EUREKA STREET

Vol. 2 No 7 August 1992

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Playing with the future

Julian Disney and **Evan Jones** on the economy

Margaret Simons on airline deregulation

Graham Little on the nation and its tribes

Peter Pierce goes to the Grand National

Jonathon Swift and **Quixote** go into exile

Exclusive

What John Wren wrote to Red Ted

Photo: Andrew Stark

'It is long term unemployment that is the worst problem, rather than youth unemployment specifically. I don't think they [the young] will fare any worse than the rest of the community, and they may do better. But this is starting from a very grim scenario—to compare their fate with that of other age groups is a bit like arguing which end of the Titanic is going down first.' **Julian Disney.** (p 6)

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A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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CONTENTS

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A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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EVAN JONES

Budget it and fudge it

IT IS TIME FOR the annual tragi-comic performance of the federal budget. It is comic because of the posturing of Treasurers who promise a 'turn around tomorrow' and 'growth with equity', and because of the hype of delivery night and the thundering editorialising in the next day's serious press. It is tragic because the important issues are away from centre stage. The hype rests on the assumption that the budget is the key vehicle for the delivery of economic policy. The emphasis is placed on the bottom line, the size of the budget deficit or surplus.

Australian economists and bureaucrats believe that governments direct the economy chiefly through macroeconomic policy—at the aggregate level. The deficit or surplus is a proxy for the degree of overall spending stimulus or restraint. The market mechanism is presumed to look after the structural details by itself. But the budget is a balance sheet, and no wonder it's so boring. It is better seen as the means by which the government is supposed to reconcile its economic and social program with its revenue options. The budget is the financial reflection of the government's program. The government is itself confused on this, as it has the Treasurer deliver the budget, rather than the more appropriate Minister of Finance.

But what is the government's program? At best we get to see as through a glass darkly. The budgetary process starts early in the year as each department sorts out its internal priorities to fit the crumbs thrown to it. Many policy ideas are thrown out in the various stages, but this long process is a secretive one. How are the conflicting demands resolved? This depends upon the balance of power in the bureaucratic hierarchy. It also depends on the relationship between the Treasurer/Finance Minister and particular spending ministers.

Treasury and Finance are big. The industry and sectoral departments are smaller, the social departments smaller still. The hierarchy is reflected in the geographical proximity of the departments to Parliament House. The power of Finance waxed during the 1980s as it oversaw the transformation of an $8 billion deficit into an $8 billion surplus. Now that the surplus has evaporated during a monstrous recession, Finance is back

in the saddle again. Finance doesn't care about programs. It cares about money. Its *leitmotiv* is embodied in a sign at present in its corridors—'What part of NO don't you understand?'

It is important, of course, that there be a keeper of the public purse. But Finance has no interest in the integrity of the programs that get up, or whether they have a reasonable likelihood of success. In short, as the budgetary process is now structured, the tail wags the dog. The power of Finance and Treasury has been enhanced by the age of managerialism, which has been ushered in, to universal acclaim about its benefits for public-sector efficiency.

The Financial Management Improvement Program is yet another means by which the mechanics of operational efficiency become a vehicle for dictating priorities. Substance gets subordinated to form. And the Expenditure Review Committee is the men-only club of head honchos who whip all the spending departments soundly and send them to bed without their supper. No revenue estimates are on the table, which makes it difficult to see the spending proposals in perspective. Which is precisely the point.

It is comic because of the posturing of Treasurers who promise a 'turn around tomorrow', and 'growth with equity', and because of the hype of delivery night and the thundering editorialising in the next day's serious press. It is tragic because the important issues are away from centre stage.

BRIAN HOWE WAS ORIGINALLY not included in the committee's membership, even though he was overseeing the big-spending Department of Social Security. Ultimately Howe was invited in, told that he had been hanging around with the wrong types (unmarried mothers, unemployed dole bludgers, pensioners) and that these days they expected a better class of company (paper entrepreneurs). So Howe was roughed up somewhat for having inherited a social conscience somewhere, and he's never been the same since.

Howe did manage to produce some good results on a strangled budget—children's allowances and pensions. But these items had one eye on the votes. Other items—sole parents and the unemployed—have not been so fortunate. Indeed victimisation has escalated in line with the decline in support. Other big losers are those whose funding comes through the states. The states don't have a vote on the Expenditure Review Committee, so they have provided a convenient outlet for the age of fiscal austerity. It has been too bad for health, community services, and education.

So much for social services. The economy hasn't been doing too well either. Finance administers the spending cuts, and Treasury provides the philosophical defence. But Treasury and Finance don't understand how the economy works. Just read the statement that accompanies the budget speech.

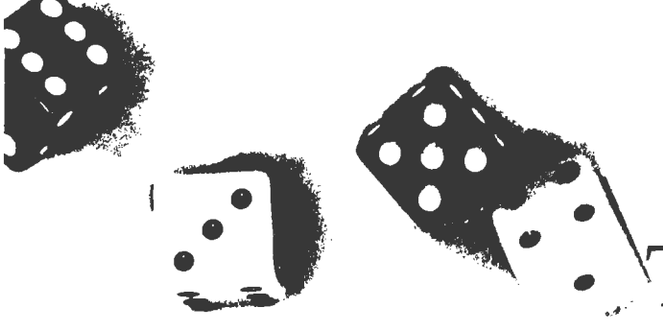
The secret of industrial success is to be found in productive cultures, which are not created out of nothing in the stiff wind of global 'free markets'. They have to be nurtured. This requires perceptive structural policies, which in turn require intelligently staffed and funded industry departments, with more power in the bureaucratic hierarchy.

If the August budget served the economy adequately, there would be no need for such events as the March 1991 economic statement, or the February 1992 *One Nation* statement. These provide an inkling of the political agenda. They deal explicitly, with policies first, finance second, which is as it should be. But they are constructed on the back foot, and influenced by the political cycle. This is the fundamental defect of the current institutional structure. Much time is spent on the balance sheet, but very little on strategy. By default, the strategy is deficit reduction *per se*. The cart is pulling the horse, and the wheels keep coming off.

It might help a teensy bit if we did away with the February and March fiascos by devising strategies contemporaneously with the long budgetary process. Program development and financing possibilities would proceed sensibly hand in hand.

I dropped a note to this effect to the Prime Minister last February. I didn't get a reply. Somebody must be tampering with my mail. ■

Evan Jones teaches political economy at the University of Sydney.



The way we are

JULIAN DISNEY *spoke to* Eureka Street *about the state of the economy and Australia's prospects*

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IS VERY SEVERE, as is unemployment in all other parts of the age spectrum. It is long-term unemployment that is the worst problem, rather than youth unemployment specifically. But there is no doubt that there are a lot of people at school who wouldn't be there if it weren't for the bad labour market, and in that sense they are really unemployed.

The current levels of youth unemployment may be substantially due to the fact that we are in recession as much as to some long-term structural changes. I don't feel enormously confident that this is the case, but it is arguable. The most profound structural change is that people are going to stay at school longer, even when the labour market is more benign. Long-term unemployment will continue to be the major problem. It won't decrease significantly, if at all, for the next five years.

Which has to do with restructuring?
Partly, though in theory that would mean that eventually the jobs might come back. I don't think all of them will, because we are increasingly moving to an economy where the emphasis is on capital productivity rather than labour. I think there will be a long-term decline in the amount of paid employment available in the community. When that happens it will affect people in their middle years more seriously than it will affect young people.

