency in the last few decades ... the goal is to promote international competitiveness. We have to keep the object of what we are doing in mind.'

A report by the Prices Surveillance Authority drew attention to the shipping cartels, and special protection for international shipping under the Trade Practices Act is now likely to be removed. The Industry Commission is conducting a review of port authorities, most of which are state instrumentalities. The review is expected to raise new questions about the intricacies of government-owned business enterprises that act both as regulators of the market and players in it.

But first, the success story. The Melbourne stevedoring company Strang Patricks reports that before the reform process began it shifted an average of 12 containers per hour per crane. Now the average is 22—which compares well with the famous international ports of Felixstowe (19.7) Zeebrugge (19.5) and Le Havre (19.3). These productivity gains have been achieved through enterprise agreements under which wharfies get paid more once an 'agreed norm' of containers has been

moved on each shift. Meal breaks are staggered, wharfies work as normal when it rains and warehouses stay open longer.

The truck queues that used to crowd the wharves are much reduced, and on average trucks spend less than half an hour waiting to be unloaded. Ship turnaround times in Australia have improved by an estimated 20-30 per cent. Even bigger improvements have been achieved in the handling of bulk cargo, such as coal and wheat, where the exporters have had a bigger role in providing port services. The NSW coal industry has bought the coal loading facilities at Newcastle and leases those at Port Kembla. The industry claims this has resulted in a 25 per cent cut in loading charges and an increase in labour productivity of more than 150 per cent. But for the ordinary exporter, who is unable to operate on such a massive level, the benefits have yet to flow through.

Most of Australia's $43 billion export trade is shipped by foreign-owned 'conference' shipping lines. Under the 'conference'—i.e. cartel—arrangements, the lines set freight rates and otherwise limit price competition. These companies—which also own most stevedoring companies operating in Australia—charge a freight rate for moving a container from shore to shore, and also land-based charges to cover the cost of stevedoring and of port authority fees for pilot services, infrastructure, towing and the like. Unlike the freight rate, land-based charges are usually not negotiable.

Australian ports only ship about two million containers a year, compared to 40 million in the combined Singapore-Japan region, so when it comes to throwing their weight around Australian importers and exporters simply don't have much to throw. And so, as the savings from waterfront reforms have flowed through,

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shipping conferences serving Australia have imposed a surcharge for land-based costs known as 'Port Pricing Additionals' (PPAs). The shipping conferences claim this charge compensates them for increased charges imposed by port authorities.

But according to the Australian Shipping Users Group—a body of exporters set up to monitor the reform process—the PPAs are simply an excuse to allow the conferences to hang on to the savings achieved through waterfront reform. The Prices Surveillance Authority took a similar line in its report. The rights and wrongs of the PPAs are difficult to analyse, not least because the industry operates on pan-Australian freight rates, under which costs for a particular commodity are averaged across a number of ports, with no relation to actual price. But there is no doubt that port charges have increased as part of a belated effort to make port authority charges reflect the actual use of facilities.

AUSTRALIA'S SIZE AND CONCENTRATED POPULATION mean that port authorities here tend to be natural monopolies—unlike their counterparts in Europe and Asia, which can compete with one another. The Australian port authorities are notoriously inefficient, but last year the first moves were made towards more commercially-oriented charges. The price of port services now tends to reflect the time that a ship has spent in port rather than the number of containers it had on board. Previously there was no disincentive for a ship owner to dock simply to unload half-a-dozen containers. Meanwhile, a major cargo could have been waiting in the queue. This change in the focus of pricing—to charging ships rather than cargo—is the shipping conferences' rationale for imposing the PPAs. Yet a study by CRA indicates that although port charges have risen they nowhere near match the savings made through stevedoring reform.

Shipping owners have reacted sharply to the allegation that they are creaming off the benefits of reform. They claim that many non-financial reforms, such as greater reliability, less waiting time and faster service, have already flowed through to importers and exporters. These, they claim, are greater than the financial benefits. They also point to the fact that the Australian Peak Shippers Association, a body set up specifically to negotiate with the shipping conferences, has agreed to the formula used for calculating the new surcharges.

Neither the association nor the conferences, however, is willing to release the figures on which the formula for imposing PPAs is based. The Shipping Users Group is scornful of the peak shippers' role as an industry body, and the Prices Surveillance Authority report entirely ignored them. That report and the events surrounding it revealed Canberra's determination to take on the international shipping companies, and in the process to remove the last vestiges of romance and mystery from the waterfront. The battle will focus on the Prices Surveillance Authority and Australia's other market watchdog, the Trade Practices Commission. For the first time, both bodies are chaired by the same man—Professor Alan Fels.

The Trade Practices Act bans price-fixing and cartel agreements unless a case can be made out for exempting specific industries from the legislation. To gain an exemption, industry groups have to establish that a cartel operates in the public interest. Part X of the act, however, gives international shipping an extraordinarily wide exemption from the provisions of the legislation—something not granted to any other industry. This is why the shipping conferences are able to set freight

rates and other surcharges with little public scrutiny.

One of the main recommendations of the Prices Surveillance Authority's report was that Part X of the Trade Practices Act should be reviewed earlier than had been intended—a recommendation that received surprisingly fast approval from the Minister. Almost before the report had been released, the government indicated that the review would go ahead, and negotiations are under way to decide how it ought to be conducted.

The ship owners were furious, and responded to the report by accusing Fels of having a conflict of interest. With some justification, they claimed that it was undesirable for Fels, wearing his Prices Surveillance Authority hat, to recommend a review of legislation that he is responsible for administering when he wears his Trade Practices Commission hat. 'There is a wider political agenda here,' says Lou Russell, general manager of a group representing the shipping conferences. 'Fels is on a crusade to make everyone subject to his legislation, no matter what. It is wrong for him to be able to use one body to reinforce his agenda in another in this way, and he clearly has no understanding of the way the industry works.'

The ship owners argue that their special treatment under the act is justified because the shipping industry has such high fixed costs and is subject to international pressures beyond the control of Australian authorities. Once a ship owner has paid the enormous fixed costs involved in putting a ship to sea, they argue, the marginal cost of carrying an extra container is so low that if free competition was allowed freight rates would soon drop to marginal costs, resulting in destructive price competition.

THE SHIP OWNERS' ARGUMENTS, however, are unlikely to cut much ice with other industries, such as mining, which also have high fixed costs but which don't have special exemptions from the Trade Practices Act. The miners are vocal members of the Shipping Users Group, which increasingly has the ear of government. Ron Knapp, head of the Australian Mining Industry Council and a leading member of the Shipping Users Group, says: 'If there is any need for special conditions, then they should be argued out on the basis of public interest, just like any other industry group would have to do.'

Port authorities, now subject to an Industry Commission review that is expected to report next March, are next in the sights of shipping users and government. As state-based authorities they are not subject to Trade Practices Act, and the Prices Surveillance Authority has expressed the suspicion that, even when governments begin to demand that port authorities meet revenue targets, this will be done by raising charges for port users rather than by increasing efficiency.

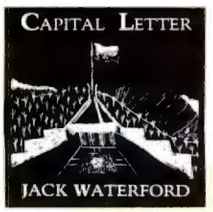
Allegations of cronyism or worse have been heard. The Trade Practices Commission has received allegations that some port authorities use their tax-exempt status to benefit some stevedoring companies. It is alleged that the authorities buy expensive equipment, such as cranes, tax-free. The purchase is financed by the stevedoring company, which then leases the equipment. Meanwhile, the port authority refuses to organise similar deals for competing stevedores.

Ron Knapp says: 'One of the problems with the waterfront and shipping is that we have tended to put it up on a pedestal, and allow it special rules and special attitudes. Now all branches have to be made subject to exactly the same rules of behavior as any other industry. That includes the wharfs, the ship owners and the port authorities.'

There is a battle between those who are determined to deliver the benefits of waterfront reform to the community and powerful international shipping cartels that, so far, seem to have pocketed most of the benefits of reform.

The move to take the rorts out of international shipping is on, and for once it is something on which government, industry and regulatory agencies are prepared to cooperate. It may take their combined efforts to do it. ■

Margaret Simons is a regular contributor to *Eureka Street*.



Unlikely roundheads, less likely cavaliers

THE HIGH COURT'S DISCOVERY of an implied right of free speech in the constitution attracted a predictable roundhead revolt—though there are few more unlikely Pyms than Senator Michael Tate of Tasmania, and the supposed cavaliers were in fact speaking about reining in executive power as well as defying parliamentary supremacy.

Indeed, the Tate attack exposed the weakness of the roundhead position as fully as it demonstrated the weakness in the court's. The Justice Minister correctly argued that the constitution's founding fathers had eschewed a bill of rights on the grounds that the best check on an oppressive parliament was the revenge of the electors. Moreover, he pointed out that the common-law tradition had been a fairly barren field so far as the protection of human rights was concerned. Where were the courts during the great periods of religious intolerance? Or during the Vietnam War?

A cynic might reasonably respond that the courts were applying laws enacted by parliaments, which had themselves proved immune to notions of liberties and rights. Parliamentary majorities have been quite content to trample on the rights of minorities, showing no great fear of electoral retribution. And in any case, although Senator Tate may be right in principle in arguing that an elected parliament is likely to be more sensitive to human rights, he is quite wrong in arguing that the Australian constitution enshrines a notion of parliamentary supremacy on the British model. Australia, unlike Britain, has a written constitution that clearly circumscribes the powers of parliament as much as of any other arm of government.

Senator Tate is, however, on surer ground in denying to the common law the degree of inventiveness it would need to substitute for a full-scale human rights covenant. The most that can be said for the British common-law tradition is that it is habitually suspicious of executive government and tends to read strictly any new legislation inhibiting what has hitherto been permitted.

There are, however, two new fields. The first was outlined in the two free-speech decisions. The court has said that if one reads the constitution and knows anything of its history, it is clear that those who drafted accepted a host of assumptions about the framework of human liberty. The constitution speaks of parliaments chosen by the people—that choice would be a farce if the electors were not able to learn about the merits of rival candidates and to debate their ideas. The constitution thus assumes a level of free speech that would permit these things to occur. And, despite what some have said, this is not the first time the court has read implications into the constitution. It has done so in relation to other fundamental constitutional assumptions, such as federalism and the separation of powers.

The second area of interpretation comes from international law, especially the international law of human rights. Australia, like most other countries, is a signatory to a host of treaties and conventions governing political, civil and economic rights. It has used the obligations thus imposed on it to override state powers in, say, the Racial Discrimination Act case and the Tasmanian Dams case. And the court has frequently quoted international law in arriving at its decisions, not least in the Mabo case. If one wanted the High Court to be the arbiter of human rights, it would have no shortage of materials upon which to draw, even if Australia does not formally incorporate a bill of rights into its constitution.

But would one want to? Here is the nub of the roundheads and cavaliers debate, and there is a host of considerations. Rights are intrinsically political, and the elucidation of them is generally a conservative one. They may empower individuals and groups, but they serve to check the power of parliaments, the executive and the judiciary. The business of selecting judges to adjudicate on questions of rights necessarily involves close attention to their temperament—if the judges go bad there is not much that can be done about it. Moreover, the High Court, unlike the US Supreme Court, is also a common-law court, serving as the ultimate court of appeal on all legal matters in Australia. The judges we now have are not a bad lot, either as common lawyers or as constitutionalists, but if the constitutional demands were increased, the pressure to get politically 'safe' judges might fatally weaken the court's jurisprudential strength.

Another roundhead, Senator Chris Schacht (Labor, SA), in an unexpectedly ignorant contribution to the debate, accused the court of being almost entirely WASP. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. There are three devout left-footers, two 'oncers' whose philosophy is pervaded by their upbringings, and two of Anglo-Catholic background. Only two justices could be said to have grown up in an atmosphere of privilege. A narrow majority of them have radical opinions, and two others have very liberal opinions. If there is to be an attack on the unrepresentativeness of the court, it probably ought to be on the score of giving some Presbyterians and conservatives a look-in.

Still, one has to put fundamental faith in some institutions. A formal bill of rights—which would, of course, have to rest fundamentally on the High Court in any event—might be surer ground for upholding human rights than any the court has found so far. And the justices are likely to exercise greater deliberation than most politicians of my acquaintance. ■

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

Helen Garner

Singing for your supper

Photo: Bill Thomas

The first writers' festival I ever went to was Adelaide Writers' Week in 1978. My first novel had been published the previous spring, but in my ordinary life I didn't hang out with other writers. I was 35, bringing up a child in a big communal household in Fitzroy, and the people I spent my time with were musicians and performers and photographers. I didn't even know there were such things as writers' festivals, until I received the invitation to Adelaide. I was flattered and rather awestruck.

I owned a car but no suitcase, and I carried my clothes to Adelaide in a cardboard box. In the tent under the plane trees I gave my first reading, and delivered a stiff little paper which I read out in what someone I knew later described as 'best reader grade six' voice, taking up obediently the exact 10 minutes I'd been permitted by the organisers' letter. An English writer on the same panel was surprised to learn that 'one' was expected to give a paper. He had not prepared anything. In a relaxed manner he cracked a few jokes about Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious, then sat back smiling, leaving his Australian panel-partners looking earnestly provincial and over-anxious. We said nothing, but we had lips of string.

I spent whole days in the tent, listening eagerly. Best of all was a man from I forget which Eastern European country who read a wonderful short story about a wife, a husband, a child, an apartment and a light bulb. I have forgotten his name, but 14 years later the story is still fresh in my mind. It wasn't even spoilt by the brief encounter I had with the writer in the hotel lobby. Seeing him standing outside the lift, I ran up and tugged at his sleeve. 'I wanted to tell you how much I liked your story,' I panted, red as a beetroot; 'it was *beautiful*.' His eyes glazed over, he opened his mouth, and out poured a stream of stunning clichés: 'Ah yes—it was a story about the alienation of the working-class family in modern society, blah blah blah.' I let go his sleeve and stepped back. But I'll never forget the story. It was probably the first time I was struck by the power of minimalism—and by the way something read out loud can enter the mind and flourish there.

At night, in my tiny room like a *chambre de bonne* on the top floor of the Grosvenor Hotel on North Terrace where the writers (those of my low echelon, anyway) were lodged, I had to stand on a chair to see out the window; but the lights on the horizon twinkled fiercely in the dry summer air, I felt the thrilling proximity of desert, and I thought, 'How lucky I am! What a marvellous way to hear writers from other countries, and meet other writers from here, and have a little break from home!'

This year I was in Adelaide again. Because of a contretemps with the organising committee I wasn't a guest of Writers' Week. My publisher paid for my plane ticket and my hotel room and I slaved away all day doing publicity interviews for my new book. I had a minder from the publisher's PR division who put sandwiches in my hand and pushed me in and out of taxis.

Heavy rain fell without a break, day and night. I had so little free time that I heard only two sessions in the tent, and carried away one serious memory (Miroslav Holub saying 'It is so hard to exterrrrminate somesing') and one flippant (Orhan Pamuk talking about 'the

engaged Turkish writer who bravely goes to jail—by comparison I seem to be a spoilt young bourgeois who has fun and writes a lot.') A tight-lipped audience contemplated the young Turk's playful cynicism, but I couldn't help laughing. Feebly, out of exhaustion. When I looked out my hotel window I saw grey streets shining with rain. I thought, 'How miserable this is! I wish I could go home.'

The trouble is that the attractiveness or apparent honesty of the writer is no guarantee of the quality of the work. Plenty of good writers are, let's face it, jerks in person, while others who are charming and generous in the flesh are boring, phoney or feeble on the page.

Somewhere between 1978 and 1992 the gilt had worn off the gingerbread. Festivals had lost their festiveness and turned into work. Their magic had fled. Publishing in the '80s became internationally monstrous, and the festivals reflected this. Publishers and agents became as important as writers—behind the scenes, anyway. The pleasantly daggy mucking in together of big and small names is a thing of the past. Internationally known writers—the male English ones, at least—tend to travel in tight groups of friends from home. They do their gig, fill the boot of the hire car with Grange Hermitage, and shoot through to the outback.