Because younger people are more flexible?
Most tend to have more flexibility in a number of ways—one is their physical vigour, and, perhaps more important, their lack of dependants. I don't think they will fare any worse than the rest of the community, and they may do better. But this is starting from a very grim scenario—to compare their fate with that of other age groups is a bit like arguing which end of the Titanic is going down first.

How much of it was unavoidable?
The recession, I think, was very largely avoidable, and I am not speaking with hindsight. We—ACOSS and I, particularly at the Economic Planning Advisory Council—said at the time what was going to happen and what errors were being made. We weren't alone in foreseeing these problems. We learned from other people who were saying it and who seemed to us to be right.

Where were those people? There weren't very many of them.
No, and that is the problem. Why didn't more people either speak out or get heard? They are still not speaking out or getting heard sufficiently. Some of them are academics who aren't very good at expressing themselves in public. But we have also had in the media and the public service what I've called the intellectual tyranny of the past five years—a fierce determination by the powers that be to abuse and ostracise anyone who questioned their rigid prejudices.

Isolate the elements of that tyranny. Which groups are you talking about?
It has run through all the key co-ordinating departments—Prime Minister and Cabinet, Treasury, and Finance. It has been an enormous intellectual tyranny, where to show any sign of questioning orthodoxy was bound to affect your career adversely. It is still with us. I agree with Joan Kirner that it is about time some Commonwealth ministers stood up to their advisers. It is also about time some of them stood up to their colleagues, for example, in relation to the scandalous new superannuation system.

The recession was largely avoidable. We would inevitably have had a bit of a downturn because the rest of the world has, but the Government still hasn't adjusted its policies sufficiently. Everything they have done has been too late. *One Nation* should have been at least a year earlier. Labour-market programs are a classic example—ACOSS was pushing them before the recession, saying you must create training programs that include work experience. Some key union leaders, who in many of these areas have not been very constructive, said 'Don't want any of these job creation schemes. They're hopeless. Just have training.' But for many of the most disadvantaged people, training is not enough. You need actually to get into the workplace. Finally, the Government has followed our advice but done too little and much too late.

What next, then, particularly if there is a change of government?
At the moment, despite *One Nation*, we have still two parties competing with each other to run as fast as they can in the wrong direction. But I think that for years this hasn't been what the Australian public wants. This has been masked by a sequence of odd election results. We had the intervention of Bjelke-Petersen. We had the Peacock-Howard fight. Labor hasn't really 'won' an election since their second one, which they only just won. The next two elections they really didn't 'win'; the Opposition lost. And the next one, if they win it, they won't really have 'won'. If the Opposition didn't have lead in their saddle bags they would romp in. I

think Labor will probably win—the GST is a major electoral liability. One of the dangers, frankly, is that a lot of 'progressive' people will say, 'Fine, the Government's changed direction, or at least it's not as bad as the Opposition', and will 'close ranks' rather than demand real change in the Labor Party. A lot of the people who get concerned about poverty and injustice, especially if they are from church groups, often call for the simplest bandaid stuff, not for structural change in the underlying causes. And they are very easily won over.

So what is to be done?

I fear we may have a pretty cathartic period first, whether it is from a Hewson government or not, during which things get even worse until the demand for change becomes overwhelming. Just think what the Labor Party, and people on the left generally, would be saying if there were a Liberal government now. There would be outrage in the streets. They would be breaking down the doors of Parliament House. That is one of the problems: the great forces of social justice are largely silenced because 'their' party is in office and the only available alternative is even worse.

Is this a breakdown of democratic process? Or just a hiccup in democratic process of the kind that we have to live with from time to time?

I'd say that this reflects the fact that much of the union movement no longer really represents the most socially disadvantaged. There is government, business, unions and, around the edge, an enormous number of other concerns—the green movement, the women's movement, welfare, the Democrats. This potential 'fourth force' has not yet coalesced, but it may make progress in that direction.

In the unions, the main hope lies with women in the movement. They tend to work with the more marginal workers, and, in the past, the union movement has not adequately represented the marginal part of the workforce, let alone those who are unemployed or sole parents or old. But for a variety of reasons many people in the Labor Party still believe that the unions are principally concerned about the most disadvantaged people. That is just not correct. Anyone who has a secure job is privileged, and if they have a secure house they are doubly privileged.

During the round of superannuation talks four years ago, I remember talking to John McBean, then deputy president of the ACTU. We got into an argument about the ACOSS proposals to trim the superannuation tax concession. I said to him, 'Our proposals wouldn't hurt anyone who is earning less than $70,000.' And he said, 'Some of my members earn more than $70,000, and I am not going to agree to anything that disadvantages them.'

The superannuation debate has shown that some union leaders have a very simple view of the world: childhood, work for 45 years, retirement. But what about unemployed people, disabled people? People who are taken out of paid work by child care, or are pushed out for illness or retraining? We are facing a situation where the bottom 10 per cent of the community are getting further and further away from the rest of the field while 'middle Australia' remains very affluent. The iniquitous wage-tax 'trade off' in '89 was an example. No one was willing to accept a real reduction in living standards.

We are not going to, are we, unless forced.

Not early enough and broadly enough. I don't want to suggest that this is the only or main thing that has to be done. A lot of the things that have to be done are, funnily enough, level-playing-field things. For example, a very important area is removal of many tax distortions. It was tax distortions that enabled the Bonds and Skases to borrow money overseas at virtually no cost rather than raise it through share issues, to blow out our national debt, and then to spend the money on speculative activity or corporate takeovers. Most of those huge tax issues still haven't been addressed.

Looking at the future, it is best to be realistically pessimistic about the next five years. That doesn't mean we shouldn't do anything, but if we concentrate too much on quick fixes we won't get unemployment below about 8.5 per cent at best. We must aim for longer term reforms and initiatives which eventually can achieve much lower levels of unemployment.

Enormous attention should be paid to South-East Asia. If it weren't for South-East Asia being our region, and being the most dynamic part of the world, I would be very pessimistic about Australia's prospects. But we need to understand that trade follows culture. I think we need to make a quantum leap in commitment—not just the incremental one that has been going on for the past 20 years—to get to understand not just their languages but their cultures in a very broad sense.

I don't think the Government sufficiently understands the importance of this broad cultural approach. If I really wanted to bring Indonesia and Australia closer together, and expand our trade prospects with them, I would devote about 40 per cent of my energies to developing sporting links and another 40 per cent to mass-media links.

One of the biggest weaknesses in the dominant economic ideology of the past 10 years has been the failure to recognise Australia's special physical circumstances. We have followed policies which were developed in countries with, or near, large, industrialised populations. Our situation is very different. But we are 'off the coast' of South-East Asia, which will be an economic engine room of the future. So the message of gloom can become a message of hope if we recognise our special advantages and disadvantages and adopt Australian solutions for Australian problems. ■

Julian Disney is professor of public law at the Centre for International and Public Law in the Australian National University. He was president of the Australian Council of Social Service from 1985-89.

In the wrong key

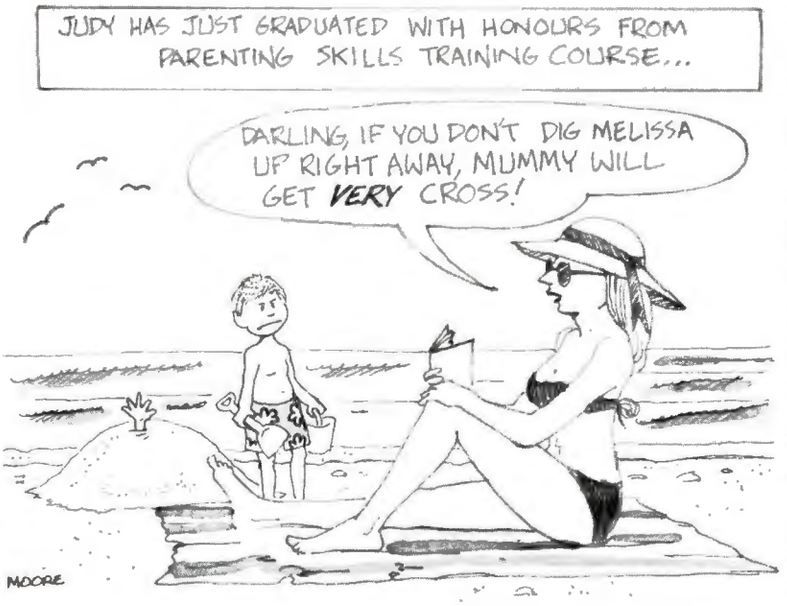
From the Rev. John Bodycomb
Eureka Street is real 'quality', but it needs a Protty consultant to avoid gaffes like 'In the Moody and Sangster' (June 1992, p38).

Dwight L. Moody (1837-99) was a Boston salesman who went to Chicago in 1856 to begin a career as an evangelist; he was the 19th century precursor to Billy Graham. His colleague was the singer and hymn writer Ira D. *Sankey*, who was to Moody what George Beverley Shea was to the Billy Graham evangelistic crusades.

W.E. *Sangster* was one of Britain's great Methodist preachers in this century. He was a president of the Methodist Church, and minister of Central Hall, Westminster.

John Bodycomb
Parkville, Vic.

From Peter Haddad
I enjoyed the review of Janette Turner Hospital's latest novel, and the memoir she provided. But 'In the Moody and Sangster' didn't sound quite right.



Sangster should be Sankey; Ira D. Sankey (1840-1908) was the music director for evangelist Dwight L. Moody, and composer of around 700 hymns and choral settings. His simple verses and stirring refrains belong to the late 19th century gospel hymn movement, and constitute a distinctive popular religious art form.

Peter Haddad
Charnwood ACT

What we lack by way of consultants, we make up for in correspondents. Thanks for the corrections—ed.

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.

Update

From Frank Brennan SJ
On the very day the High Court of Australia ruled the country was *terra nullius* no more, Cardinal Clancy wrote to me accepting my resignation as adviser on Aboriginal affairs to the Australian Catholic bishops (see *Eureka Street*, July 1992, p5). The bishops have now recognised a fully elected Aboriginal group, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, as the advisory body to the conference. For Aborigines, there were welcome changes in church and state on 3 June 1992.

Frank Brennan
Kings Cross, NSW

Sea no barrier

From Tom Cloher
Your May and June issues have moved me from being an experimental subscriber to being a committed one. I refer particularly to Dean Moore's article on the University of Notre Dame Australia, the splendid 'Winter's tale' by Peter Steele SJ, and Paul Ormonde's fearless but fair report on the Movement after 50 years. To use a phrase coined in another context, *Eureka Street* is the journal the Catholic community had to have.

However, may I politely remind readers that many of the Eureka originals moved on from Victoria to the west coast of New Zealand (where I grew up with their love of the written and spoken word). Shipping between Melbourne and Hokitika was well established in gold-rush days and historic links have a life of their own, inviting renewed involvement.

Being Catholic in New Zealand is less comfortable than it is in Australia. Belonging to a distinct minority—1:7 is quite different from the comparatively mainstream experience of Australian Catholicism. Having a contributing editor from New Zealand could add a useful perspective to *Eureka Street*, as well as adding to the readership it deserves.

Tom Cloher
Daly River, NT

Got the numbers

From A.J. Murphy
Your report by Paul Ormonde on the conference '50 Years of the Santamaria Movement' (June 1992), suggests that the small attendance, about 60 people, is an indication of B.A. Santamaria's limited support today.

In my view, the conference, convened jointly by the State Library Society of NSW, the Catholic Institute of Sydney and Sydney University's department of government, failed because Gerard Henderson and the other anti-Santamaria speakers lacked credibility and pulling power.

The NCC's own celebrations held in the different capital cities some months earlier, attracted capacity houses: nearly 1000 in Melbourne and Sydney, and 500 in Brisbane and Perth. At those functions Sir Charles Court, Professor Lauchlan Chipman, Robert Manne, Archbishop D'Arcy and Bishop Pell were among many notable Australians who paid tribute to Mr

Continued p46

MARGARET SIMONS

Change is in the air

Theorists talk about economic reform as a matter of level playing fields and fast tracking. But the way real people act and the way models work are two different things.

THE NOTION OF government providing services is out of fashion these days. Increasingly, costs must be recovered, and the user must pay. Yet when the lines between government and business become blurred, the traditional checks and balances on government can disappear. A controversy involving the Civil Aviation Authority underlines the point, and shows that when government-owned trading enterprises are involved, the parliamentary system can be left struggling to rein in the horses.

Once cited as one of the worst examples of mindless bureacracy, the CAA has been reformed on the principle of cost recovery and business efficiency. But now its senior bureaucrats face allegations that they manipulated the tendering process for Australia's new air traffic control system, so as to favour a company with, according to evidence before a parliamentary committee, a poor performance record but with which they had previous dealings. The affair calls into question the integrity of tendering processes at the highest levels of the transport bureaucracy, but is also cause for suspicion about whether government-owned business enterprises such as CAA can be made sufficiently accountable.

The federal Parliamentary Works Committee, whose public hearings brought the affair to light, has threatened senior CAA bureaucrats with contempt of Parliament for refusing to give details of the tendering process. The bureaucrats claimed the details were 'commercial in confidence'. Although they eventually gave evidence in camera, it is believed that some vital details were still not obtained.

The Public Works Committee, normally seen as a 'rubber stamp', has now taken the extraordinary step of refusing to give the go-ahead for the construction of buildings to house air traffic control equipment. It has demanded that the whole of the tendering process which resulted in the French-based company, Thomson Radar, being named preferred contractor, be referred to an independent committee for investigation. As well, an unsuccessful tenderer, the American-based Hughes Aircraft Company, has taken the unusual step of writing to the Prime Minister, Paul Keating, calling for an independent inquiry. Meanwhile, the Department of Industry has said it is 'not impressed and is barely concealing its displeasure' with the way CAA has handled 'what is probably the biggest purchasing decision it will make in the next 20 years.'

The CAA officials under the spotlight include men who have been given the chief responsibility for carrying out the government's policies on microeconomic and infrastructure reform. At the centre of the affair are the CAA's general manager for projects, Dr Robert Edwards, and the recently appointed chief executive, Frank Baldwin. Both men are best known for their involvement in the radical reform of the New Zealand Airways Corporation, where Baldwin slashed staff and Edwards oversaw the modernisation of the air traffic control system. They were brought to Australia as part of the CAA's transformation from bureaucratic dinosaur to lean, mean, money-making organisation.

EVEN BEFORE TENDERS were called, Australia's new air traffic control system had already been controversial. The number of air traffic controllers was to be drastically cut, and the degree of supervision of remote airspace reduced. All air traffic control services for the entire country would be provided through two centres at Brisbane and Melbourne airports.