Writers are no longer humbly grateful for being noticed. These days 'one' would flounce home in a pet if one were shown into a *chambre de bonne* on the top floor of an old hotel. Nowadays 'one' expects at the very least a vast, impersonal room at the Hilton. I have learnt, through watching Ken Kesey stack on a turn at a Toronto reception desk, that international hotels have a certain number of rooms with *openable windows*: that 'one' does not after all have to endure meekly the choking claustrophobia of North American central heating.

When you think about it, there's something peculiar about the very idea of a writers' festival. Writers, in my experience, are not extroverts. They tend to be what Joan Didion calls 'lonely, anxious rearrangers of things'. Their work is by its very nature solitary—and when they're not actually in the workroom with bum on seat and door closed, they're mooching around the streets staring at people, listening in on conversations, sucking incident and meaning out of what's going on around them. Writers don't tend to hang out together. In fact, they repel each other. How *can* writers sit in a room together? They understand instinctively each other's horrible detachment, and out of what few manners are left to them, they struggle not to turn that dry-ice stare on each other. Thus, when they are together, their conversations tend to the trivial, to shop-talk. They talk about contracts, money, agents, sales figures. It's awful. But what can you expect?

It's a fantasy of non-writers that writers discuss their work with each other. I remember a funny Frank Moorhouse story about a woman who comes to live in Sydney from some blighted part of the outback, and searches keenly for the pubs where, she is sure, people *discuss*. The narrator, astonished, touched, and perhaps slightly ashamed, is obliged to disillusion her. No one *talks* to anyone, round here! Perhaps occasionally an acknowledgement, a swipe, a furtive compliment; once in a blue moon a sudden phonecall of warm admiration ... but to imagine that writers sit around talking about *how to do it*, or about themes (those things which exist only in the minds of high-school English teachers), or *what they meant*, or *what they'll tackle next*, shows a mistaken idea of what writing itself is like.

(Exception: I once had a short and fascinating conversation with Murray Bail and David Malouf, at Malouf's kitchen table, about punctuation—an occasion so rare that it felt almost indecent—we were *blushing*; we couldn't look at one another).

'Everything you have deciphered,' writes Amos Oz in *To Know a Woman*, 'you have only deciphered for an instant.' Writers don't know how they did it. They certainly don't know how they'll do it next time. And when they're put into a group with three random strangers and called a panel, then given a topic and asked to discuss it in front of an audience, what they produce is some kind of strange heatshield, or smokescreen. Not *lies*. But everything 'one' says, however hard one is trying to tell the truth or say something useful, comes out askew, a little bit blurred, ever so slightly exaggerated or glib or beside the point.

This explains, perhaps, why writers rarely go to hear one another read or speak, at these events. At a festival in New Zealand not long ago another guest laughed incredulously when I said I was going to hear the session of a writer I'd just met and liked. 'Surely you don't think people expect you to *go*! I wouldn't dream of asking anyone to come to mine.' When the American poet August Kleinzahler (who's my friend) spotted me in the audience of his panel at this year's Melbourne Writers' Festival, his face went blank for a second, with shock; I felt embarrassed, as if I had breached protocol. Part of this is the same neurosis that makes teenagers hate ringing up a stranger while someone they know well is in the room with them—someone who will register the exact amount of falsity in their special phone voice, their public persona.

ONCE, AT A PUBLISHER'S DINNER in Sydney where I was grumbling quietly to a fellow-writer about having to get up in a minute and make a speech, he laughed and said, 'Stop whingeing. Stand up and *sing for your supper*.'

Is that what writers' festivals are all about?

Everyone knows that these days writers can't just write books: they have to get out and flog them. There's a variety of ways to do this. A writer like Tim Winton will cheerfully appear on *60 Minutes* and the *Steve Vizard Show*, because he wants the audiences of those shows—people who wouldn't go to a writers' festival in a fit—to know that his book (a) exists and (b) was writ-

ten by someone they don't need to suspect of being what Paul Keating calls 'a hairy-arse who's just dropped out of university'. He wants a forum where he can show himself as an ordinary bloke who's written a non-threatening book without any arty-farty pretensions. This, of course, is as false as any other persona. Tim Winton is in fact highly articulate and very widely read in theology and fiction; his books are rich and challenging. But he's also a family man and a terrific fisherman. With spectacular success he presents himself at the popular end of the publicity spectrum. Writers' festivals hover at the opposite end. Writers' festivals are for writers who are squeamish about deep publicity, or who don't want to get their hands dirty; or for writers escaping from a bout of doing those things in their own countries; or for writers who are tired and jaded, and need a little break from home.

WHAT SORT OF *readers* are they for? What is this powerful urge people feel, that makes them not only buy books but pay even more money in order to clap eyes on the writers themselves, to hear them speak and read? Festivals 'make you feel part of something', one journalist bluntly stated after the Melbourne Festival. 'To observe and partake in ... a discussion between two eminent writers, as though they were somehow in your own living room, is what writers' festivals are all about.' I found this oddly touching, and tried to recall ever having experienced such a sense of inclusion, myself, while in an audience. I couldn't.

But it strikes me that there is a connection between the ever-increasing roll-up to writers' festivals and the question so often asked of writers by readers and journalists: 'Is this book autobiographical?'

Why *do* people always ask this question? I once saw Doris Lessing cop it, from a woman who stood up and shouted it from the back of a huge audience at the National Gallery of Victoria. Lessing glared. She snapped. She bit the poor woman's innocent head off, and the woman sat down in confusion. It was a distressing sight; but I had sympathy for both biter and bit. I think that readers, specially today in a world so crammed with books that choice makes us dizzy, are longing for some guarantee of integrity. They want to know who they can trust. But does seeing a writer at a festival lead readers in the right direction?

The trouble is that the attractiveness or apparent honesty of the writer is no guarantee of the quality of the work. Plenty of good writers are, let's face it, jerks in person, while others who are charming and generous in the flesh are boring, phoney or feeble on the page. This is a simple but unfortunate fact. And the risk with festivals is that writers who hop up on a stage to be 'spotlighted', to speak at length about their work and related matters, may be judged on their perceived performance, their gift of the gab, their persona, rather than on what they've written.

If all I knew of John Ashbery was the casual, stonewalling, rather hungover way he answered his interlocutor's reverential questions at the Melbourne Festival, I would never pick up a book of his, let alone buy it. I've been reading Marina Warner for years in the *Times Literary Supplement*, always with enormous pleasure and respect; I had her book *Alone Of All her Sex* on order at a bookshop before I went to her session with Marion Halligan at Melbourne, and now I'll have to grit my teeth and force myself to buy it because in spite of her manifest, sharp and ready intelligence in performance, I found her presence chilly and not very likeable. So what? Why *should* a writer in front of an audience be warm, open, likeable? Yet something about the modern writers' festival makes us likely to demand this, or to be disappointed if we don't get it. It's not fair. It's a bit ridiculous. It's got us barking up the wrong tree.

Writers, for their part, aren't supposed to get instant gratification. If they wanted that, they'd be in a different line of work—singing, or acting, or stand-up comedy. The danger of writers' festivals, for the writers, is that 'one' can get an inflated idea of one's importance. 'One' can go home with a fat head—or wake up next morning like someone after a huge party: wondering whether one has been a fool, revealed the nastier sides of one's nature, failed to recognise someone and thus created an enemy.

Worst of all, 'one' has forgotten how to be lonely, which is the *sine qua non* of the writer's life.

It sounds as if I'm saying that writers and readers should be kept apart. That's not what I set out to say; but maybe it's not such a bad idea.

Helen Garner's most recent book was *Cosmo Cosmolino* (Penguin, 1992). She wrote the screenplay for the current-release film *The Last Days of Chez Nous*.

Nor is it darkness

What will the world do when I am completely gone,
without me to observe it, will it simply blow away
like the milky mist above midwinter football grounds
just after breakfast, your fingers frosty as hell?
What will its beauty add up to if I am plainly not
here to take note, as usual, of heaped cumulo-nimbus
over the plaster pediment-work of 1885
brick terraces, dew on windscreens, the soft
machinery of a turtledove, or the Cootamundra
wattle blushing all over with instantaneous yellow?

The mystical survives. It is not bound by my life,
nor even dependent on quanta.
It merely expands
like the unseen, epiphanic ether...

—Chris Wallace-Crabbe

Echoes of origins

A BIRD IS SINGING high up in the branches of a tree. I can hear it, but I cannot see it. So, keeping my ear on its song, I move around at another angle, and then another angle, until I am fairly sure where it is. And then, if I look hard enough, I catch a glimpse of it.

So also, when the Russians were doing their underground nuclear testing, the Americans used listening devices in seismological stations around the world. By getting the direction and intensity of a number of signals, they were able to fix the point at which the explosion occurred and to estimate its intensity.

Every explosion has its echoes. The sounds reverberate for quite some time. The larger the explosion, the larger the reverberation. Now the Big Bang, if there was a Big Bang at the beginning of our universe, was a very large explosion with tremendous heat and energy being given off. The 'sounds' of this explosion are not so much noises as huge amounts of electromagnetic radiation. This radiation has been stretched outby the universe as it expanded. No matter what direction we tune our sensitive detecting devices towards, we find traces of a common 'background radiation'. Recent data from listening devices in space, however, gives us another ear and the possibility of being more certain that there *was* a Big Bang, and where and when it might have occurred.

The Big Bang is just a theory, of course, but the latest evidence brings scientists closer to confirming the theory. Some Christians may object to the idea of the universe beginning with a Big Bang, just as some have objected to the theory of evolution. Such scientific theories, however, should never be seen as problematic, for the accounts of creation in the Book of Genesis are not intended to make a precise point about the mechanics of creation.

You will note that I have written 'accounts of creation'. If you look at the opening paragraphs of the Bible you will see that in fact two separate and is some ways contradictory accounts of how this God-made and God-cherished world came to be. The first account of creation (Genesis 1:1-2:4a) tells the story of how God made everything out of the void in six days and rested on the seventh day. The second story (Genesis 2:4b-24) tells the story of a single day on which the Lord made earth and heaven, on which Adam was formed from the dust and Eve from the side of Adam, and everything else was made.

These are quite different stories if they are read as scientific accounts. But if they are read as revealing that creation is good and God-made, they are in total agreement. And that, surely, is the point of these stories, Big Bang or no Big Bang. ■

—John Honner SJ

REPORT

MICHAEL MCGIRR

Imperial retreat

ON 24 NOVEMBER the last American servicemen will leave the Philippines. They will not soon be forgotten. Along the western perimeter of what used to be the Clark Field airbase is a lasting reminder of US military involvement: almost two kilometres of abandoned nightclubs and discos. Their names read like a brochure for Disneyland: 'The Flying Saucer', 'Viking', 'The Wild West', 'Sky Trax', 'Barbary Coast', 'Maverick City', 'Vampire Club'. There are also 'The Port Darwin Club' and 'The Gold Coast Club', and signs advertising 'Texan and Australian Meals'. The grey mud on the roadside is a reminder of last year's volcanic eruption at Mt Pinataubo, after which the Americans gathered up their skirts and hurried off.

It is difficult to overestimate the extent to which the Philippines has been forced to depend on US bases. During the '80s, 40,000 servicemen and their dependants contributed more than a billion dollars annually to the economy, which on conservative estimates is about two per cent of gross domestic product. Cities such as Angeles, which adjoins Clark, and Olongapo, which adjoins the Subic Bay naval base, were entirely dependent on the bases, with 10 per cent of their populations employed in the sex industry.

The bases directly employed 79,000 Filipinos. Eliazer Diaz is a typical case. He used to be a civilian driver on Clark but now makes a third of his former income driving a tricycle. There are few passengers, so he spends most of the day playing pool with his friends. 'Some of the workers used their severance pay to buy jeepneys', he explains, 'but there are no people left to travel in them.' Did the US give good redundancy packages to workers? 'Yes', he says. His friends nod.

Not everybody is so happy with the American legacy. Dr Randy David, presenter of *The Big Story* television current affairs program, believes that Washington chose to interpret the Philippines Senate's refusal to renew the lease on Subic as a hostile act. According to David, that is why the US Defence Secretary, Dick Cheney, once a personal friend of President Ramos, refused to attend the latter's inauguration. US military aid has been cut by 90 cent, and this year financial aid is down from $523 million to $182 million.

An Olongapo resident who knows the cost of the American presence at Subic is Fr Shay Cullen, who in 1972 founded the Preda centre to help rehabilitate prostitutes and drug addicts. There are 35 children at the

centre, aged from eight to 15, and Cullen has started a 'childhood for children' program for those still on the streets. Most of them are Amerasians, the children of servicemen and prostitutes.

'There is an Amerasian child born in Olongapo every day', says Cullen. 'They're the throwaway children of servicemen. Sailors used to shack up with a girl and then walk out when she was pregnant. It's incredible that a city like Olongapo, with a population of more than 185,000, should have no other industry than the commercial sex industry. But it doesn't.'

Cullen has spent the past 15 years campaigning for the closure of the bases, which he believes have wrecked the social fabric of Angeles and Olongapo. 'My toughest time in this country was in the early '80s,' he says, 'when I started to speak out about child prostitution. I was ostracised. The powers that be in this town didn't want to know me.' The Pinataubo disaster destroyed most of the Preda Centre but Cullen has been unable to get a building permit from City Hall. He has gone ahead with rebuilding anyway and now faces prosecution.

Richard Gordon, the 45-year-old grandson of an American serviceman, has been Mayor of Olongapo since 1980. Gordon's fortunes fell briefly with those of Marcos—he says he was 'kicked out' by Cory Aquino in 1986—but he was re-elected in 1988. Visitors are not in Olongapo for long before learning the name of the local mayor—billboard messages such as 'Fight on Olongapo' and 'Tough times don't last' have proliferated over his name. As chairman of the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority, Gordon has achieved national prominence for his plans to provide Olongapo with civilian industry to replace the naval base.

GORDON SAYS THAT stories about Olongapo's sex industry are exaggerated because, with the foreign military presence, 'there's a political element involved here—if any sleazeballs got in here they did so while I was relieved of my post. I had to clean the place up.' Gordon does, however, concede that the US has not shouldered its responsibility for the children of American servicemen. 'They gave privileges of choice to Amerasians in Vietnam, Cambodia and Korea. They let those kids take up American citizenship. But they won't do that here.'

Nevertheless, Gordon prefers to look forward: 'I don't believe in fixing the blame, I fix the problem'. Having fought vigorously alongside his one-time foe, Cory Aquino, for the lease on Subic to be renewed, Gordon now wants to turn Subic Bay into a freeport, to take the place that Hong Kong is about to vacate in Asia. He has travelled widely overseas and is attracting significant investment from Taiwan and Singapore. 'Under our special legislation they can bring in their capital and raw materials to this area tax-free. They only pay a final tax of five per cent on the gross margin. Plus the facilities here don't exist elsewhere—just for starters, we have an airport that can handle 747s.'

Gordon is busy marshalling his constituents behind the proposal. As the Americans began leaving Subic, he organised about 500 people, mostly former civilian employees of the base, into teams to prevent the looting that has left Clark without so much as a toilet bowl. He asked tribespeople living in rainforest inside the base perimeter to help control poachers. Finally, when the American ambassador, Richard Solomon, handed over half of the base on 30 September, the official Filipino representative was Richard Gordon. The mayor said then that he wants to have 100,000 people working on Subic by the end of December. And Gordon has set his sights beyond Olongapo: he wants the freeport to become an 'engine of growth' for the whole country.

Shay Cullen has a more modest proposal for the redevelopment of Subic. His idea is for an international university of the environment. He points to the 13,000 hectares of primeval rainforest that have been kept intact as a watershed for the base, and to the nearby swamps, wetlands and reefs. There are 1800 airconditioned homes, dormitory accommodation for thousands, and a four-star hotel. 'There's nothing like it in the world,' says Cullen. 'People could come from all over to see and to learn.'

A home away from home, sort of: abandoned nightclub near Clark Field. Photo: Michael McGirr.

Indeed they could. Those who venture beyond the gates of Subic, to see the paint peeling off the bars and parlours in Olongapo and to watch Amerasian children pushing water barrows, will have many lessons in store.

Michael McGirr SJ is a regular contribuor to *Eureka Street*.

• ECPAT (End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism) will hold a conference in Sydney this month. For details phone (02) 287 0900.

Blinded by science

*What makes economists confident that their theories describe reality? **Brian Toohey** thinks they haven't noticed how scientific models have changed, and **Geoffrey Brennan**, **Evan Jones** and **Richard Curtain** take a critical look at some debunking of fashionable economic theory.*

The labour market needs reform, and, pending that, cannot clear itself.
—Sir William Cole, head of the coalition's taskforce on the goods and services tax.

TO UNDERSTAND WHY unemployment is given so little attention in contemporary economic theory, it helps to consider the seductive appeal that Newtonian physics still holds for economists. Physicists may have moved on from Newton but economists seem unable to resist his notion of a system in equilibrium.

For them, an economic system is assumed to come into equilibrium at full employment provided the forces of supply and demand are given free rein. The strict requirement is that all markets for all goods and services should be perfectly competitive—it's no good simply achieving equilibrium on one market, no matter how important it may be.

This key proviso is usually overlooked by people who like to concentrate on labour-market reform. They simply assume that once labour-market reform removes impediments to price movements, the market will 'clear' and all labour will be used in the optimum fashion. Unemployment will be entirely voluntary so long as governments get out of the way and workers accept total downward flexibility in the price of their labour. To get a job, all people have to do is respond to the 'price signals' telling them to take a large enough pay cut.

The idea of an economic system being in equilibrium at full employment found its most powerful expression in the work of the 19th century French-Swiss economist, Leon Walras. Writing in 1874, Walras made a distinction between science, art and ethics that allowed him to treat economic issues as involving questions of justice. He promptly went ahead, however, and designated most economic behaviour as the proper subject of the natural sciences:

'We may divide the facts of our universe into two categories; those which are the result of the play of the blind and ineluctable forces of nature and those which result from the exercise of human will, a force that is free and cognitive. Facts of the first category are found in nature, and that is why we call them natural phenomena. Facts of the second category are found in man, and that is why we call them human phenomena.'

Having acknowledged the existence of free will, Walras opted for the operation of the 'blind and ineluctable forces of nature' as the answer to the crucial economic questions, particularly for the way prices are formed. Although choice—notwithstanding the blandishments of advertising—might seem to be at the heart of decisions people make about what to buy and sell, free will did not get a guernsey in Walras' 'pure economics'. Instead, he made a direct parallel with the accomplishments of Newton and Laplace to explain his preference for the behaviour of natural phenomena as the appropriate model for the study of economics:

'We all accept their description of the universe of astronomical phenomena based on the principle of universal gravitation. Why should the description of the universe of economic phenomena based on the principle of free competition not be accepted the same way? ... The pure

theory of economics is a science which resembles the physico-mathematical sciences in every respect.'

A contemporary, William Stanley Jevons, was equally keen to declare the 'principle' of free competition to be equivalent to that of gravity. In the preface to his *Theory of Political Economy* (1871), Jevons said it presented a 'close analogy to the science of Static Mechanics, and the Laws of exchange are found to resemble the laws of Equilibrium of a lever as determined by the principle of virtual velocities. The nature of Wealth and Value is explained by the consideration of indefinitely small amounts of pleasure and pain, just as the Theory of Statics is made to rest upon the equality of indefinitely small amounts of energy.' This faith in the explanatory power of physics when applied to human behaviour is echoed in the remark of one of the most widely read modern economists, Paul A. Samuelson: 'Until the laws of thermodynamics are repealed, I shall continue to relate outputs to inputs, i.e. to believe in production functions'. (Samuelson was striving too hard for the imprimatur of physics—the casual reader is correct to assume that the law of thermo-dynamics could be repealed tomorrow and inputs would still equal outputs in the economist's production function.)

The physicist's notion of the conservation of energy is reflected in a statement by another famous modern economist, George Stigler, which assumes that all resources will be fully used: 'Unless one is prepared to take the mighty methodological leap into the unknown that a non-maximising theory requires, waste is not a useful economic concept. Waste is an error within the framework of modern economic analysis.' As a consequence, unemployment is treated as a form of waste that should not occur provided rational economic agents always behave in a maximising fashion (which they are supposed to do axiomatically).

GIVEN THAT 'RATIONAL AGENTS' (the economist's term for people) are not supposed to make errors, the best explanation that another leading equilibrium theorist, Robert Lucas, can give for the Great Depression is that it was a 'mistake' based on imperfect knowledge. Lucas makes no attempt to explain the lack of a full-employment equilibrium in the Third World where millions are unable to a get a job at any price. But he has no trouble saying that the Great Depression could have been avoided—rather than exacerbated as disequilibrium analysis would have it—if only people understood the need for bigger wage cuts: 'If you look back at the 1929 to 1933 episode, there were a lot of jobs people quit that they wished they had hung on to; there were job offers that people turned down because they thought the wage offer was crappy. Three months later they wished they had grabbed [the job].'

A common source for the sort of theoretical thinking that rules out non-maximising behaviour (i.e. how most of us live) can be seen in Walras' attempt to formalise what economists are about: 'The mathematical method is not an experimental method; it is a rational method ... The physico-mathematical sciences (just like economics) do go beyond experience as soon as they have drawn their type concepts from it. From real-type concepts, these sciences abstract ideal-type concepts which they define, and then on the basis of these definitions they construct *a priori* the whole framework of their theorems and proofs. After that they go back to experience not to confirm but to apply their conclusions.'

Abstraction is essential to any theory, but this particular process has the highly convenient consequence that economists don't have to test their conclusions against what actually happens in the real world; all they have to do is apply them to the hapless citizens of that world. The *a priori*

approach is very much alive in an even more antiseptic form today, as is apparent in the comments of one of Walras' most influential disciplines, Gerard Debreu, in accepting an honorary doctorate in 1977:

'First, the primitive concepts of economic analysis are selected and then each one of these primitive concepts is represented by a mathematic object ... An axiomatised theory substitutes for an ambiguous economic concept a mathematical object that is subject to definitive rules of reasoning.'

Examples of these 'primitive' concepts include people whose cantankerous exercise of free will needs to be reduced to a mathematical object allowing the smooth operation of the equations. In further developments of Debreu's analysis, consumers become an inchoate 'continuum of agents [existing] in an atomless measure space'. So much for the vibrantly independent individuals assumed to exist in the political lessons drawn from Debreu's work!

Debreu and another economist, Kenneth Arrow, are generally credited with demonstrating how it would

be possible to achieve a Walrasian state of general equilibrium in which full employment existed by definition. The conditions for achieving this equilibrium, however, were so restrictive as to be impossible to replicate in practice. There had to be perfect competition in which no one was big enough to have any influence on any price. There had to be perfect knowledge on the part of all participants about both the present and the future, and perfect homogeneity of goods and services (including labour) within each market. There was a market for all possible goods or services that anyone might want, including markets covering highly contingent future possibilities. For good measure, there could be no 'externalities' such as pollution. In these absurd circumstances, markets would 'clear' and there would be no unemployment. To put it at a minimum, rather more than 'labour market reform' is needed to meet these Debreu/Arrow conditions for equilibrium.

Even if the 'mathematical objects' represent prices instead of heavenly orbs in perfect balance, statements about the optimum allocation of resources in any resulting equilibrium are crucially dependent on assumptions about the desirability of the initial distribution of income and wealth. Accordingly, it is hard to see what is achieved beyond a trivial restatement of the axiom that supply equals demand at the point of equilibrium. In any event, a glance around a globe inhabited by people suggests unemployment and a general state of disequilibrium is much more the order of the day. Yet the modern textbooks leave little doubt about the wonderful social outcomes made possible by assuming human behaviour mimics the world of pre-entropic physics:

'The economy is a machine ... We show how the price system connects all markets, simultaneously making sure that there is full employment [sic] and determining what gets produced and how ... We will find that under some conditions, an economy in which there is competition in all markets indeed ends up with an optimal allocation of resources.'

This reassuring result for employment is given at the start of the chapter on 'General Equilibrium Theory and Welfare' in the textbook (by Fischer and Dornbusch) commonly used by Australian universities to turn out the graduates who form policy and lead opinion across our nation. Until economists abandon their fascination with pre-entropic physics, they will continue to think of unemployment as an error that will be corrected as soon as they get the 'noise' caused by people out of the system. ■

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Grand visions in collision

Markets, Morals & Manifestos: *Fightback!* and the Politics of Economic Rationalism in the 1990s, edited by Peter Vintila, John Phillimore and Peter Newman, Institute for Science and Technology Policy, Murdoch University, 1992. ISBN 0 86905 233 0 RRP $18.95.

THE OBSERVANT VISITOR from foreign parts can't help but be struck by the extent to which economics seems to dominate Australian public discourse. Australia is, in this respect, distinctive. In the US, as they front up to their presidential election, there are lots of issues in play, from foreign policy to candidates' alleged pot smoking in undergraduate days. American politics is more theatrical than ours, in part because they have a richer script.

In Britain, class divisions remain vivid and much of the political debate makes appeal to those divisions. And Britain has major issues of national independence and identity to grapple with as Europe lures (or looms, depending on how you see it). There, at least, these seem to be issues worth getting excited about.

Here, our news seems preoccupied with the latest balance of payments figures, or with minute fluctuations in the rate of exchange between the US and Australian dollars. Our politics seems to evince a curious bipartisan agreement that growth in the gross domestic product (GDP)—and particularly growth in our GDP relative to that of other countries that seem to be growing faster than we are—is the only game worth playing.

Indeed, the main matters of contention between the parties appear to be whether the public sector should be 10 per cent of the economy or less, and how we should organise our tax system. Even on the latter question, the arguments now arrayed by the Opposition for the goods and services tax (GST) are ones that the Government itself vigorously defended only a few years ago.

Some people see this debate as impoverished, and long for a politics that delivers rival grand visions—a politics that will engage and excite. That longing is understandable, though there is much to be said on the other side, (viz. that idealist politics is dangerous and that politics can do rather less on almost all relevant margins than politicians and most political commentators concede). Still, on this I am a heretic, and certainly against the natural tide. The truth is that democratic politics *demands* high rhetoric and the hypersell. Both those who seek to sell policies to the electorate and those who wish to attack those policies are led to some measure of oversell. The *Fightback!* document exhibits a good bit of that. So does this collection of essays, edited by Peter Vintila and his colleagues from the Institute for Science and Technology Policy at Murdoch University.

What these essays seek to do is distil from the *Fightback!* rhetoric a grand vision of Australia's future—a vision that the editors take to be the political articulation of economic rationalism. The contributors then seek to respond to that vision along what they take to be standard social-democratic lines.

That is, this book of essays is unashamedly partisan. Its object is to reveal *Fightback!* (i.e. economic rationalism) as: the enemy of 'equity, sustainability and democracy' (px); as 'intending to expose Australians much more fully to desperation at home and abroad' (p10); promoting 'a central ethos [of] possessive individualism which undermines the communal foundations of personal identity and freedom' (p22); passing government over to the forces of 'footloose international capital' (p26); as promoting '... a new society in which the logic of the market invades not just the more intimate spheres of private life but one in which it overwhelms and ultimately extinguishes the public realm as well' (p292).

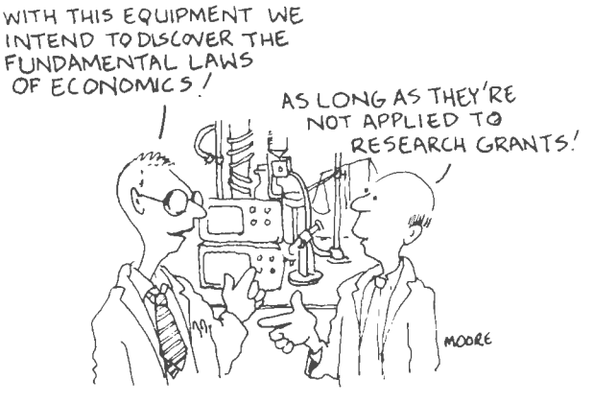
Along the way, the Opposition parties are described as shifting to a 'more *ruthless* neoliberal politics'; Keating's attempts to regain the political agenda are 'heroic'; the *Fightback!* manifesto offers a '*strident*' moral argument; it assumes 'moral postures' and so on. This kind of verbal zeal diminishes rather than augments the book's impact. Such excess makes it all too easy to pass it off as merely a partisan tract (which it is, in part), and to avoid taking the anxieties that it raises seriously. After all, there *is* a kind of extreme dry ideology whose simple-minded economic thuggery does strike fear into the hearts of reasonable people. To concede this, however, is not at all to concede that virtually all mainstream economists fit this category, that Australia would be better off if we pursued more protectionist policies, that government is uniquely the locus of communal life, or that any extension of Australia's indirect taxes is necessarily a bad thing.

I do not deny that these latter propositions are debatable, and some of the essays in this volume help to pursue that debate. But too many of them set the discussion in terms that are too tendentious to make the debate profitable. For example, it is interesting but unhelpful that nowhere in this book is there a clear summary of the policy content of *Fightback!*. The interest seems to be much more in what *Fightback!* connotes, and on what 'economic rationalism' might be taken to mean. As the backcover blurb puts it: 'The *Fightback!* package is not just about a goods and services tax. It is an approach to life.' Perhaps. But it is not obvious.

There are some good things in the Vintila volume. Frank Castles' piece comparing Australian levels of public expenditure and growth rates in those levels to overseas counterparts is useful and relatively cool. But even Castles is guilty of a little hyperbole. He claims, for example, that: 'what neither economic rationalists in general nor the *Fightback!* package in particular recognise are the wholly legitimate purposes of public expenditure in a democratic and humane state' (p43). That is surely false. There *is* an argument about what those 'legitimate purposes' are and about what kind of public spending and what levels are most appropriate to those purposes. But the idea that *Fightback!* proposes the wholesale abolition of public spending activity is absurd.

The Savage-Jones chapter, reporting their work on the distributive consequences of the *Fightback!* tax proposals is also a useful piece. They make the entirely proper point that reducing high marginal rates of personal income tax together with better focused welfare policies can serve not so much to reduce effective marginal rates but rather to redirect them to the lower end of the scale—where, incidentally, work-effort response is likely to be greater. It would have been interesting for Savage-Jones to break their analysis down into the separate distributional effects of the indirect tax *reforms* and the income tax/GST *substitution*. After all, the reforms (the replacement of the wholesale sales tax, the payroll tax and the petrol excise by the GST) involve almost three times as much in fiscal dollars as the GST/income tax substitution.

Moreover, the assessment of the latter substitution depends critically



on the assumption that there is no evasion of either tax, so that nominal tax burdens are actual tax burdens. It was a central argument in the 1985 Tax Summit that increased reliance on indirect taxes would substantially reduce the capacity of free-riders to escape the tax net. If one accepts that line, then some allowance needs to be taken of it in measuring the distributional effects of the tax substitution. Arguably, the GST will increase the tax collected from the upper end of the income spectrum, where income-tax 'minimisation' is supposed to be such a well-developed art.

And I enjoyed Stuart Macintyre's potted history of the Australian economy and the economic policies that went with it—partly because it reminds us that the current debates are not new, and partly because it constructs a history less of 'missed chance-

es' (as *Fightback!* would have it) than of serious debate about complex and ambiguous issues.

One of the interesting facts about Australia's fiscal history is that during the past century we have moved from having one of the biggest public spending to GDP ratios in the developed world to having one of the smallest. There is an interesting story to be told about this, but Stuart Macintyre does not seek to tell it here—beyond a pervasive reference to our deep roots in social democracy.