Although many in the industry agreed that Australian airspace had been unnecessarily tightly regulated, with onerous results, the new system was thought by some to go too far in the other direction. Air traffic controllers and flight service officers claimed safety was being sacrificed in the name of cost recovery and eco-

nomic rationalism. In March 1991, a predecessor of Edwards, Clive Davidson wrote a letter to senior executives, including Baldwin, saying the rationale for the introduction of the new system was faulty, the financial analysis 'puerile' and 'gung ho', that documentation had been compiled in 'paranoid secrecy'. He said the whole process was 'the most unprofessional exercise I have ever seen'. A few weeks later Davidson left the CAA, and is now believed to be working in Europe.

> I must say that it is the first time I have ever been given a reference to look at two buildings when no one knows what they are going to look like, how they are going to be built or what they are going to contain. —Works committee chairman Colin Hollis.

The tendering process began in May 1991, when six companies were invited to register their interest in providing the equipment for Australia's new air traffic control system. Four tendered: the French-based multinational Thomson CSF, Hughes, Siemens/Plessey, and IBM. A 50-person team was set up to evaluate tenders, and in October 1991 it selected IBM, Thomson and Hughes for the next phase. Final offers were submitted on 22 November 1991, and the evaluation team recommended that Hughes get the contract, judging it superior on all fronts.

According to evidence before the parliamentary committee, shortly after that decision normal tendering procedures were abandoned. Edwards indicated in meetings with Hughes that CAA was opening the door for repricing. Hughes was also directed to extend its schedule, necessitating a price increase, was asked to resubmit performance guarantees, although it had already been told its performance guarantees were acceptable, and finally, in April 1992, was told that Thomson had been given copies of its drawings for the buildings.

Hughes claims this information should have been confidential, since it would have allowed Thomson to redraft their tender more favourably. Thomson deny that this was done. (Hughes was also given a copy of Thomson's drawings). In February 1992, the 50-person evaluation team was disbanded, and the entire process of assessing tenders handed to three bureaucrats, including Edwards. At this point the Air Traffic Controllers Association withdrew its representation, because, the controllers told the works committee, they believed the evaluation had been changed to 'achieve a certain result'.

On 17 March 1992, Edwards announced that Thomson was the preferred contractor. Questioned by the parliamentary committee, Edwards justified the allegedly 'gross repricing' of tenders after final offers by saying that the complexity of the project meant that a 'staged negotiation' was more appropriate than a formal tender process. He denied that the process had been designed to favor Thomson. He was asked: 'Would the reason Thomson was selected have anything to do with the fact that you have worked with Thomson's over the years and, whilst some of their work was not 100 per cent, it was acceptable and they were quite willing and able to work with the CAA ...?'

Edwards replied: 'No, none whatsoever ... We knew what problems we could expect dealing with them, what things traditionally happened with that company, so that certainly did not influence us towards Thomson's—if anything it probably led us in the other direction.'

Edwards was asked to provide the committee with detailed information on the tenders, including the prices at various stages of the process. He refused. The committee was in a difficult position. It had initially been asked to approve only the building component of the scheme, which made up only about $50 million of the $300 million project.

At the beginning of the hearings, the committee chairman, Colin Hollis, had said the committee would not involve itself in issues relating to the equipment. It was a position that proved impossible to maintain. As soon as the hearings opened, unions, the unsuccessful tenderers, the CAA's own engineering staff, and other government officials all cried foul over the way the process had been conducted.

In the last public hearing, Hollis' attitude had changed. He said to Edwards. 'I must say that it is the first time I have ever been given a reference to look at two buildings when no one knows what they are going to look like, how they are going to be built or what they are going to contain. Nevertheless, that is what we were given the reference for ... you might wish the committee would confine its inquiries to two buildings which are the figment of someone's imagination, but believe you me, we will not.'

> Davidson wrote to CAA executives, saying the financial analysis was 'puerile' and 'gung ho' ... 'the most unprofessional exercise I have ever seen.' A few weeks later he left the CAA.

Hollis went on to accuse Edwards of deliberately not giving answers to written questions from the committee, and eventually threatened him with contempt of Parliament for refusing to divulge the tender prices.

After taking legal advice, Edwards was allowed to give evidence in camera, but in the meantime the chairman of the CAA, Ted Butcher, wrote to the parlia-

Photo: The Age.

Men of influence: Ted Harris, James Strong and Peter Abeles listen to the then Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, in 1989.

mentary committee saying it should limit its questioning so as not to 'inhibit' CAA's negotiations.

Hollis responded, 'It really does surprise me that someone of such senior standing in the public service does not know how committees of this Parliament operate ... someone occupying such a senior position should get his facts correct before writing to a committee of this Parliament.'

As well as being chairman of the CAA, Butcher is also head of the new National Rail Corporation, which has been charged with the vital and controversial job of reorganising Australia's rail freight network on a commercial basis. It is hard to think of a more vital player in moves to reform Australia's transport system than Ted Butcher.

At the conclusion of its hearings, the public works committee unanimously recommended that an independent panel be appointed to review the entire tender, but the story didn't stop there. Terms of reference for the review were released in early June this year, but were immediately criticised for being too narrow, and too heavily influenced by CAA.They also set a 1 August deadline for the panel to report, so that CAA's intended schedule for completing contracts would not be interfered with. In the meantime, CAA continued to negotiate with Thomson.

Subsequently, Swedavia, the technical consulting arm of the Swedish aviation authority, was named as possible adviser to the review. Swedavia had previously worked with Baldwin and Edwards in their former roles as aviation bureaucrats in New Zealand.

After some media coverage of the issue, the head of the panel, former Liberal MP Ian McPhee, a man widely respected for his independence, was told that he could review and seek an expansion of the terms of reference if he wished, and choose his own advisers. The industry awaits his conclusions with interest. ■

The sideshow and the game

IT WAS HALF-PAST NINE on the first Sunday in June, and the jaws of some of the most influential people in Australia were dropping open. The Prime Minister, Paul Keating, had just announced on Channel Nine's *Sunday* program that Qantas would merge with Australian Airlines, and that the new body would be sold.

The announcement came as a complete surprise to almost everyone involved. Although Australian Airlines, Qantas and Ansett have all been tight-lipped since that Sunday, sources confirm that Keating's announcement came as a complete surprise to all three. One senior airline official said: 'I came in here on Monday morning and it was chaos. Nobody knew. It was a complete shock.'

Even the Commonwealth task force on asset sales, which had been trying to sell Australian and Qantas as separate items for months, was surprised by the move, though delighted to have two unattractive assets turned into a highly saleable package. A senior official on the task force said: 'Suddenly everything is possible. Ansett have been very influential in the past because of the relationships between certain people. These recent moves have come as a shock to some of those people. I guess you can draw your own conclusions from that.'

To understand what is going on in airline policy at the moment it is necessary to understand two things. First, the developments of recent months make the end of the two-airline policy look like a sideshow, and second, the game is being played by new rules. Sir Peter Abeles, whose TNT is half-owner of Ansett, is no longer as influential. As the Institute of Public Affairs put it in a foreword to a paper on airline deregulation, the

airline industry has been 'dominated by those people best able to hold the attention of politicians'. Which means the story of airline deregulation is as much about patronage and personal power as it is about the theoretically impersonal logic of market forces. There is nothing wrong with being influential, nor is there any evidence to suggest impropriety in the conduct of airline policy, but when politicians and powerful business people grow close, the public has a legitimate interest in scrutinising the relationship.