There is, of course, a piece of history that *Fightback!* tells, and it is one that informs policy on both sides of the political spectrum. It is that Australia has, during the past century, moved from being one of the richest countries in the world to being some way down the international league table. It is this loss in our medal count that *Fightback!* is fighting against. The important questions, then, are whether it should matter to us if Singapore and Taiwan grow faster than we do, and, if it does matter, where there is much that government policy can do about it. My view is that it does not matter much, and that there is little that governments can do about it anyway. The idea that the move to a GST will, in itself, turn the tide, strikes me as simply ludicrous (though there may be good independent reasons for reforming our indirect tax system, and maybe even for somewhat greater reliance on indirect taxes).

There are important aspects of *Fightback!* that deserve to be highlighted and confronted. First, *Fightback!* is based on a diagnosis of Australia's economic condition that is itself dubious. Second, it is predicated on a capacity of government action (or inaction) to do a great deal about that condition—which is highly debatable. But this kind of critique does not emerge from the Vintila volume. Vintila and his co-authors want to fight another, more high-flown rhetorical battle. They want to cast the current political arena as a contest between compassion and brutality. And that characterisation is neither insightful nor helpful.

Geoffrey Brennan is professor of economics and director of the Research School of Social Sciences, ANU.

Biting the rationalists

The Trouble with Economic Rationalism, edited by Donald Horne, Scribe, Newham, 1992. ISBN 0 908011 22 9 RRP $12.95.

THE TIDE IS NOW TURNING against the orthodoxies of economic rationalism. So says this little pot-boiler arising from Donald Horne's *Ideas for Australia* conference last February. Michael Pusey's *Economic Rationalism in Canberra* has provided a rallying cry.

Horne's trade-mark is bite-size talks, which has led to a collection of bite-size pieces from a group of mostly academic sociologists and political scientists. All of them attack the narrow economists who run this country and the narrow columnists who channel acceptable economic opinion.

Much of the commentary is eminently sensible. It outlines, for example, anomalies arising from the ill-considered dismissal of 'government' in the market economy. It argues that effective competition is not guaranteed by a laissez-faire policy and that publicly-funded services (like English-language training) are crucial for the very functioning of an industrial economy. And so on.

Some authors note the implicit biases in economists' key measuring sticks. Others attack the repressive language of economists, language in which the 'market' is sold as a machine, automatic, innately efficient; and the government (and most of the public) is seen as outside the market, incompetent and corruptible.

Jo-Anne Pemberton highlights economists' subtle linguistic abuses. In economists' parlance, rationalism connotes the sensible and pragmatic. Pemberton draws on the neglected British philosopher, Michael Oakeshott, to expose the face of rationalism which fits perfectly the real agenda—an attachment to a fixed-rule utopia. Libertarian economists, formally opposed to planning, have become the social engineers of the late 20th century. Mary Kalantzis concludes with the need to counter the ignorance spawned from educational fragmentation with a 'critical literacy' fostered by a broad and integrated education.

All this is reasonable and refreshing. Yet there is a certain lack of a hard edge to the contents. What kind of public sector do we want? Vague references to a western European social democratic model aren't very satisfactory. What of merit do we reclaim from the past? Vague references to a more enlightened 'Keynesian' era aren't satisfactory either, as the post-war boom was produced by more complex forces than Keynesian demand management.

The book displays a pervasive political naivety. There is the presumption that economic malaise will lead to a radical reevaluation of priorities in Canberra. There is no evidence of this at all from either major party. There is the presumption that Canberra's professed ambitions are to be taken literally, for example, on efficiency or an export-driven economy.

PART OF THE PROBLEM is not what the parties promise; rather it is that they have no serious intention of delivering. There is a political cynicism here that has yet to be confronted by the academics. Apart from the quality of the argument, one has to ask whether the establishment is listening. The economics syllabus is getting worse rather than better. And economic bureaucrats read only themselves, which is to say they don't read at all.

The book highlights the weaknesses and failure of dissent, especially that emanating from the academy. It is not enough to declare that the problem with Canberra and the journalists is merely that they are ill-informed and their reasoning is faulty. Even less effective to demand that the establishment succumb to the power of genuinely rational debate and see the error of its ways.

The economics of the political and financial world is different from its academic relation. It is crude and subject to fashionable volatility (J curves, twin deficits, etc). The transparent absurdity of the ideas highlights that something more than persuasion is needed to defeat them. Although there is an undercurrent of

zealotry, the offending bureaucrats are first and foremost political animals. They have very intelligently read the wind and fashioned their behaviour accordingly.

Readers of this volume might be looking for some nitty-gritty—how are these narrow people produced and and how do they rise to such positions? By what means do they rule and how do they quell dissent? By what means do alternative ideas and policies get a foot in the door? Why was it the Labor Party (both here and in New Zealand) which effected the libertarian revolution? There's little enlightenment on these structural concerns in *The Trouble with Economic Rationalism*.

Michael Pusey broke ground with his seminal survey of senior economic bureaucrats. Yet his conclusion that their anti-social views are the product of their privileged backgrounds is much too glib. One's own students from underprivileged backgrounds disappear into the Canberra milieu and its media entourage faster than you can say Paul Keating.

Similar questions concern the character of media opinion. Contributors to the volume are rightly preoccupied with media support of economic rationalism, most notably Julianne Schultz, a journalism expert. *The Australian*, *The Australian Financial Review* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* are indisputably rationalist. Radio and TV are also dominated by rationalist talking heads from the finance sector.

The book does include three senior unorthodox journalists—Ken Davidson, Brian Toohey and Alan Kohler. Yet they play the academic. They might have used their long experience as insiders to enlighten us on trade secrets. Why do the Alan Woods, the John Stones, the Max Walshes, Michael Stutchburys and Ross Gittinses figure so prominently? What is the nexus between journalism and policy-making?

Strangely, Schultz ends her condemnation with a glowing tribute to Paul Kelly, the editor who presides over the decidedly non-pluralist stable of Alan Woods, P.P. McGuinness, John Hyde, Laura Tingle and Tim Duncan. Kelly's reported defence that B.A. Santamaria brings a pluralist counterweight to this newspaper is specious.

Kelly simultaneously defends the ascendancy of economic rationalism as the 'triumph of a minority intellectual tradition'—equally specious. It is not a minority position. It is a long-standing, powerful position whose effect has been to support Australia's global integration as a colonial outpost, under the rubric of free trade. This tradition killed off the Vernon Report in the 1960s and the Jackson Report in the 1970s.

In cargo cult fashion, this tradition delivers the domestic economy to the mining sector and to the finance sector on their own terms. Whether these terms allow Australians to pay the bills is the question that economic rationalists refuse to examine.

One contributor labels the journalists of the species 'right-wing thugs'. You can't get any more verbally aggressive than that. Yet something more than verbal aggression is needed if the spirit of economic rationalism is to be overturned. ■

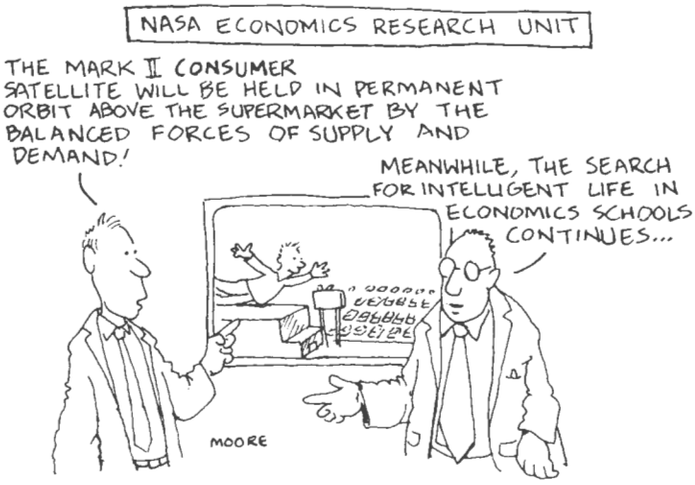
Evan Jones lectures in political economy at the University of Sydney.

A touch too much nostalgia

Shutdown: The Failure of Economic Rationalism and How To Rescue Australia, edited by John Carroll and Robert Manne, The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 1992. ISBN 1 86372 008 1 RRP $16.95.

ANY BOOK OFFERING IDEAS on how to save Australia from its economic ills deserves attention. This is doubly so when the book includes contributions from both right and left-wing commentators, and was launched jointly by former Prime Minister Malcom Fraser and the ACTU secretary, Bill Kelty. But after setting such high expectations, does it deliver new answers?

Shutdown collects 13 papers under such headings as 'The Australian Tradition Under Threat' and 'Overseas Models of Success and Rebuilding the Australian Economy'. The book's main argument, put by John Carroll, who is reader in sociology at La Trobe University, is that free-market economics and its proponents within the Canberra bureaucracy have a stranglehold on national policy. The new 'econocrats' are seen by Carroll as ivory-tower intellectuals, addicted to mathematical models but with little practical experience of business, who ingest 'rationalist economic theory from their professors as if it were God-given revelation, the pure and only truth, with all other economic doctrine rejected as heresy.' (p13).



Robert Manne, a La Trobe University political scientist and the editor of *Quadrant*, provides some background to the new conservatism, citing the mining industry as offering 'undoubtedly the most unequivocal and enthusiastic support for deregulation'. Agriculture, however, is torn between the deregulationist National Farmers Federation and the increasingly protectionist National Party.

Manne also points to a generational rift among the conservatives. Malcolm Fraser is portrayed as the last representative of the Menzies-McEwan years, with John Howard as a transitional figure and John Hewson as the embodiment of new-model Liberalism. A good example of this generational rift is the Kemp family whose father ('C.D.'), an influential adviser to Menzies, is now a public critic of economic rationalism while his sons (David and Rod), as current federal MPs, are strong supporters of it. The

rift, according to Manne, is based on differences about what conservatism means: 'where economic rationalism is programmatic and theoretical, older style conservatism is pragmatic, experimental and, ultimately, sceptical about the role of theory in human affairs.' (p57)

Colin White's contribution, 'Mastering Risk: The Story of Australian Economic Success' offers perhaps the most thoughtful analysis. He rightly insists that Australia's economic under-performance has to be analysed in a comparative perspective, drawing on the full historical and geographical context. This broader starting point is often absent in the other papers.

White argues that federation in 1901 was a reaction to the depressed conditions of the 1890s, and gave rise to a set of policies aimed at defending existing living standards. Tariff protection, centralised wage fixing, immigration control and residual social intervention formed a coherent response to a high-risk environment. During the 1950s and 1960s, Australia experienced an extended boom based on a shift in trade from Britain to East Asia, and on moving successfully away from farm products to mineral exports. Import-substituting manufacturing has, according to White, complemented an export economy based on primary products and helped to create a balanced response to a difficult and alien environment.

However, White sees the government response from the 1970s as being less than appropriate. Reduction in tariff protection has accompanied deindustrialisation, although he acknowledges the difficulty of disentangling local effects from a worldwide decline in the proportion of the workforce involved in manufacturing. Deregulation of the financial system allowed 'hot money' to flow in and out easily, causing a large current account deficit, high interest rates, an overvalued exchange rate and significant short-term debt that must be serviced even in bad times. White contends that, at the very least, there has been a major problem in the timing of deregulation, especially in manufacturing.What White and the other authors fail to acknowledge, however, are the real limitations of an industrial base aimed merely at import substitution. Many of the authors appear trapped in the dichotomy of free trade or protection as the only policy options. There is no awareness of the fundamental flaws in the type of manufacturing produced by high levels of protection. Our industrial sector faces an ever more competitive world in which the East Asian 'tigers' are exporting low-to-medium technology products that are Australia's specialty.

None of the analyses of Australia's plight discusses the shortcomings of a manufacturing strategy based on branch plants of multinational corporations, using a workforce with low skill levels and out-of-date technology. One consequence of being a branch-plant economy is the low level of private investment in research and development—one of the lowest in the OECD. Multinationals prefer to conduct R & D in their home economies. The institutions formed in reaction to the depression of the 1890s are no longer adequate to provide us with the flexible response required to reverse the decline in our economic prospects since the 1970s. High levels of protection, centralised wage fixing, immigration to provide cheap labour, budget-funded pensions and unemployment benefits, and universities divorced from industry are no longer adequate vehicles for overcoming our economic difficulties.

A major weakness of the pragmatic conservative perspective offered by Carroll and Manne is that they look to the past for the answers. Carroll harks back to the 'remarkable combination of Menzies and McEwen which produced the long period during which Australia's economic management was at its wisest.' This sort of misplaced nostalgia is not going to help us devise new, more appropriate institutions that will enable Australia to respond to a fundamentally different, interdependent world economy in the 1990s.

The debate should not be a matter of the level playing field *v.* more government intervention. The answer lies more in developing new institutions to foster a dynamic tension between competition and cooperation (the real lesson of the Japanese miracle). This involves reorienting manufacturing towards export markets, developing value-added products thorugh the processing of wool, food and minerals, and using brokers to encourage firms to cooperate in a range of areas, such as research and development and training. Producers of high value-added products need to be fostered by a special relationship with their financiers during their development phase they should not be subject to the short-term demands of the stock market. That is the lesson in the story of the European commercial aircraft, the Airbus, which is told so well by Magaziner in his chapter of *Shutdown*. Universities need to establish entrepreneurial agencies to foster more active links with industry, and academics need to conduct first-hand research about the actual difficulties faced by industry.

In the concluding chapter Carroll argues that Australians have a talent for bureaucracy; what he fails to appreciate is that this a large part of our problem, not the solution to it. There is a continuing need to introduce competitive pressures into the public sector to improve the efficiency and responsiveness of such areas as public transport and local government. The spirit of cooperation that he emphasises should not be regarded as an end in itself. It should be harnessed to restructure our institutions in a way that avoids the massive social costs incurred in Britain and the United States.

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PETER PIERCE

Beaten, broke, bedraggled at the Heath

ON A DAY OF RELENTLESS RAIN and poor rides the Caulfield Guineas meeting produced fine performances from horses who could cope with the weather and their jockeys. Gauchely self-promoting Moonee Valley would probably have rated it a good day with clearing showers. Muddy puddles in the mounting yard told a truer, dispiriting tale, as did race times that nearly broke records for the slowest since metrication. New Zealand stayer Castletown was so far back in the Caulfield Stakes that his jockey nearly pulled him out of the race. The horse knew better, coming from six lengths behind the second last horse on the turn to win. Punters groaned, but worse was in store for them.

Down for their annual rich pickings, the Sydney jockeys showed distaste for the conditions by persistently going too early or too wide. Mick Dittman even scratched himself from an engagement on the favourite in the last. It was of no consequence: Runnymede's chances vanished in the gloom. Of the northerners only Shane Dye won a race, and then cheekily, because on radio he'd avowed that eight-year-old Aquidity would need the run in the Herbert Power. But this was a sentimental moment to cherish: a group race win for veteran T.J. Smith, who only days before trained his first winner this season in the Sydney competition that he dominated for three decades.

After the race, the giant tote board struck against the weather. Its lights went out for half an hour. Operations resumed for the Thoroughbred Club Stakes. This was won by the worst named horse in the hemisphere, Googs Dream. Ridden by Therese Payne, starting at 40/1, she beat the recently named Start Goose. The latter had indecorously been christened Let's Goose, and had won a race before the authorities twigged.

In the Guineas, local jockey Damien Oliver found himself for the second time in the afternoon on a horse that broke through the barrier. In all, he had a dirty day. On the first occasion, his mount Khoshaf eventually ran last and probably should not have been allowed to start. While in the Guineas Oliver rode Palace Symphony into second place behind the Hayes-trained Palace Rain, he had taken off too soon, tracking the favourite, Bundy Lad, only to find it weaken. The magnificently furnished stallion King Marauding ran last, but for a change this Guineas saw two good and genuine colts in the finish. And, if it rains till next year, they'll be there again in the Derby.

The hoots of the feral life in the new grandstand were stilled by the result of the third Group One race of the day, the Toorak Handicap. With appalling recent form, but placings in classic races last season, Ready to Explode delighted this writer, if few others, when it won by five lengths at 37/1 (the tote odds). Accepting the trophy, the owner explained to 'a few detractors [that] you got your just deserts'. Diplomatic mission completed he disappeared under his umbrella. Jockey Stephen King was happy enough with his tactics to repeat them in the next race, which he won on Something Wicked by an even bigger margin.

Apart from the delay caused by minor protest, the day was done. Bedraggled and broke, punters headed for the car parks or the station with dripping form guides held over their heads. Whenever it rains during the spring, Caulfield seems to be the luckless course. It was hard to believe that a year ago, on a radiant day, Shaftesbury Avenue won the Caulfield Stakes in under two minutes. So sapping was this day for horses that some may have capitulated for the remainder of the spring. Form will be hard to follow.

Palace Symphony may improve enough to win the Derby, but the much-touted Sydney three-year-olds Coronation Day and Muirfield Village missed the Guineas to stay at home in the sunshine. Heroicity ran a splendid second in the Caulfield Stakes in unsuitable ground and should earn prize money in one of the cups. Among the older horses, Ivory Way raced so ungenerously that stud duties will suit him better. Ali Boy could win a country cup. The soft going puts Castletown in with a show at Flemington. But it's been an odd spring racing season, halfway over before it seems properly to have begun; so beset by the weather that judgments on horses' performances are as shifty as the tracks. ■

Peter Pierce is *Eureka Street*'s turf correspondent.

RAY CASSIN

Unity we have, allies we want

AUSTRALIA'S TRADE UNIONS are painfully aware that they have an image problem. Sometimes among their own members as well as among the wider public, there is a perception of middle-class union officials, adorned with economics degrees and wielding mobile phones, negotiating cosy accords with cabinet ministers clad in Italian suits. Meanwhile, the rank-and-file wait to find out if their jobs will disappear after the next round of tariff cuts.

Whether there is any truth in this caricature is only part of the problem. For the unions, overcoming their adverse image is a matter of urgency at a time when there is a real prospect that a coalition government may be returned at the next federal election. A radical restructuring of industrial relations is at the core of the coalition's *Fightback!* strategy, and it leaves little room for the operation of unions, awards and industrial tribunals as Australians have traditionally known them.

The psychological shift away from a basic assumption of a century of Australian politics—that the unions and the ALP, whatever their occasional disagreements, constitute a single movement—is clear.

The desire to keep the coalition out of power, and the question of what to do if it can't be kept out of power, formed the background to a two-day conference held in Sydney at the end of September. *Moving Forward!* (why do campaign titles always have exclamation marks these days?) was a consultative forum organised for the ACTU by the Evatt Foundation. It brought together not only the ACTU leadership and a cross-section of affiliated unions, but also representatives of some employers—ICI, the Metal Trade Industry Association, the Australian Manufacturing Council—and of the social movements that now vie with labour (if not with Labor) in claiming to be what's left of the left.

Peter Garrett was there, officially to represent the Australian Conservation Foundation. Unofficially he also seemed to be regarded by some delegates as a spokesman for 'youth', which somewhat extends the usual meaning of the term. Pat Dodson spoke for the Aboriginal Reconciliation Unit, and Merle Mitchell for the Australian Council of Social Services, which is warring with the unions over whether their push for superannuation will benefit the most disadvantaged Australians.

Michael Costigan, of the Catholic Social Justice Council, was there, basking in the glow of *Common Wealth for the Common Good*. That document won an endorsement from the ACTU's senior vice-president, Jennie George, who observed that in denouncing free-market zealotry and excessive disparities of wealth the Catholic bishops had not said anything with which the union movement would disagree. The only difference, she added, was 'that they may have stated it better than we have'.

The unions' traditional political ally, the Australian Labor Party, was represented by its national secretary, Bob Hogg. But since the scope of future political alliances was to be a subject of debate, Hogg had to share a rostrum with John Coulter, of the Australian Democrats.

The question of political alliances was raised in the opening plenary session by Kari Tapiola, of the Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions. Mindful that membership is a vexed question for Australian unions (57 per cent of small workplaces are not unionised), he offered a comparative survey of the plight of their European comrades. In general, membership is falling in countries where it is closely tied to political or religious affiliation and rising where it is not. The trend is clearest when a comparison is made between otherwise broadly similar societies: in Britain union membership is down but in Ireland it is up, and in the Netherlands it is down though not in Belgium.

On this view the basket case is France, where only 10 per cent of the workforce are now union members. French unions do not organise on an industry or craft basis—metal workers, clerks, etc—but on a party-political basis. There is a Communist union, a Socialist

union, etc, and these direct much of their energy towards fighting each other rather than towards specific industrial questions.

Tapiola also brought an international perspective to the problems of shop-floor organisation. The traditional model of the firm has been a pyramid, rising from a broad base of employees through middle management to the chief executive at the apex. But modern firms, especially multinationals, operate in a much more diffuse manner. Instead of one hierarchy there are many, connected through a variety of contractual arrangements. It is the age of the subcontractor, in which firms can deter unions from organising by hiving off sections of the enterprise to form small, employee-owned units.

This kind of industrial structure, which Tapiola calls the 'amoeba model', can create the illusion that there is no centre. But in fact it may considerably increase the power of central management, especially in a time of recession. It is easier to cut subcontractors adrift because their services are too costly than it is to give employees the sack. And, although the subcontractors may have been just as dependent on the parent firm as employees were, when subcontractors are discarded there is no union to complicate the picture.

The organisational lesson for unions, says Tapiola, is that they must both cover a larger number of workplaces and focus more specifically on the conditions of particular workplaces. This is already happening in Australia, where union amalgamations have proceeded in tandem with a shift in emphasis to enterprise bargaining. But determining the scope of that shift in emphasis, of course, is where the trade union movement and the federal coalition part company dramatically.

THE QUESTION OF HOW TO COMBAT the Hewson-Howard ideal of ultimately abandoning the award system, with its 'safety net' of minimum conditions for all workers in an industry, was taken up in workshop sessions. With a little steering from the organisers, delegates puzzled out how to alert their rank-and-file to what life without the safety net would be like, and how to convert that awareness into action at the ballot box.

The delegates proffered a variety of suggestions for the first task, such as a reinvigoration of the shop-steward system—which on Tapiola's 'amoeba' model of decentralised industry would be necessary anyway—and better use of the available media. But the carefully phrased responses to the second problem, especially when set against Tapiola's remarks on union recruitment, raised an intriguing prospect for Australian unionism.

Reporting to the full conference on the deliberations of a workshop session, Anna Booth, of the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union, set out the aim of union political strategy in these terms: 'to ensure a distinctive and independent union agenda, and to use this to influence the agendas of appropriate allies.' Appropriate *allies*? The psychological shift away from a basic assumption of a century of Australian politics—that the unions and the ALP, whatever their occasional disagreements, constitute a single movement—is clear.

It is not a matter of unions severing their formal bonds to the party—not all unions are affiliated to the ALP anyway—or of finding a substitute political partner. It is a recognition that the heyday of the accord in the '80s was something of a double-edged sword for the union movement. Despite gains in the 'social wage'—income support through the welfare system, maintenance of Medicare, wider superannuation coverage, etc—the perception grew among union members that they had been sold a dud.

The rank-and-file watched their own leaders accepting the wage restraint sought by Labor governments while entrepreneurs rushed to make money in the deregulative mania initiated by those same governments. Even when jobs began to disappear as industry protection was scaled down, it seemed that ALP governments could take union support for granted because, to the unions, the main alternative looked even worse.

Fear of that alternative will continue to be a factor at the ballot box, as the Victorian ALP's success in retaining its industrial 'heartland' in last month's state election partly indicates. But if the deliberations of *Moving Forward!* delegates get translated into strategy, labour's support for Labor, or any, electoral candidates will increasingly be conditional on the willingness of those candidates to adhere to pro-labour policies.

Dave Robson, of the Australian Teachers Union, cited a piece of carefully phrased electioneering: the Victorian Trades Hall Council's slogan in the state election was not 'Vote Labor' but 'Put the Liberals last'. That kind of approach, said Robson, gave the unions greater flexibility and, in the case of his own union, made it easier to persuade members that the union should *have* a political stance. Even active ATU members, he said, were often not ALP supporters, and they might well also be active in one or more of the social movements, such as the Australian Conservation Foundation, that are sometimes in conflict with the wider trade union movement.

Whether or not the ALP continues to recover support among its traditional constituency as the federal election approaches, there is no indication that the kind of multiple allegiance which Robson described will decline. The phenomenon is not restricted to teachers, and it is likely to further loosen ties between Labor and the unions. Nor does it put the unions in the position of importunate suitors, desperate to court 'appropriate allies'. For participation in a trade union still offers ordinary Australians what membership of a social movement or political party cannot offer— some control over the daily grind of earning a living.

If the unions are astute at playing hard to get, they may find that social movements and political parties will have to play suitor to *them*. ■

Ray Cassin is the production editor of *Eureka Street*.

Against the odds

***Frank O'Shea** profiles the President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, who was in Australia last month.*

RURAL IRELAND MAY BE as politically conservative as it is possible to get. Ireland's 'pro-life' referendum in 1983, which degenerated into vulgar farce, was carried by a majority of more than 80 per cent in the countryside. What chance, then, that seven years later the same people who had voted to entrench a ban on abortion in the constitution would vote for a woman who had campaigned on the other side? Especially a woman described by those who are fond of categories as a feminist, a middle-class Dublin liberal, a wealthy do-gooder, a Trinity College graduate and hence, by implication, 'probably not even a Catholic'? Conventional political wisdom would give such a candidate a poor chance of success; but that is how Mary Robinson became President of Ireland.

Ireland's first citizen is officially seen as the guardian of the republic's constitution. But, except in times of crisis, the presidency is largely a ceremonial job, without executive responsibility. It is the kind of job in which you might pension off a politician whose career was drawing to a close, and when the time came to elect a successor to President Patrick Hillery in 1990, that is what most people expected to happen.

The favoured candidate was Brian Lenihan, a former deputy to the Taoiseach (Prime Minister). Lenihan, the sort of politician who exudes bonhomie, was noted for his ability to talk for long periods without saying anything. His stock phrase, 'No problem', was as much a personal trademark as Joh Bjelke-Petersen's 'Don't you worry about that.' Moreover, Lenihan had a lifetime of service in Fianna Fail, the party of all except one of the six presidents Ireland had had since the office was created in 1937. And of course, like all six, he was male. (Religion seems to be less of an issue: two presidents have been Protestant, including the first, Douglas Hyde.)

A few carefully planted leaks tested the feelings of the electorate, and the response was positive. It seemed that Lenihan would be a shoo-in as the country's seventh president, and there would be no need for a contest.

But Dick Spring, Ireland's one-time rugby fullback and now leader of the Labour Party, was determined that there should be an election. After all, it was the intention of the constitution that the president should be chosen directly by the people. And Spring felt that whoever opposed Lenihan should do so with a vision for the job which was more substantial than that of a retirement home for party hacks. In a television interview he declared that if necessary he himself would run in order to give the people a choice. The media condemned the suggestion, but the possibility of Brian Lenihan being elected unopposed had been stopped.

In the event, the Labour Party gave its support to a 46-year old lawyer and academic, Mary Robinson. This was a remarkable choice, as she had left the Labour Party very publicly some years earlier. It was a considerable achievement for Spring to persuade his party to wholeheartedly support a non-member—and one who insisted on running as a non-party candidate.

MARY ROBINSON SET OUT to tell the Irish people who she was. She did so not just through the media but face-to-face, wherever Irish people meet or gather—in the streets and at roadside stops, at meetings after Mass, at shopping centres and on their way to football games.

They found a person with a passionate belief in human rights and in the power of law to deliver those rights. In the past 20 years or so, Robinson had been a leading campaigner on behalf of the disadvantaged in Irish society. She agitated for the right of women to sit on juries; she opposed development on archaeological sites in Dublin; she was active in the anti-apartheid movement and in Cherish, a group representing single parents; she attacked the operation of the Special Criminal Court and the introduction of the Emergency Powers Bill in 1976.

If many of Robinson's causes were on behalf of women, it was because women in Ireland still had to demand rights that were accepted in other Western democracies. If she spoke on behalf of personal choice in private morality, it was not because she was anti-Catholic; in fact she comes from a staunchly Catholic background and has the distinction of having been the first Catholic to represent Trinity College in the Irish Senate.

In six months of campaigning, Robinson visited every town and village in Ireland. The middle-class Dublin lawyer got to meet ordinary Irish people again, and she listened to them. She saw that they dearly wanted a president who would be more than a tie-and-tails recluse locked away in the presidential lodge in Phoenix Park.

As the campaign drew to a close, her opponents became increasingly desperate. They whispered that her marriage to Nick Robinson was staying together only until after the election. They pointed to the fact that she was supported by the Workers Party, who sit with the Communists in the European Parliament. At a meeting in Wexford attended by Lenihan, a local MP asked: 'Is she going to have an abortion referral clinic in Aras an Uachtarain (the presidential lodge)? That's what I'd like to know.' With a week to go, there was particularly vitriolic attack by a Fianna Fail minister. Sample quote: '... none of us who knew Mary Robinson very well in previous incarnations ever heard her claiming to be a great wife and mother.' Australian politics seem bland in comparison.

ON ELECTION DAY Lenihan won 44.1 per cent of the vote and Robinson 38.9 per cent. Austin Currie, the candidate of Ireland's main opposition party, Fine Gael, won 17 per cent. Currie's transfers went to Robinson by six to one and she finished up with 52.8 per cent of the votes cast. It was a staggering setback for Fine Gael, who changed their leader within the week. For Dick Spring, it was a personal triumph. And for Fianna Fail, who had assumed that their candidate was the most attractive imaginable, it was a huge rebuff.

Mary Robinson's election showed that a candidate with dedication and commitment, with vision and purpose, with personality and charm, could take on and beat the massive resources of money and manpower of a large political party. Moreover, she showed that the people of Ireland were ready to listen to her version of patriotism rather than the jaded, green-flag variety that had been the staple diet of Fianna Fail. And she did it with a quality that few public people possess, a quality found in the likes of Bobby Kennedy and Gough Whitlam: she did it with style. ■

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Guardian spirits

SINCE THE ADOPTION by referendum of the 1937 constitution which declared that Ireland was 'a sovereign, independent, democratic state', the country has had seven presidents: Douglas Hyde (1938-45); Sean T. O'Kelly (1945-59); Eamon de Valera (1959-73); Erskine Childers (1973-74); Cearbhall O Dalaigh (1974-76); Patrick Hillery (1976-90); and Mary Robinson (1990-).

Arithmetic indicates a seven-year term for the elected office, but the hiccup in the mid-'70s deserves explanation. Erskine Childers, son of the English-born novelist (*Riddle of the Sands*), gunrunner and rebel leader of the same name, died in office and was replaced by a former chief justice, Cearbhall O Dalaigh.

In 1976, as a result of the assassination of British ambassador, Christopher Ewart Biggs, the government of Liam Cosgrave rushed through an Emergency Powers Bill. O Dalaigh, a man with an almost obsessive sense of integrity and probably the finest legal mind in the country, referred the bill to the Supreme Court, as was his right. The court declared the bill constitutional and O Dalaigh duly signed it.

A few weeks later, Paddy Donegan, the Minister for Defence, described it as a 'thundering disgrace' that the president should have the temerity to refer the bill to the Supreme Court. The remark was made as part of an after-dinner speech to a revelling company of army officers; under the constitution, the president is commander-in-chief of the army.

After his remarks were reported, Donegan, in business as in politics the Irish equivalent of Australia's Wilson Tuckey, offered to resign. Cosgrave refused to accept his good friend's resignation, indicating that a letter of apology would be adequate.