Keating's surprise announcement was part of the government's attempt to recover from an appalling month, in which Graham Richardson, Minister for Transport and Communications and a man with immense personal and political power, had been forced to resign. More significantly, it was the clearest sign to date that the tides of influence have changed. The announcement was a massive kick in the teeth for Ansett. Although Ansett's general manager, Graeme McMahon, recently broke Ansett's shocked silence with brave talk about the new challenges facing the group, industry analysts believe the airline will now be relegated to a niche carrier operating in a market in which all the rules will be set by the new merged operator. Some speculate that Ansett might not survive as a domestic carrier at all. and it will certainly have to seek extra capital, probably from a foreign airline.

So much for level playing fields. The decision to merge Qantas and Australian Airlines was entirely driven by the need to make them attractive assets for sale. In spite of the deregulation rhetoric, Ansett has been left with the playing field tilted very sharply against them. Access to international routes is to be decided by a commission that the new Minister for Transport and Communications, Bob Collins, has said will be entirely open and accountable. But at the moment, Qantas has the most profitable routes tied up for five years, and the government, mindful of the need to get a good sale price, has indicated that will remain the case.

When the two-airline agreement ended, there were happy predictions that the Australian market would be able to support numerous carriers. That is now considered ridiculously optimistic. Compass airlines have gone spectacularly broke, and Southern Cross, which is trying to revive Compass, has filled only half its $50 million float, raising doubts about whether its aircraft will get off the ground. Now international carriers will compete for domestic traffic. It seems likely that the market will always be divided up between two carriers, with the threat of a third constantly in the wings.

Nevertheless, deregulation has been good for consumers. A survey by the Prices Surveillance Authority has confirmed that although airfares rose after the collapse of Compass, average fares have still fallen by a total of 22 per cent since the beginning of deregulation. As a result, more people are flying more often. Running an airline has become a high cash flow, low profit margin, business. And, although there is concern about the new air traffic control system, so far there is no evidence that the airlines have reduced their safety standards.

For the past decade or more, the friendship between the former Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, and the part-owner of Ansett, Peter Abeles, has been one of the enduring features of Australian politics. The former Minister for Transport and Communications, Graham Richardson, was also one of the circle. Blanche d'Alpuget's biography of Hawke, written with his co-operation, describes Abeles, along with Gold Coast property developer Eddie Kornhauser, as one of a number of 'father figures' who advised, funded and counselled the emergent politician. Hawke chose Abeles as his witness at the meeting in November 1988 at which he made a secret pact with Keating to give up the leadership after the 1990 election. It was Hawke's breaking of this promise that precipitated the series of challenges which eventually led to Keating being Prime Minister in 1991.

In the meantime, Hawke, Richardson and other ministers dealt regularly with Abeles during the airline pilots' dispute; their discussions included the $100 million compensation paid to the airlines. They also dealt with him over the end of the two-airline agreement; the award of the coastal surveillance contract to Ansett's affiliate, Skywest; and the company being permitted to buy East West Airlines in spite of controversy; and over the signing of long-term leases on terminal space before deregulation, which severely restricted new entrants. Abeles had also been appointed to the board of the Reserve Bank in August 1984, and in 1991 was given the highest honour in the Australia Day honours list.

When Hawke lost the Prime Ministership, things began to change. Bob Collins, the boy from the bush, took over the aviation section of the Transport and Communications portfolio within weeks of the Compass collapse. Amid the turmoil, and in little more than a month, he achieved what three other transport ministers—Gareth Evans, Ralph Willis and Kim Beazley—had failed to do. He ended Australia's unique separation between domestic and international airlines, and began the merging of the Australian and New Zealand markets.

Abeles and the chairman of Australian Airlines, Ted Harris, who was also used to having the prime ministerial ear, lobbied hard for measures to protect their markets, but they failed to sway Keating. The changes, the most radical in the history of the industry, were announced in the *One Nation* statement. Now the Qantas-Australian merger, announced only days after the disappearance of Richardson from the ministry, is an even harder kick in the teeth for Ansett.

The rules in the airline industry have changed for good, but the results might not be what the economic rationalists would have expected.

Margaret Simons is a freelance journalist. She is a regular contributor to *Eureka Street*.

What are we waiting for?

Time is a great healer but, for much of the African continent, time is running out.

Drought has laid to waste the agricultural pride of many African countries. With no end in sight, the people can only wait and pray for the rains that will end what has become the worst drought in eighty years.

But waiting has its price. Scarce resources are dwindling and food and water supplies are nearing exhaustion with each passing day.

Australian Catholic Relief is working right now to help those who are most vulnerable - children under five, expectant and nursing mothers, the sick, the elderly and the disabled.

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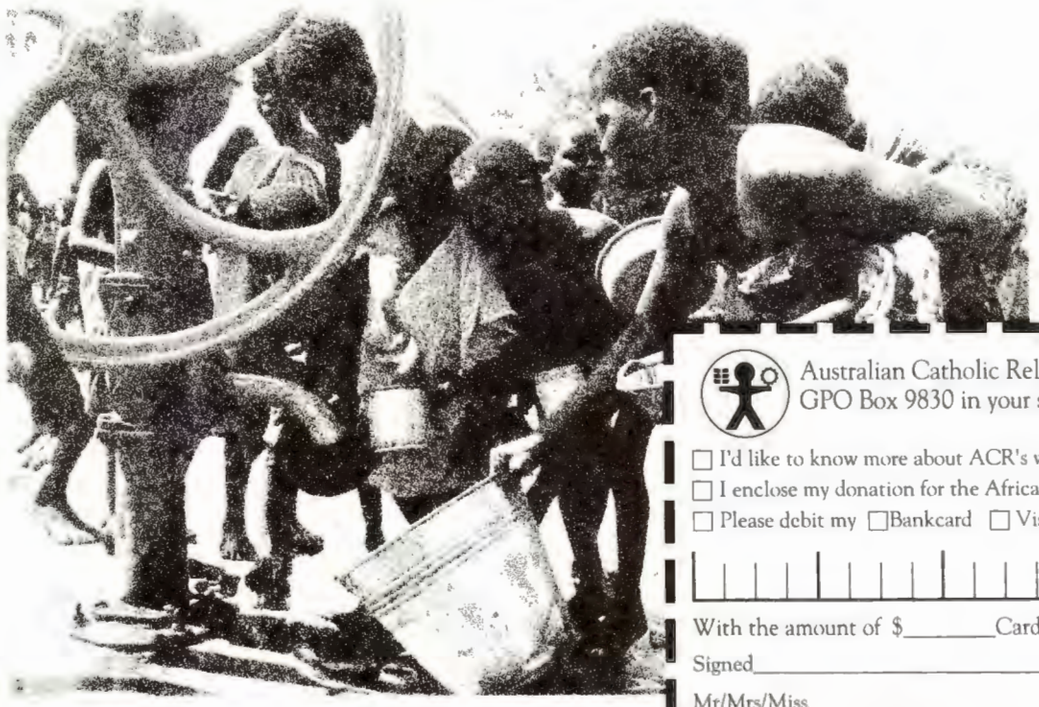
But please don't wait - every dollar spent now will help avoid a tragic crisis and the much higher cost of emergency aid.