O Dalaigh, 'to protect the dignity and independence of the presidency as an institution', then resigned. For the Irish people, it was a welcome signal that the post of president could be more than a sinecure for faithful servants of a political party. ■

—Frank O'Shea

Judge not lest you run off the rails

THE TRAM GRINDS TO A HALT where the road cuts through the park. A natural stop but not an official one. There is no traffic to bar the way but there is a shiny new Met bus, perched on the grass strip between the tram tracks and the road, and an inspector waving to the tram driver. Since it is late at night and Melbourne is sodden from unkind spring rains, I decide that the inspector needs an oil lamp and a sou'wester to really look the part. He should be waving the lamp rather than his hands, to warn passing trams of the danger of running aground.

Instead he merely pokes his head through the front door of the tram, draining a small lake from a depression in his peak cap as he does so. The passengers, who by now have all noticed the bus, guess what he is about to say and low groans ripple through the tram. There is maintenance work being carried out on the tracks ahead and we have to transfer to the bus.

We squelch across the grass and climb aboard. Since the bus is smaller than the tram there are enough of us to fill the new conveyance. There are people returning from a night out, and for some it seems to have been a long night. Others seem to be returning from an even longer day at work. And there is a woman with three children and several plastic bags full of groceries. A young man helps her to carry the groceries, and then squeezes into the last vacant seat ahead of her. He smirks and hands the groceries back.

The inspector is the last to board the bus. He says something to the driver, who eases the bus off the grass and onto the tram tracks. Low moans begin to ripple again, this time swelling to a roar of dismay. A bus on rails? We begin to feel like ancient mariners who have just been told that the ship is about to sail off the edge of the world. The inspector, who perhaps believes that he is Columbus trying to quell a mutinous crew, raises a hand to reassure us. 'It's quicker this way,' he says. 'Really.' Well, I suppose it's the sort of argument that Columbus would have used.

But it fails to reassure. More importantly, the tyres fail to grip the wet steel beneath them and we zigzag through the park, alternately bumping over rails and sleepers. The nautical mood now really takes hold, as the bus rises to the crest of each metal bump and crashes into the wooden troughs below. And while all this is happening, the man who is supposed to be standing on the headland in a sou'wester, waving a lantern to warn ships that there are rocks with sirens ahead, is on the bus with us instead. Smiling.

Like all journeys undertaken by ancient mariners, this one ends in disaster. There are no rocks but there is a crash. As the bus bumps off the rails for the umpteenth time it slides away from the tracks altogether, swiping a rubbish bin bolted to a 'Hail trams here' sign. An official stop but not a natural one. This time the passengers' roar of dismay comes first, diminishing to the ripple of groans. I look round to see whether any travellers are bruised, bloodied or broken, and note that the only casualty is one of the woman's grocery bags. A pumpkin bursts forth from the plastic and rolls down the aisle of the bus, stopping at the feet of the inspector. He picks it up and smiles again.

I also look around to see if there are any sirens. There is, or rather was, a Madonna poster on what used to be the rubbish bin.

Though no one is bruised or bloodied, dignity is somewhat ruffled. The young man who helped to carry the woman's groceries stands and begins to make a speech. 'This is a disgrace,' he tells the inspector, 'and if you can't get your act together I'm leaving this bus.' 'Yeah, please do!' chorus the rest of us. Mr Dignity, shocked at this betrayal by fellow passengers, alights from the bus and vanishes into the night.

The Met gets its act together. The fateful tram stop was the last before the maintenance works, so the bus is driven back across the grass and on to the road. But dignity is still unruffling. An older man, who looks as though he has had a hard day and sounds as though he has had an even harder night, rises to make his speech. 'I suppose you're going to tell us that it's slower this way,' he says to the inspector, and then turns to the passengers, perhaps expecting applause for this slurred witticism. There is none.

He staggers back to his seat. Unfortunately it is next to mine, so I have to hear the rest of his speech. 'You'd think they'd be better organised anyway,' he says. 'Why do they have to work on the tracks when people are trying to get home? Is this what we pay taxes for?'

I wonder why I am about to defend people who have just made fools of themselves and could have caused someone serious injury. But I decide to make a fool of myself, too. 'They have to work on the tracks at night,' I say, 'because there is too much traffic during the day. And if they didn't do any maintenance work, you wouldn't be getting your money's worth for your taxes.' 'Oh, thank you for that!' he croons. 'Thank you for drawing that cartoon! It's so-o-o-o nice to meet people who can explain these things.' He leaves his seat again and proceeeds to sway up and down the aisle, singing about cartoons and fools on buses.

The bus stops suddenly again, this time at a red light. The swaying drunk is pitched face-forward into the aisle and loses his wallet in the process. I pick it up and hand it back, along with several cards that have spilled from it. The top one is gold. A special travel pass. Ah yes, sober as a judge. ■

Ray Cassin is the production editor of *Eureka Street*.

BRUCE DUNCAN

Minding the commonweal

Common Wealth for the Common Good A Statement on the Distribution of Wealth in Australia by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Collins Dove, Melbourne, 1992. ISBN 186371 151 1 RRP $12.95

IN THE MIDDLE OF Australia's greatest social crisis in 60 years, the Catholic bishops, in their long-awaited statement on the distribution of wealth, have denounced the situation in this nation as unjust. They point to 'the great and increasing inequality of wealth and income in Australia, the presence of serious poverty, unemployment and homelessness, and the growth of what is commonly called an "underclass" of gravely disadvantaged people' (pxiv).

These are bold statements to make in an election climate and they have already fuelled a fiery public debate. To root out current injustices the bishops recommend more equitable taxation, greater government activity to revive the economy and a redistribution of wealth and income.

The 212-page document carefully examines current grave distress, with more than a million unemployed, a burgeoning foreign debt of $150 billion and an increasing gap between rich and poor. The bishops call on Australians to reform 'attitudes towards wealth, poverty, greed and consumerism, and the structures that underlie them' (pxiv). In mid-1992 'nearly 700,000 children were living in homes where nobody had an income-producing job. Youth unemployment was bringing in its wake a sense of hopelessness and despair, with consequences that included a rise in the suicide rate and increased recourse to drugs and crime'. (pvii).

The document draws perceptively from the Scriptures and church teaching and relates these to current economic and social debates. The result is a powerful critique of economic and social practices in Australia with 58 recommendations for action. A smaller pamphlet summarises the document and is aimed at a wider mass audience.

The bishops are aware of the need to avoid dogmatism but do not apologise for speaking strongly on the moral issues involved. In the foreword, Cardinal Clancy of Sydney distinguishes 'between the level of doctrinal principles, where teaching authority is invoked, and the offering of contingent judgments on real life situations, where the possibility of differences in viewpoint among believers exists'. (pii). Of necessity experience and interpretation enter in, allowing differing views about how to act in practice.

By making this distinction clear, the bishops acknowledge the freedom of others to come to their own conscientious decisions about how to evaluate issues and how to act. Thus the authority of the bishops on essential moral principles is preserved, but application of these principles rests on prudential judgments about which lay people may be more informed. The bishops are not claiming to bind Catholics to the details of analysis, but do intend to challenge them to clarify their values. This also lets the bishops off the hook politically.

NEVER BEFORE HAS the Catholic Church put so much time and work into preparing social statement. In February 1988, the bishops announced the inquiry, modelled on the practice of the US bishops, who had succeeded brilliantly with their significant inquiries into two highly contentious areas: the US economy, and arms policies.

The Australian bishops chose the topic of the distribution of wealth, another sensitive and potentially divisive issue. The Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace, a tiny group working with Dr Michael Costigan in Sydney, was charged with the task of piloting this explosive cargo through the shoals of public debate. Public hearings were held in many dioceses, and almost 700 submissions were received. Throughout the process, there has been extensive ecumenical collaboration and input from interested non-religious groups and

Photo: Andrew Stark

organisations. The results of this extensive conversation appeared in the draft statement of January 1991, *Common Wealth and Common Good*, a title almost identical with that of the final document. After much debate, a further round of hearings and receiving about 600 more submissions, the Bishops' Committee has produced the final version, *Common Wealth for the Common Good*.

This final version is much improved over the earlier draft, and its authors have obviously listened carefully to responses to that draft. The final text has been restructured so that the value assumptions are immediately grounded in the Scriptures and the teaching of Jesus, in church tradition and the contemporary Christian call for a renewed 'option for the poor'. So it is not simply a matter 'of echoing enlightened liberal values and their sense of basic human justice and fair play' (pxi).

The bishops do not see their option for the poor as a superficial aping of an overseas rhetoric, but as demanded by the experience of God's activity among the Jewish people and the Christian church. 'Failure to care for the poorest and most vulnerable shows that a person is not truly attentive to the voice of God.' The law and the prophets were urging 'a preferential option for the poor' (p5): the New Testament presents Jesus as 'embodying God's deep concern for the poor and for society's outcasts' (p6), and demanding the same of his followers.

The bishops acknowledge that the message of Jesus has often been distorted or ignored, and even today the powerful 'have at times misinterpreted it as legitimising the status quo' against the poor. But the 'message needs to be repeated in all its purity and simplicity. To the affluent it is an invitation to see the face of Christ in the poor and to release their hold on what the poor need in order to survive.' (p12).

PART TWO OF *Common Wealth* examines in detail the distribution of wealth and poverty in Australia, and seeks to identify the causes of inequity. The bishops' catalogue of the symptoms of social trauma makes distressing reading: increasing unemployment; the huge increase in poverty; homelessness; increasing drug use, crime and suicide; the growing gap between rich and poor; the redistribution of income from poorer groups to the richer during the 1980s; the choice by many richer people to engage in harmful speculation rather than invest in productive enterprises; and the collapse of big businesses and financial institutions with the loss of savings. Groups most at risk are Aborigines, immigrants, the impaired, women, sole parents, youth and single-income families.

The most dramatic collapse has come in rural Australia where, as one writer put it, farmers are being debased 'into serfdom and peonage' (p79); another writer said 'an increasing peasant underclass' has appeared (p80).

THE THIRD PART OF *Common Wealth for the Common Good* examines how to develop a more just society in Australia, and concludes on a call for sustained social and political action to right injustices and lay the basis for a renewed social order. It also includes a glossary of economic terms, a select bibliography, a discussion guide for groups, and lists individuals and groups who made submissions or responses to the draft.

The bishops abandoned a somewhat defensive chapter on the use of church wealth in the 1991 draft, noting suggestions to review the issue elsewhere. They said that all Catholics, especially the bishops themselves, have the duty to examine their practice and live out this option for the poor, so that the Gospel is truly proclaimed in word and witness (p65).

The bishops squarely confront what they call the spirit of economic rationalism which has so influenced both major political parties; if taken to extremes it leads to individualism, a 'survival of the fittest' and a 'greed is good' mentality. The bishops criticised giving individuals 'the utmost freedom to pursue their own material well-being' without regard to social consequences.

They also criticised the view that sees market freedom as 'sacrosanct', with little role for regulation or redistribution through taxation. 'Some would even advocate the further reduction of welfare. The market is seen as a self-corrective system where efficiency and cost-effectiveness are the primary decision-making criteria.' (p36). They write that many of the economic consequences derived from economic rationalism have been presented dogmatically, without explanation, and with little apparent con-

Continued p35

JOHN COULTER

Right, left, into the fray

INCURSIONS INTO THE POLITICAL ARENA by the Catholic Church have been pretty well par for the course for as long as there has been a Catholic Church.

For centuries after Constantine adopted Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire, God ran Caesar. Or the Holy Roman Emperor. Or the King. Then Henry VIII got a little rambunctious and church influence grew patchier. But as late as the 20th century, Rome swayed Europe's Catholic kings, invested Franco's annihilation of the Spanish Republic with the aura of a crusade, and even brought to heel that socialist reprobate Mussolini. In the Christian world, only the socialist countries and the US wrote religion out of the secular state. (They got their come-uppance: a church sweeping to power in post-communist Europe, and every American presidential candidate insisting that he 'prays regularly'.

Ecclesiastical incursions into politics, then, have until recently come mostly from the right.

Common Wealth for the Common Good is therefore a refreshing new development. Or relatively new: Latin Americans like Aloisio Cardinal Lorscheider and other Brazilian bishops have long crusaded on behalf of the poor, skating a thin line between obedience to the teachings of Christ and consideration for the worldly diplomatic manoeuvrings of the Roman Curia. And in 1986 the US bishops published *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the US Economy*, a pastoral letter that rocked free-enterprise America and which the Australian bishops may have considered something of a model. After all, as Australians they have little experience of poverty.

Australia has always been a lucky country, although I would hesitate to call it clever, since we have dissipated our fortune in a remarkably unintelligent way. Even so, poverty has never been the issue here that it is in the Americas or in Africa or Asia. My own childhood 50 years ago in Perth

would be considered poor by the standards of today, although then it was probably more modest than poor. I knew poor children, who wore shoes only to school and had no books or toys, but they ate regularly and were clothed more or less adequately. The grim, skeletal, blown-belly poverty of Africa was all but unknown here. So was the street-smart, scavenging homelessness of Latin America or even Southern Europe. And the helpless, hopeless, alienated and despairing poverty-amid-plenty of the US.

Not any more. The Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference has produced some shocking figures. We knew that 11 per cent of the workforce was unemployed (35per cent of the youth workforce). But did we know that five per cent of Australians own 50 per cent of our country's wealth? That some 700,000 Australian children live below the poverty line—and a conservatively-drawn poverty line at that? That most state schools are feeding children from time to time? That between 50 per cent and 70 per cent of our farmers are technically bankrupt? That between 80,000 and 100,000 Australians 'live in dire poverty or homelessness', 25,000 of them children? They may not be 'in immediate danger of death from starvation or exposure', as the bishops put it, but 'the lives of some of them are greatly and sometimes brutally shortened as the outcome of such byproducts of extreme poverty as malnourishment, disease, drug addiction, violence, crime and a pervading sense of hopelessness.' This is the poverty of exclusion, pernicious in itself and a threat to society as a whole.

The bishops have directed these findings at their Catholic constituents. But they have shaken the political establishment as well by pinpointing as the cause of many current ills the current quasi-religious cult of economic rationalism, essentially the domination of economic expediency over social morality.

The bishops describe economic rationalism, which is enjoying a worldwide vogue, as a 'structure of sin' which places the market above people. 'Individuals are to be given the utmost freedom to pursue their own material well-being,' the bishops write, '(and) the freedom of the market is seen as sacrosanct .. Any regulation or intervention, even by government, is suspect ... The market is seen as a self-corrective system where efficiency and cost-effectiveness are the primary decision-making criteria.'

According to *Common Wealth for the Common Good*, 'the effects of economic rationalism ... include totally unacceptable levels of unemployment and the sharp rise in the number of people living in poverty who are denied what most Australians would consider to be basic rights.'

This blunt speaking has stung a few conservative columnists into labelling the bishops closet Marxists and superficial bunglers—one way of denigrating facts and figures that defy denial. ■

Senator John Coulter is leader of the Australian Democrats.

From p33

cern for their social consequences (p37). The bishops are also sceptical about claims that wealth would trickle down to the poor, or that increased production would automatically be justly distributed; this had not been the experience of Britain or the US during the 1980s (p84).

The document does not condemn a free-enterprise system as sinful in itself, but criticises the exploitation and injustice that have occurred; the too rapid and unsupervised deregulation of financial markets which was exploited by the greedy; the unparalleled extravagance of some of the very rich, as well as their tax evasion and improper political influence; the over-reliance on interest rates and the reduction in government spending.

Against such thinking, the bishops stress that the 'primary social and spiritual value we as Catholics wish to affirm is that of community' (p39), and that human good does not consist in 'having' more; rather it lies in 'being' more. Thus they 'reject the widespread notion that more is better. In fact, acquiring goods simply for the sake of acquiring them is wrong.' (p40)

The 52 recommendations for action begin with moves to help Third World countries, particularly by reducing the impossible debt burden of $1.35 trillion which is causing the deaths of millions of children (p85). Within Australia, the bishops sharply defend the social security system against wholesale condemnation, saying that it is founded on justice rather than simply benevolence (p60). They note that social security payments were only 7.1 per cent of national income in 1991-92, a figure well below that of most other western countries.