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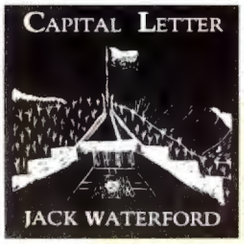


Come back Shame, come back

In NSW, a Premier already heading a minority government loses another seat when a government MP turns independent. The MP signals that he might go if a public service job can be found for him. At the Premier's behest, the head of the NSW public service concludes, after a 10-minute examination of conscience, that the MP in question, whose record for erratic behaviour is second to none, is better than 150 uninterviewed other applicants. The NSW Independent Commission against Corruption, a body that the Premier had set up to signal that there is a new morality of the public purse and public trust, concludes that this was corrupt.

In Tasmania, a criminal trial establishes the guilt of a leading businessman in attempting to bribe a Labor politician. An ensuing royal commission suggests that the former Liberal Premier knew more about the affair than he let on, even if his conduct fell short of complicity. This former Premier challenges the verdict at law, and fails. But after the Labor government falls, the incoming Liberal government decides to reimburse the legal costs of all parties to the royal commission and ensuing litigation. (Except, initially at least, the politician whom the businessman had tried to bribe).

In Queensland, a police misconduct tribunal, established under the state's post-Fitzgerald reform legislation, finds that a police commissioner has improperly used public funds for private travel. The commissioner challenges the findings on narrow legal grounds—an alleged failure properly to specify the alleged offence—and succeeds. A new hearing is ordered. But the Criminal Justice Commission, the supposed watchdog of the new morality, decides to play dead and the commissioner is reinstated. A round of recriminations begins and the man who conducted the misconduct inquiry resigns, alleging that the commissioner was a friend of the CJC chairman. The CJC chairman blames the press.

In Western Australia, several former politicians, including a former Premier, and several once-prominent entrepreneurs face criminal charges arising out of the cosy 'WA Inc'—the term used to describe a network of relationships between government and private business. The same philosophy of gung ho partnership between government and business has also left the economies of Victoria and South Australia in ruins. In these two states, however, it is the governing party's reputation for competence, rather than honesty, that is in tatters.

What is interesting about all these cases is that politicians are finding it hard to cope with some of the public reactions to the forms of misconduct in question. There is a feeling that somehow there is a new morality operating—that the rules have suddenly changed, and that it is a bit unfair for offenders, particularly first offenders such as Nick Greiner, to be executed for breaching them. Greiner's public lament was that politicians had been giving jobs to the boys for years. Why is it suddenly a hanging offence? A few inconvenient facts, such as the fact that tradititional forms of patronage involved certain kinds of job—chairmanships and consultancies, etc—rather than the perversion of public service merit principles, were ignored. To many people, Greiner's claim had some merit.

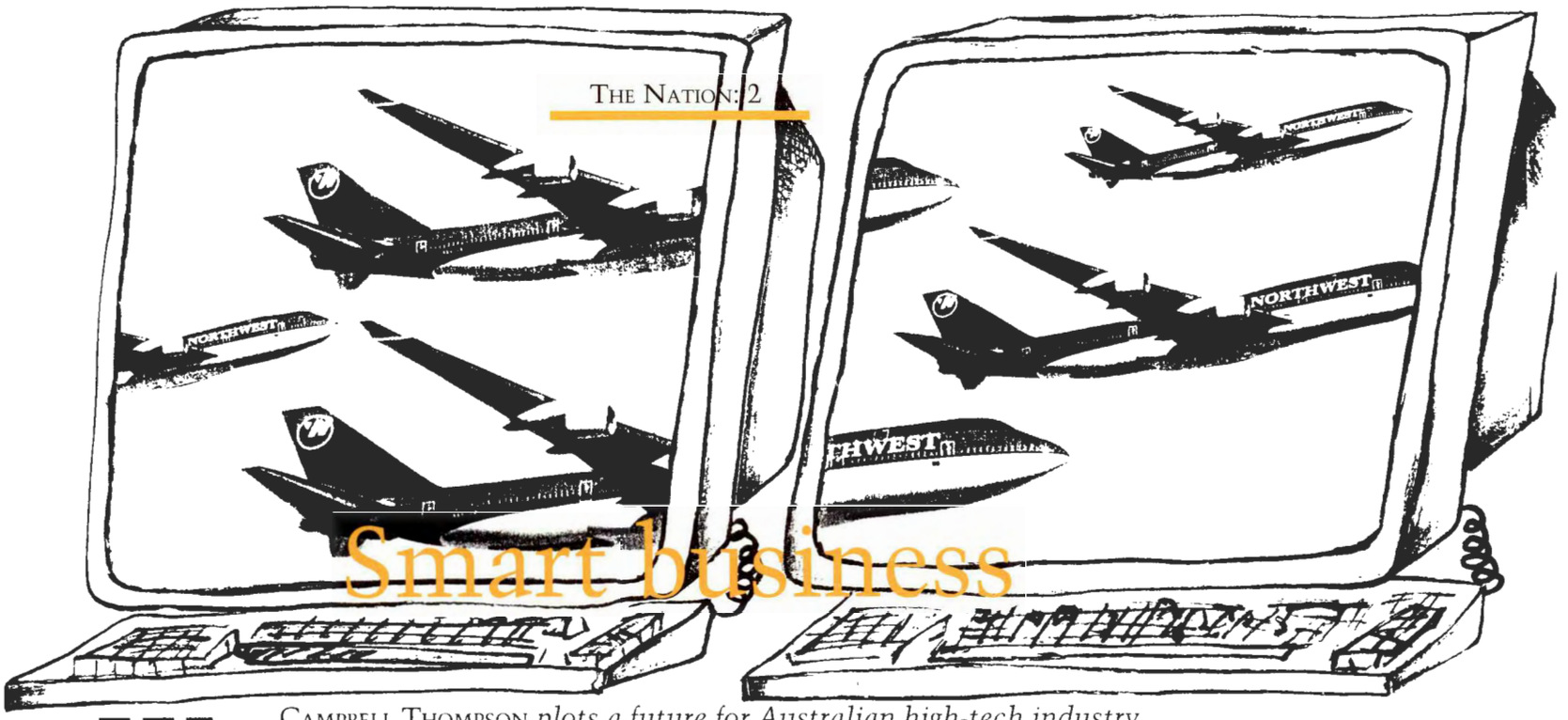
One problem is that Greiner had, in part, achieved power by saying that the old morality of patronage was out of date. As that well-known political commentator Roy Slavin aptly put it: 'It's no good Nick Greiner complaining that he has just done what everyone has been doing for years when he has been found guilty of doing what everyone has been doing for years by a body he himself set up to stop everyone doing what they have been doing for years.'

When Senator Reg Withers was chided and forced to resign by a royal commissioner, for having had a quiet word with an electoral commissioner, the feeling among the old hands was that the affair revealed the naivety of the judge more than it revealed the wickedness of a politician. Nonetheless, Malcom Fraser decided Withers had to go. Similarly, once the purges started in Queensland's post-Fitzgerald zeal, not a few old-timers thought that things had got out of hand, with politicians being forced to resign or going to jail just because of a bit of cheating on their travel and lunch expenses.

Are the hard heads right? Is there a new morality at all? Or simply the reinforcement of an old one, because the behaviour of many politicians and public officials has become unusually disgusting of late, and because the economic failures of the 1980s have undermined the capacity of well-meaning politicians to do good.

There is certainly no evidence that the voters have ever shared the fairly tolerant attitude of the insiders. A phenomenon of the age, the resurgence of independents, even in lower houses, is connected with issues of public morality. Of course, the sort of naivety displayed by many independents has risks of its own. I'd trust a smart corrupt politician a lot further than I'd trust some of the earnest, single-issue innocents. But, however much politicians affect to admire ruthlessness, or a willingness to traffic with the truth or with public funds, it is worth remembering that few ex-politicians can trace their demise to an excess of honorable conduct. ■

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



Smart business

CAMPBELL THOMPSON *plots a future for Australian high-tech industry.*

WHO COINED THE PHRASE 'the clever country'? The long-term unemployed will tell you that it doesn't look too clever now. With most politicians keen to turn up the flame-thrower on the already burnt earth of the level playing field, what are the prospects for companies with new ideas? Do they have to go overseas to make money? Are investors interested? And what can government do as the world economy shifts towards the service, technology, and information industries?

Early this century, Argentina had the world's highest standard of living, from beef exports. Hyperinflation and chaos arrived after only a few decades of complacency. Australia may have a stronger tradition of parliamentary democracy but its position in the world is frighteningly similar. Stuck in the southern hemisphere, both countries are isolated from the world's main markets in North America and Europe. Both depend on the export of primary products, with little value added. Both are hostage to the boom-bust cycles of foreign capital markets, and both have sheltered behind tariff barriers. Argentina is making a halting recovery. Can Australia?

Thinkers in Australia play a kind of kick-to-kick game with ideas, before punting them overseas. This country lacks the kind of sponsorship that brings home premier dividends—the CSIRO's gene shears project is the best-known example.

Roger Allen is chairman and chief executive of Computer Power, Australia's biggest software, systems development and training company. Its story illustrates many of the problems facing 'clever' companies. Stockbrokers say of Computer Power that it is a good company with a lousy balance sheet—it has just written off $89.7 million of its database intangible assets. But Allen responds: 'In the US market you have to amortize intangibles. Here, companies like Westpac are writing down their assets to current market value. How do you convince investors of the value of an idea? Look at the money paid for Hollywood software companies. Accounting does not treat their type of assets well either.'

Double-entry bookkeeping and accounting can be traced back to the mercantile Venetians, who controlled maritime commodity trading. Australian investors still think of value in the same terms: tonnes of coal, bales of wool, city real estate. As the failure of the last building boom shows, these tangibles can be equally speculative. Says Allen: 'One problem is that we haven't had a fantastic success story like Microsoft or Lotus. The closest would be Orbital, and investors have backed that'.

As Michael West wrote in the *Australian Financial Review* of 2 June 1992: 'In the boom-time 1980s ... the market flung money at anyone with an invention. A slew of fledgling blue-sky companies sprang up, many spawned on Perth's second board, and share prices roller-coasted, often with market abuses by company promoters and speculators. Some had dubious technology, others poor management, and a few were just plain rorts. But after the crash in October 1987, turnovers were sliced by two-thirds and a generation of pretenders were transported to that great high-tech graveyard in the sky.'

IN THE PRESENT RECESSION, few investors are willing to put money into companies with less than a billion dollars of market capital. Institutions consider short-term profits before long-term possibilities. Research into the viability of patents is expensive, and there are not enough scientists in our finance industry with analytical ability. Allen sees it like this: 'If you develop ideas here you have to go to the world market to make them pay. In the US you can make money locally before worrying

about going overseas so it's easier to get success stories.

The analogy is with films and books. It's harder to crack the US market from outside than from within. The more successful you are, the more you gravitate to the major market. The best you can do is have your roots here. Some people move offshore and never come back. In our case, we're leaving the research and development here and putting the marketing overseas.'

'Australia could be the contract software centre in the Asia-Pacific—we are the most sophisticated users of software in the region. Whereas Singapore and Taiwan have put lots of money into training, you can't buy 20 years of experience.'

—Computer Power chief Roger Allen

An example is Computer Power's AIDA, or Artificially Intelligent Document Analyser. The company leads the world in this kind of software, which analyses and summarises text by concentrating on the author's language and style rather than the document's contents. But the Australian market is too small for Computer Power to make enough money from AIDA.

The director of the Australian Artificial Intelligence Unit, Mike Georgeff, points out that Australia ranks third among OECD countries in the number of world-class scientific publications per capita, but third from the bottom in terms of money spent on research and development. The artificial intelligence unit is a project of the Co-operative Research Centre, a joint venture of Computer Power, the Stanford Research Institute and the Victorian government. The unit has been given $100 million from government funds, and after four years is now gaining profitable research and development contracts.

Georgeff argues that the transfer of technology to industry should be market-driven and that the Anglo-Saxon tradition of keeping research separate from industry is ineffective. He also argues that specialist organisations like his own are better suited to meet industry requirements than public bodies like universities and the CSIRO.

The vice-chancellor of Melbourne University, Professor David Penington, maintains that universities are the right place for contract research. He argues that the academic culture is moving in the right direction and points to the research of Professor Graham Clark into the bionic ear, which has been developed by Cochlear, a subsidiary of Pacific Dunlop.

Melbourne University and RMIT have set up CITRI—the Collaborative Information and Technology Research Institute—to provide what the insititute's chief executive, Professor Peter Poole, calls 'an interface' with industry. It is responsible for such projects as Titan, a text retrieval system that is being sold under licence by Knowledge Engineering.

Behind all the acronyms, and euphemistic titles such as Co-operative Research Centre, there is a jealous pursuit of government funding. All involved agree that government intervention is necessary at the macro level, but argue that bureaucrats should not determine where the money is spent, as happened with the VEDC.

Roger Allen extrapolates from Computer Power to Australia's position: 'The raw talent here is very good. We have a group in Perth doing research and development for IBM. The customer is in the Hudson valley, New York State. You can't physically get further away. Yet they sit on terminals hooked into a worldwide network and can talk to these guys like they're in the next room.

'When the talent from New York comes to Perth, they all want to stay. They don't need to work in a big city. They want a clean environment, a place to raise their kids, good education, good health systems and leisure facilities. We can attract the best people. The brain drain is due to the funding and facilities available overseas.

'Australia could be the contract software centre in the Asia-Pacific—we are the most sophisticated users of software in the region. Whereas Singapore and Taiwan have put lots of money into training, you can't buy 20 years of experience.

'For instance, Eriksons moved some R&D here because Telecom was the first customer in the world to want it. IBM used to think: "Australia, do those guys know what a computer looks like?" Now they know we can produce quality work on time.'

Allen argues that Australian companies cannot compete in Europe. But IBM spends $7 billion a year on research and development, and if 30 per cent is for the Asian market attracting it to Australia would bring enormous benefits.

The language of world software is English, which gives Australia a headstart over Japan and the other fast-developing Asian nations. Research laboratories are cheaper in India and China, but the best researchers don't want to live there. The federal government could help Australian firms compete with entities like Singapore's National Computer Board.

Allen argues that Australia has no added competitive advantage in assembling components that have to be imported in order to build products that are then exported to make money. IBM has an efficient plant in Wangaratta, but it also has the worldwide purchasing and distribution network to make it viable.

Another Australian high-technology company that manufactures overseas to be nearer its major market is Telectronics, a Pacific Dunlop subsidiary that makes heart pacemakers in Miami. Its world-leading cardiac technology was developed in Australia, and Australian shareholders benefit from its exploitation overseas. German and Japanese companies, with higher labour costs than Australia, also manufacture overseas.