There is considerable room for the government to increase spending here. It would have to be funded by increased taxes, but Australia is comparatively lightly taxed (p108). The bishops recommend reforms to make taxation more equitable, and suggest that the Commonwealth consider reintroducing a wealth tax, provided that it 'not cause hardship to families, small business and the farming community' (p110).

In line with papal thought, the bishops recommend that workers share in the ownership and management of productive property through co-operative ventures like those in Germany or at Mondragon in Spain (p92). While supporting the right of women to work and receive equal pay, the bishops say that women should not be forced to work at the expense of family responsibilities. They recommend increased family allowances, a minimum guaranteed wage, or greater taxation relief (p6).

They recommend that governments create jobs, especially in badly affected areas and for certain age groups (p98); measures to provide adequate low-cost housing (pp103-4); reforms to the health system and support for a system similar to Medicare; and more funds for education, so that parents can exercise their rights to choose schools maintaining their values.

Common Wealth for the Common Good reaffirms the bishops' long-standing support for Aboriginal rights, and action to reduce the injustices and poverty they suffer. The document particularly urges bipartisan political support for a just and proper settlement between Aborigines and other inhabitants of Australia as soon as possible (p121).

THE BISHOPS AFFIRM that Australians have always prided themselves on being 'the land of the fair go', but this had not been much in evidence in the past decade. One of their most significant recomendations calls for a federal government inquiry into the distribution of wealth in Australia, to be completed no later than 1994-95 (p123). The bishops warn that unless action is taken to remedy the unjust distribution of wealth, and consequently of power, divisions in society will become more serious (p132). Only the widespread expression of 'outrage from the grassroots level' can bring about such change in pursuit of the common good (p131).

The document is obviously not the last word on these contentious issues and if this were a second draft instead of the final version, some areas could have been treated more fully. Firstly, the treatment of economic rationalism requires more stringent analysis. Not all the news is bad. There has been notable progress with economic restructuring in Australia. Micoeconomic reform has led to dramatic improvements on the wharves and other areas. Inflation has dropped to its lowest point in decades, industrial disputes have been relatively few, and overseas earnings in some areas have risen encouragingly. So there are signs of hope and purpose in recent economic changes, as well as severe pain.

Secondly, attention needs to be given to the economic constraints on policy options, particularly arising from our foreign debt and the balance of payments problems. How do these affect the bishops' proposals for increased spending? Other questions, such as the debt of developing countries, also need more discussion.

Thirdly, the document lacks the ecumenical perspective we have come to expect these days. This is the more surprising since the ecumenical collaboration in preparing it was extensive. Yet it says nothing about the historical role of the social gospel movement and makes little acknowledgement of the social activity of other churches.

The bishops criticised giving individuals 'the utmost freedom to pursue their own material well-being' without regard to social consequences.

The document is firmly locked into a Catholic confessional perspective. This is perhaps the most important defect of *Common Wealth*, especially since the churches had earlier collaborated, through the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, in making social justice statements. If the bishops are to make further statements, they will have to attend to this issue carefully.

However, the bishops have produced a courageous and much needed challenge to Australians to rethink the direction of social and economic change from the point of view of social justice. *Common Wealth for the Common Good* has also shifted Catholic social thought in this country on to an entirely new and more sophisticated plane. The move is long overdue. The community should take up the debate vigorously from here. ■

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JIM MCCLELLAND

Live connections

SUSANNAH SHORT'S recently published book on her father throws interesting light on the role of the Movement in Australian political and trade union affairs during the 1950s. The contest in the Ironworkers' Union between the Communists, who totally dominated that influential organisation, and the Industrial Group of which Short emerged as leader was probably the most crucial in deciding the future direction of the trade union movement and, indirectly, of the Labor Party.

Calm before the storm: H.V. Evatt greets Laurie Short (right).

Laurie Short, A Political Life, Susannah Short, Allen and Unwin, Sydney 1992. ISBN 1 86373 188 1 RRP $29.95

By mid-1952 Short's long, brave battle was approaching its denouement. A court-supervised ballot for all branch and federal positions had been ordered for the end of that year. The momentum of Short's campaign, fought through the courts and the workshops, had to be maintained until then, or all of his victories would be nullified and the gravely eroded Communist dictatorship would be restored, probably indefinitely.

The key to victory was to get the members to vote. The Communist control of the union had been built on apathy and fraud. Though the number of members of the union who were card-carrying Communists was probably never higher than one per cent, they were zealous activists, ready and willing to devote time and energy to the innumerable chores involved in the winning and maintenance of power. And the large number of Communists who were not members of the union were also available for these tasks—door knocking, distribution of propaganda, the contribution of money, intimidation of opponents, ballot rigging etc.

This was where the Movement, under the leadership of B.A. Santamaria, played a decisive role in the struggle for control of the Ironworkers' Union. Where do you go looking for the footsoldiers to combat those readily available to a disciplined force like the Communist Party? Not many rank-and-file members of the union, no matter how disgruntled with the Communist officials, were prepared to undertake the chores of what had become a long drawn-out struggle to get rid of them. What was required was a supply of anticommunist zealots to match the efforts of the Communist zealots. Santamaria's great service to Short's cause was to supply his army of footsoldiers.

Santamaria has admitted that, in setting up the Movement, he used the Communists as an organisational model. It was a matter of fighting fire with fire. He certainly deployed his troops with masterly effectiveness. I had not set eyes on him since we were classmates at St Kevin's College, more than 20 years earlier. During those years he had become the heart and soul of the Catholic Social Studies Movement, although he was not without enemies inside Catholic ranks—and ultimately he was to have his wings clipped.

As Short's legal adviser I was in the thick of his legal battles. I decided about mid-1952 that he should meet Santamaria and enlist his aid. The two of us visited Santamaria in Melbourne and I was most impressed with his intelligence and energy.

There ensued a collaboration which resulted in a sweeping victory for Short and his followers in the 1952 election. In the course of researching her book, Susannah Short interviewed Santamaria and he volunteered this opinion of me: 'At that stage I did not realise the limitations of his character. But I soon came to the conclusion that he wasn't fair dinkum, that he was battening on to Short and his fight. I thought he was making a career out of it.'

What he really meant was that he was disappointed in the limitations of my allegiance to him. I regarded Short's and my collaboration with him as being confined to our common task of fighting communism. Thus Short and I (and John Kerr) declined his invitation for us to join the DLP. I have discovered that I am merely one of many people whom Santamaria excommunicated for not toeing his line.

THE IRONWORKERS' VICTORY was the high point in the achievements of Santamaria's Movement. It had implications well beyond the routing of the Communists in an important union, since it also had a large political impact. A big union like the ironworkers sends large delegations to ALP conferences, and a series of victories by the Industrial Groups in union elections ensured right-wing control of the NSW branch of the party. I can well imagine that at that stage Santamaria could realistically contemplate for himself the role of *eminence grise*, guiding the ALP away from any socialist tendencies in the direction of a European-style Christian Democratic Party.

But neither he nor anyone else

could have foreseen the erratic conduct of Dr H.V. Evatt which put paid to those fantasies, led to the great Labor split of 1955, the subsequent formation of the DLP and Labor's 23-year exile from office in the federal parliament.Evatt had endorsed the Short ticket in the 1952 election and had addressed a meeting of some 1500 people at the Sydney launch of the Short campaign. In the light of Evatt's sudden discovery in October 1954 of a subterranean movement centred on Santamaria which had set out to subvert the ALP, it is interesting to note that, on Evatt's own admission, he had met Santamaria six months before this outburst—that is before the May 1954 federal election in which Evatt's defeat finally unhinged his mind.

In fact, Evatt had actively cultivated Santamaria. The latter told me that Evatt had invited him to contribute to the section of his policy speech dealing with foreign policy. It is inconceivable that a man of Evatt's political literacy did not know what Santamaria was all about. Yet, when challenged about his previous acquaintance with Santamaria, Evatt was to say: 'I entirely reject Mr Santamaria's claim that I was inconsistent in attacking him in October 1954. It is true that I was acquainted with him six months earlier. I had not the slightest idea that he was the head of a secret "Movement" aiming at the control of the Labor Party from without.' If he didn't know that, he was all alone in the world of *Realpolitik*.

There is a curious parallelism in the careers of Evatt and Santamaria. In a sense, they may be regarded as Australia's two most brilliant political failures. In a moment of candour a couple of years ago, Santamaria told a journalist that he had failed to achieve any of the things he had set out to do. The fact is that he was burdened by an excessively apocalyptic view of the human condition. Evatt, equally endowed intellectually, was basically a philosophical nihilist to whom any road to the top was permissible and whose failure to reach his goal ultimately drove him around the twist. ■

Jim McClelland, former judge and minister in the Whitlam government, is a columnist for the *SMH*.

ANDREW HAMILTON

Peace, on paper

Cambodia: The Obstacles to Peace, by Dennis Shoesmith, Centre for South-East Asian Studies (monograph series 1/92), Northern Territory University, Darwin, 1992. ISSN 1038 8893

THIS BOOK PROVIDES CHASTENING reading for anyone who believes that peace is assured in Cambodia, or that it is safe to send back there the Cambodian boat people rejected by Australia.

Shoesmith, who has written extensively on Cambodia and on Cambodian refugees in Australia, examines what resources exist for implementing the Comprehensive Peace Plan for Cambodia signed with such great applause on 23 October 1991—and what difficulties the plan faces.

He argues persuasively that the settlement was virtually imposed by the international community on the local factions with Cambodia. The Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia in 1989, and the pressure brought by nations supporting the factions, forced the parties to negotiate. In these negotiations, Australia played on important and creditable role.

The peace, however, will depend on the local actors. Although the presence of the United Nations forces has led to diminishment of armed conflict, the crucial test will come when these forces are withdrawn immediately after the elections.

In preparing for the elections, three bodies are significant: the United Nations Transitional Authority, the present government of Cambodia, and the Supreme National Council, which includes representatives from all the factions. But the relationships between them are undefined. There has been little progress made in disarming the factions and, even if a government wished to govern in the interest of all Cambodians, the lack of infrastructure and lack of experience in administration would make it difficult.

The character and intentions of the conflicting groups will be crucial. Shoesmith argues that all but the Khmer Rouge are badly divided, that none has strong allegiance to democratic institutions, and that the Khmer Rouge, whose attitude everybody acknowledges to be central, has shown that it is determined to regain control of Cambodia by political as well as by military means.

He makes his case well, detailing the way in which the present government has intimidated its opponents, and its regular infringements on the civil rights of the people. The gov-

ernment is dominated by Chea Sim, who stands for strong party control of Cambodia. Shoesmith also shows the consistent opposition of the Khmer Rouge to the aspect of the peace plan that would infringe on their arms or their interests. He points out that the reason why they have been brought into the peace process is not that it will work with their involvement, but that it will certainly fail to work without them.

In the meantime the country continues to suffer. Much of the government's budget is given to defence, young people are still conscripted to fight for an unpopular army, and the liberalisation of commerce without adequate infrastructure has created inflation and a heated market in the city. Minorities, especially the ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese, are unpopular and always under threat.

So, if Australia returns the Cambodian boat people to Cambodia, they will return to a country without security, without economic resources, where intimidation and violence are routine, and where in the intermediate term the return of the Khmer Rouge to power is at least as likely a prospect as any other.

Shoesmith carries his account up to April this year. Events since have not argued against his thesis, and deadlines named in the peace plan have passed. By early August, the United Nations forces had not been able even to enter Khmer Rouge controlled areas, let alone proceed with the disarmament. The Khmer Rouge have shown themselves consistently opposed to elections under the protocols proposed in the peace plan, and a group of train travellers was executed in traditional Khmer Rouge style.

Moreover, a number of Vietnamese families were massacred with great brutality, and the Khmer Rouge subsequently demanded that Vietnamese living in Cambodia be deprived of a vote and expelled from the country. This suggestion has received wide public support.

In its attempted resettlement of refugees, the UN has made promises that it cannot keep. And finally, the only people to have shown any optimism about the future attitude of the Khmer Rouge have been UN officials, on the basis of contact with junior Khmer Rouge officers. Which is akin to inquiring about the strategies of a centralised organisation like News Limited from its junior reporters.

Shoesmith's book makes one fear for the future of the Cambodian boat people in Australia should they be deported. ■

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Noted

The drawing at left was commissioned from Waldemar Buczynski for p11 of the September edition of *Eureka Street*.

The illustration below it appeared in Melbourne's *The Sunday Age* on 18 October. The illustration, used on p1 of the world news section, was unsigned.

It's hard to keep a good idea to yourself.

Casablanca, dir. Michael Curtiz (new print, Greater Union). Fifty years on this wondrous film is still hard to overpraise, but its greatness wasn't always evident. I have a scholarly book on movies published in 1946, Roger Manvell's *Film*, that manages not to mention Casablanca at all in its 237 pages, though Curtiz' later *Mission to Moscow* and Disney's *Victory Through Air Power* get guernseys.

What makes *Casablanca* tick? First, it is a political message film, challenging American isolationism in the face of Nazism, but the message is melded with a powerful love story that poses a moral challenge of considerable complexity. At its centre are issues of public and private morality, of realism versus idealism, of the limits of fidelity, but these are embodied in a fast-moving adventure comedy that is scripted with glittering brilliance, and superbly directed and acted.

It is the quintessential talking picture: the dialogue bubbles, sparkles and lingers like vintage Bollinger. The supercilious Nazi officer asks Rick his nationality. 'A drunkard,' he replies, and the response tilts in one direction the film's dialectical engagement with nationalism and private passion, patriotism and self-interest, state power and individual cunning. But the balance shifts time and again, culminating in the masterly ending.

Critics have called the plot a mess, but in spite of occasional clumsiness (why did Major Strasser take so long to get to the airport?) and loads of sentimentality, it serves the film's purposes perfectly. 'I'm the only cause I believe in,' says Rick defiantly, but the events are set to test this defiance.

Claude Rains' classical performance as the cynical, corrupt sensualist, Inspector Renauld, is a comic triumph; but he also embodies the genuine crisis faced by so many ordinary, unheroic Frenchmen confronting defeat, occupation and a burgeoning realisation of the Nazi enormity. The crisis lingers in current French debates about the Vichy years.

Play it Sam: the fundamentals still apply.

—Tony Coady

The Last Days of Chez Nous, dir. Gillian Armstrong (Hoyts, Village). This film was fairly described by another critic as a 'language-driven interior drama about a household of unorthodox characters living in a terrace house in inner Sydney.' Helen Garner's script concerns Beth (Lisa Harrow), a successful writer who knows she's bossy but can't help herself, her high-spirited younger sister Vicki (Kerry Fox), Beth's homesick French husband JP (Bruno Ganz), and her daughter Annie (Miranda Otto). Their offbeat life is happy on the surface, but tensions appear when Beth takes a trip to the outback with her crusty old dad (Bill Hunter) because she wants to make peace before he dies.

The film is witty, often charming, and very good-looking, thanks to cinematographer Geoffrey Simpson and production designer Janet Patterson. It touches on many big themes: family dynamics, knowing thyself, cultural identity, love and jealousy. The characters are three-dimensional, but you're too often *told* what they're like when, in the movies, seeing is believing.

The three women at the centre of the film are fine as far as they go, as is Bruno Ganz, but the sum of the parts is only faintly bittersweet. Maybe that's because the characters are in comfortable circumstances and their woes seem partly to stem from constantly having to be entertained. Only the scenes between Lisa Harrow and Bill Hunter have more depth, and that stems from his character being uncomfortable with language: the sort of Aussie bloke who runs a mile when asked to talk about feelings.

Composer Paul Grabowsky uses bluesy saxophones well, but the score begins to grate towards the end: one climactic scene involving Beth is backed by music that sounds like a frenetic minuet played on a moog synthesiser.

For those who like seeing Australian streetscapes on the big screen, there are some atmospheric shots in and around Glebe, including the fabled Wentworth Park greyhound track.

—Mark Skulley

Lethal Weapon III, dir. Richard Donner (Village). It's hard to find a Hollywood big-budget genre movie these days that doesn't hedge its bets by knowingly smirking at itself. *Lethal Weapon III* is no exception. Entirely devoid of plot, it gives us instead a crescendo of ever-cleverer and more self-conscious stunts interspersed with a touch of romance, and some clichés from the heart-warming repertoire of the buddy movie. The astonishing thing is that, for all that, the film does have a certain charm.

This time Martin (Mel Gibson)

Eureka Street Film Competition

Ah, Hollywood's first siren, Theda Bara, in *Salome*. Caption her silent-screen encounter with King Herod, send it to *Eureka Street* Film Competition, PO Box 553, Richmond, Vic. 3121, and we'll award two tickets, to the film of your choice, for the answer we like best. The winner of September's film competition was Frank Hughes, of Wellington, who thought that if George M. Cohan were alive today he would have written a song called *I'd Rather Be Right* for George Bush. (In 1936 Cohan played the US President in a film of that name.)

and Roger (Danny Glover) have been busted down to beat cops because of Martin's cavalier treatment of high explosives. So, aside from a little police harassment of passers-by, there is not much for them to do while eking out the days till Roger's impending retirement. Until, of course, The Mission comes along. In the process of fulfilling it, Martin falls in love with a police internal investigator (Rene Russo) when he finds that she has bullet scars just as impressive as his own. When, in the denouement, she is badly wounded it takes on a peculiarly erotic overtone. Here is yet another sexy bullet wound, we are supposed to think—only fresh.

The other strand of the movie concerns Roger's retirement. This, it transpires, will ruin Martin's life—for Roger and his family are all the family that Martin has. Will Roger realise that being a cop, and living nearby in a house that he could only afford if he were on the take, is a crucial moral responsibility that as a buddy he must not shirk? What do you think? And, for that matter, will the bad guys be defeated and will Martin get the girl?

What's hard to explain is why watching these questions get answered is by no means the worst thing you can do at the moment.

—David Braddon-Mitchell

Stan and George's New Life, dir. Brian McKenzie (independent cinemas). This is a film about mid-life crisis, which is appropriate since the film appears to suffer from a mid-life crisis of its own. Here is a gifted director working with two likeable character actors (Paul Chubb and Julie Forsyth) on a story of simple charm, and halfway through we are subjected to one of the longest and silliest subplots in memory.

Stan (Chubb) is a 40-year-old child living with his parents in a shabby, old-fashioned part of Melbourne. During the day he tends an unfrequented barber shop and at night he spends his time listening to his father talk feverishly and bitterly about the weather: apparently, there is some conspiracy among weather forecasters to mislead us into thinking that Melbourne's weather isn't quite as bad as we all know it to be.

Stan is desperately bored with this life, as he should be, and longs for change, which comes in the form of a clerical position in the Weather Bureau and a relationship with George (Forsyth). All of this is established with gentle good humour, but from here on it is all downhill, as the very foolish and unfunny Weather Bureau conspiracy takes centre stage.

The simple story of Stan and George may well have worn thin before the end of a feature-length film, but this would not have been due to lack of narrative drive. It would have been the result of the undercharacterisation of the central figures—especially George—and the strident caricatures that make up the rest of the cast. It is a shame that McKenzie has not concentrated on what he does best—observing the textures and rhythms of extraordinary, ordinary lives.

—Damian Cox

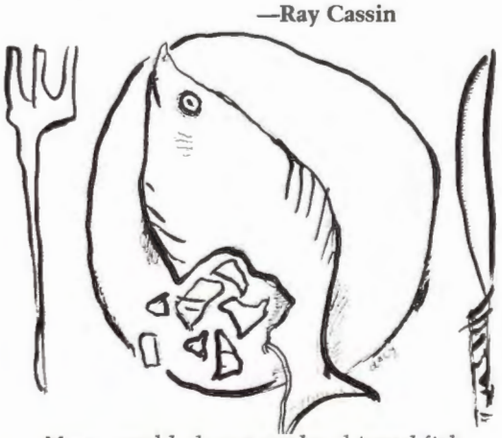
The Indian Runner, dir. Sean Penn (independent cinemas). The vogue for films woven out of images from other films is now so wide that it is a rare pleasure to find a writer-director working in this mode who offers more than a string of visual clichés. When that writer-director is also a surprising new talent, the pleasure is doubled: Sean Penn displays considerably more subtlety behind the camera than he has hitherto done in front of it.

Penn uses a slice of Frank Capra's small-town America for the setting of an old familiar story, the love between two brothers, good-guy cop (David Morse) and bad-guy thug (Viggo Mortensen). That story in turn becomes a meditation on the psychic roots of male violence—the screenplay was inspired by Bruce Springsteen's song *The Highway Patrolman*—and on the anxieties of the Vietnam generation.

Sounds familiar? Of course—American film makers have been preoccupied with such themes since Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978). But here we have no *Deer Hunter II*. Cimino's film failed to live up to the promise of its early scenes because even the combined talents of a De Niro, a Walken and a Streep could not compensate for its fundamental imbecilities of plot. In contrast, Penn avoids the lure of a big-name cast, at least for the major roles, in order to concentrate on telling his tale. And though the tale is a simple one, the telling is intricate. To enjoy *The Indian Runner* it is not necessary to recognise its constant cross-referencing of other films—but it does help. Is that old Indian who waves to the feuding brothers as they drive through town meant to make us think of Frank Capra's *It's A Wonderful Life*? Or of David Lynch's parody of Capra in *Blue Velvet*? Or both at once? Is Charles Bronson, as the gentle father of the two brothers, cast against his usual tough-guy type? Or is he playing a mirror image of it?

The Indian Runner is a film to watch more than once. It's a movie for those who love the movies, and for those who want to know about the world that movies have made.

—Ray Cassin



Mum would always make chipped fish

Regular readers of *Eureka Street* will recall that last month we drew their attention to the desire of 'our straight man', a.k.a. Alex Miller, to contact anyone who shares his interest in late second/early third century Carthage. Mindful that the Romans burned said burg to the ground in 146 BC, we added the letters 'BC' to his request.

Silly us. Carthage was in fact rebuilt, and in the later empire was home to St Cyprian and the place where those ever-popular martyrs, Lucy and Perpetua, met their end.

So would anyone who shares Alex's interest in Carthage during the late second/early third century *AD* please write to him c/- our editor?

As Jerry Lewis once said about Dean Martin, the straight man always has the last laugh.

TERRY MONAGLE

Going public

AT 7AM MY CLOCK RADIO woke me up to the voice of Richard Acland on Radio National. I headed for the kitchen, put on the kettle and toast and took the milk out of the fridge. While the kettle boiled I peered at the use-by date on the yoghurt, listened to the weather forecast and went out to get the paper.

I dressed in accordance with the weather forecast, took my rubbish bin out for collection and headed for the station, sniffing the clean air and listening to the native birds. I had to paddle through the puddles caused by the council's poor drainage, but the crosswalk attendant stopped all the Mercedes and the Mack trucks for me. I paid $3.40 for my daily round trip to Flinders Street Station (the fare is subsidised by the Mercedes drivers, if they can't avoid tax). The train was only four minutes late. In Flinders Street, young policepersons ushered vehicles through the intersection and blew their whistles at me when I ran against the Don't Walk signal.

By the time I got to work, I had used the public sector 30 times: public power generation, public water supply, public news and entertainment, public roads, footpaths and transport, and public weather forecasting. I had taken advantage of public regulation of food products, public regulation of household appliances, and public environmental protection regulations. I had enjoyed services from the three levels of government and the quality of my morning depended on them.

Partly because it is so pervasive, the public sector is usually invisible. It has been built up by generations of human concern and represents a consensus among Australians that we are a community and need to share our wealth. It is not there by accident but has been fought for, generation after generation.

Despite this history, the major political parties are abandoning the beliefs out of which this consensus grew. They see Australians as a collection of individuals, comprising a competitive market that is unerring in its logic and justice. They believe that the economy will only work if we compete with each other, and that as consumers we ourselves are the best regulators of the market.

During the past decade, private-sector ideologues have dominated the debate about the worth of the public and private sectors. An essential part of their derision of the public sector has been the promotion of stereotypes—the private sector is lean, mean, efficient and creates wealth, whereas the public sector is bloated, irrelevant, lazy and a giant sponge on the country's wealth. Maybe people are jealous of public servants' job security and pension schemes. Or perhaps they are repelled by an image of sterile, narrowly skilled clerical work, and wonder how people can exist as clerical robots in jobs without challenge. 'Aha,' they say, 'public servants don't care about serving us, they just hang on for their pension.'

These notions are losing their grain of truth. Most public servants are now on lump-sum superannuation schemes, not on pension schemes. The public sector is being reorganised in an attempt to wipe out the monotony of traditional clerical work, and no one is expected to spend more than 50 per cent of his or her time in keyboard work.

CAN WE IMAGINE what our society would be like without a strong public sector? If John Elliott owned Telecom? If there were no ABC? Or no Bureau of Meteorology (or a user-pays subscriber service instead)? No environmental protection authorities or town planning departments? No public education or health facilities? No dole and no pensions? A private company would not run our metropolitan rail systems, for example, because they will never make a profit. But if they did not exist, life in Australian cities would be fundamentally different. Public rail systems prevent the creation of ghettos and help to minimise the number of traffic jams and the amount of pollution from vehicle exhausts. Public transport is a crucial redistributor of wealth.

But the public sector does not just redistribute wealth. The generation of wealth by the private sector itself depends on the operation of the public sector. Hugh Stretton, in *Political Essays*, argues that the two sectors are so interdependent that it is misleading to talk of different sectors at all.

Stretton refers to South Australia's Cooper Basin, where there is natural gas: 'A private company buys the right to mine it. They send the gas through a public pipeline to another private company with a public franchise, which sends it, this time through a private pipe, to a private brickworks. There it is mixed with private clay and public electricity to make bricks, which go by private truck on public roads to some public land where a private builder is building a house for public housing agency, which will sell the house to a private citizen with his own private savings in a private bank, but also with a first mortgage derived from other people's savings in a state bank and a second mortgage from the public housing agency which is using for the purpose the commercial profits on its past public housing operations.'

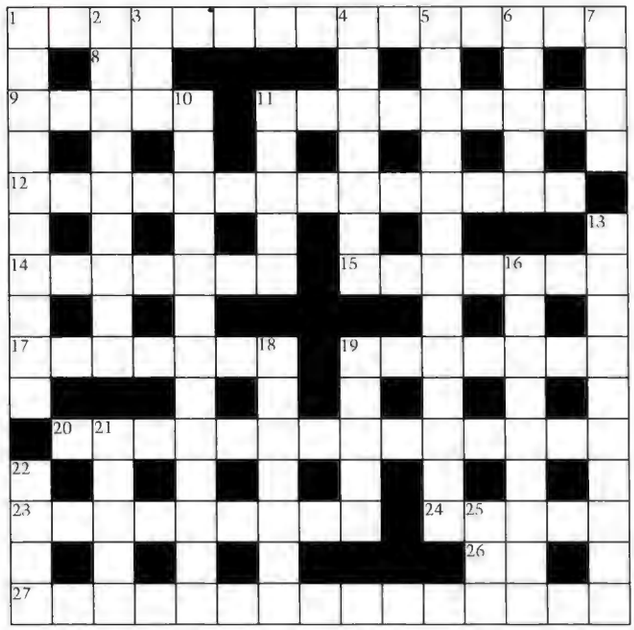
Another example: 'Public money funds university research in solid-state physics. Private journals publish it. Private firms which live chiefly on public defence contracts use the research to develop cheaper and better circuits which enable public and private telecommunications companies to commission the development of better machinery from private manufacturers. Uses of the machinery contribute to the efficiency of a large number of private and public activities.'

Stretton argues that these are not eccentric examples but describe the normal production process in Australia. And yet, despite the intricacy of this relationship, private sector ideologues demand that we reduce the size of the public sector to allow the private sector to expand. They seem happy to ignore evidence that two private-sector jobs are fostered by every public-sector job. ■

Terry Monagle is a policy officer with the State Public Services Federation.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 8, November 1992.

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS
1 Capital city's prize for the carnival. (3,9,3)
8 Half a sec! (2)
9 'I only jerks me ... in 'is ribs
To give the gentle office to 'is nibs'—*The Sentimental Bloke.* (5)
11 A winner's plan to marry in Reno? (4,5)
12 These young mares are not prepared for 1 across. (7,7)
14 When the Museum is rearranged, art goes into holding space. (7)
15 The princess's cash box, when shaken up in USA, is likely to exude drops. (7)
17 You make me angry! Go ... ... in the lake! You can hop and skip too! (3,4)
19 Green acres in a Brisbane suburb? Try postcode 4005. (3,4)
20 Ceaseless activity on moon station can't alter without a letter. (8,6)
23 Anyhow, sign Les in for the tournament; he wants to compete this way, not in doubles. (2,7)
24 Though ostensibly solid, inside he was just a wraith. (5)
26 A small measure in Tashkent. (2)
27 For a negotiated rent, hiring Spain property is possible. It's where 1 across could be held in typical weather. (2,3,6,4)

DOWN
1 Which day in the first week of November for 1 across? (3,7)
2 O, don't badger me roughly! 'Don'ts' are banned. (9)
3 Sounding low! (3)
4 Not yet in court, intrude without order. (7)
5 Require fewer bad tips to succeed on the racecourse —and so avoid futile injury. (4,4,5) or (8,5)
6 I'll lose up to 100 if my horse comes near. (5)
7 Look narrowly at your equal. (4)
10 How exasperating! I didn't back the winner in 1985 (4,1,8)
11 Embroider eyelet hole in the central, not Eastern, Philippine island. (5)
13 Did the discoverer of penicillin carry weight when he attended the racecourse? (10)
16 Where dwells in endless arid zone a phoenix? Capital answer! (2,7)
18 This great-hearted horse will easily cover the distant circuit of the course, we hear. (4,3)
19 ABCDEFG—music to my ears when gained on the TAB. (5)
21 At the start 19 down is confusing. (5)
22 A flightless bird, a trans-Tasmanian or a track winner? (4)
25 In this case she is treated as an object. (3)

Solution to Crossword no.7, October 1992

F	O	R	E	K	N	E	W	■	T	H	W	A	R	T
R	■	A	■	N	■	X	■	■	■	O	■	B	■	R
E	P	I	S	O	D	I	C	■	A	V	E	R	S	E
E	■	S	■	W	■	T	■	U	■	E	■	A	■	A
S	L	I	G	H	T	■	E	N	T	R	U	S	T	S
T	■	N	■	O	■	R	■	E	■	E	■	I	■	U
■	■	■	S	W	E	E	T	A	N	D	S	O	U	R
O	■	B	■	■	■	A	■	R	■	■	■	N	■	E
V	I	L	I	F	I	C	A	T	I	O	N	■	■	■
E	■	U	■	A	■	T	■	H	■	R	■	U	■	R
R	E	D	A	C	T	O	R	■	S	P	O	N	G	E
D	■	G	■	T	■	R	■	O	■	H	■	B	■	V
O	R	I	G	I	N	■	A	N	T	E	L	O	P	E
N	■	N	■	O	■	■	■	E	■	U	■	R	■	R
E	N	G	I	N	E	■	P	R	E	S	E	N	C	E

ERRATUM: In Cryptic Crossword no.7 (Oct' 92) clue 17 down should read: 'Otherwise *dub* in the G-G with 50 others for avoiding work?' [*Eureka Street* proofreaders will go to any lengths to ensure that only they can solve the crossword—*ed.*]

Enough of this Social Darwinism!
Give me a *Eureka Street* instead!

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