Intellectual property and technology are the key assets. If Australia can foster development in specific market niches, the flow-on effects would be substantial—there are not enough software engineers of the highest skill levels in Asia, but Australian industry could

supply them. The government initiated a Pool Development Fund to provide money for small-to-medium-size companies. Investors buy units in the fund and pay no tax on their dividends and no capital gains tax when they sell the units. It replaces the Management and Investment Corporation Scheme, which was ineffectively run by bureaucrats and invested unwisely: during a downturn in the business cycle money was put into small firms, and it became a matter of private enterprise being unable to pick winners. But the new scheme still faces a shortage of investment funds.

The only people who will invest in small and medium size Australian companies are Australian. To tap foreign capital markets you have to list overseas and, although stock markets are increasingly global, American investors want companies that conform to their accounting, reporting and legal standards.

Since the '80s, Australia has had a bad name; but accounting standards are improving, there is a move towards continuous disclosure and reporting, and directors have greater obligations. Some say this makes it more difficult to do business here, but unless standards improve the economy won't attract foreign capital.

Dick Gross, a business consultant, agrees that Australia must concentrate on regional markets. He cites the government's offsets program, under which sales to government bodies require research and development or export credits, as a further stimulus to the clever country. He thinks Australian manufacturers can be competitive in some markets, citing the fact that 95 per cent of Australian wool is washed and combed overseas. The process requires space for chemical solutions to settle, and space is a commodity that Japan and Germany don't have.

Gross believes that government and industry must work together more closely, with government ensuring that basic services—shipping, gas, electricity, roads, aviation, etc—are as efficient as possible. The sale of government trading enterprises is not necessarily an advantage. For instance, when New Zealand Telecom went private, all its procurements were made overseas and a whole sector of the country's industry went under. Government can make it more attractive for multinationals to do research here. It can encourage investment in companies with profitable ideas. And it can make it attractive for the best researchers to stay here.

There is not much short term comfort here for the unemployed, but in the long term, this country would be clever to make sure that clever companies want to do business in Australia. ■

Campbell Thomson is a lawyer and freelance writer.

Photo: Andrew Stark

ANNIVERSARIES

JAMES CUNNINGHAM

Trail blazer

In August 1942 a Japanese army appeared poised to take Port Moresby. The commander of the Australians who faced that army recalls the campaign.

Ralph Honner: 'I saw no hangdog look on parade, only proud veterans.'

HALF A CENTURY SEPARATES Ralph Honner from the bloody Battle of Isurava. But it is impossible to forget the afternoon of 27 August 1942, when the young conscripts of the 39th Militia Battalion, which he commanded, were dying hard in a struggle to keep possession of a battered Papuan village. The 39th, blocking the path of the Japanese advance down the Kokoda Trail in the Owen Stanley Mountains, was facing annihilation.

At Isurava Honner had about 200 men under his immediate command. Many were sick and all were weary from continuous fighting. But, as the Japanese intensified their bombardment and began infantry assaults, he succeeded in getting a message through to B Company of the 2/14th Battalion AIF, which was newly arrived in the battle area. The company struggled through dense jungle to join the 39th, and in savage fighting the Australians stood fast. Isurava held for two more vital days.

Something previously considered highly unlikely also happened. The militia soldiers of the 39th, most of them teenagers originally conscripted for home defence, earned the admiration of the veterans of the 2/14th and of the entire 21st Brigade AIF, which relieved them. The 39th had been severely mauled, and the soldiers appeared almost spent. But they had halted the Japanese in the first battles fought on what was then Australian soil.

In a report to the *Australian Army Journal* Honner later described the close-quarter nature of the battle, during which the Australians listened to the shouted orders, the bugle calls and the chanting voices of the enemy as they formed up to attack under cover of the tangled forest. He described the Japanese as 'veterans of unflinching valour ... trained for such desperate warfare as they waged that day.'

Ironically, the great naval battles of Midway and the Coral Sea, which shaped the war in the Pacific, had been decided before the 39th set eyes on the Kokoda Trail. But they bought time on its rainsodden ridges, denying the overland route to Port Moresby to an enemy who had lost the chance of taking it by sea. Honner now recalls it this way: 'I have no doubt that the enemy's setback at Isurava was the decisive battle of the campaign.' And, after a moment's thought: 'I never felt despair but I knew we were in a hazardous situation.'

The Japanese had landed on the north coast of New Guinea in July. If they had not been delayed and weak-

ened at Isurava and elsewhere, would Port Moresby have fallen? 'That is a difficult question,' Honner says. 'The Japanese should have bypassed us at Isurava and, given the terrain, they could have done so. Then they could have swept through to Moresby.' He is not convinced that the port would have been occupied if this had happened, however, although a stubborn defensive battle would have been required to save it.

He is certain, however, that if a different strategic plan had been adopted the whole horrendous campaign in the Owen Stanleys could have been avoided. But it would have required recognition by the high command that Kokoda airfield was the key to the defence of Port Moresby.

When the Japanese began their push inland in July 1942, the airfield was held by advance elements of the 39th, commanded by Lt Col W.T. Owen, who was soon to die in battle. The hopes of the Australians lifted at the sight of incoming transport aircraft but the expected reinforcements failed to land. Incredibly, at the last moment the aircraft turned away, back towards Port Moresby.

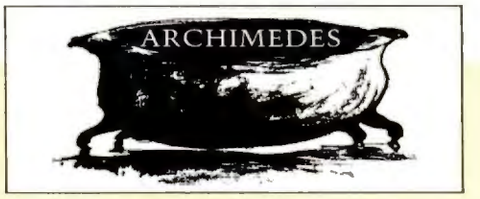
'It was our last chance of stopping the enemy from coming over the mountains,' Honner says. 'If we had done so, things might have been very different. With the airfield we could have reinforced more quickly from Australia than the Japanese could through Rabaul. But the opportunity was lost.'

Still, if Honner regrets a lost opportunity, he principally remembers with satisfaction that a few weeks after Isurava, and almost within sight of their goal, the Japanese turned back. Port Moresby was secured, although the war in Papua was far from over. The heart-breaking Owen Stanleys had to be traversed once more, this time with the Japanese in the role of stubborn defenders. And the 39th went on to play a conspicuous part in the costly attacks that eventually crushed Japanese beach-heads at Gona and Buna. Honner himself was badly wounded.

But that was another campaign. Today Honner, now 87, recalls instead the depleted ranks of his soldiers on the stand-down parade after their epic fight before Port Moresby. It is hardly surprising that he describes them with some emotion: 'As I glanced along the steady lines of pallid and emaciated men with sunken eyes and shrunken frames that testified to the hardships they had long endured, I saw no hangdog look—only the proud bearing of tired veterans who had looked death in the face and had not failed.'

Lt Col Ralph Honner MC, DSO, now lives in Fairlight, on the northern shores of Sydney Harbour. A graduate of the University of WA, he served as a company commander with the 2/11th (WA) Battalion AIF in North Africa, Greece and Crete, before taking command of the 39th Battalion on 1 August 1942. He was Australian ambassador to Ireland from 1968 to '72. ■

James Cunningham is a freelance journalist. He was for many years on the staff of the *Sydney Morning Herald*.



Just not my type

NO, NOT 'TYPE' AS IN 'Ce type-là; incroyable!', or even as in 'a nice type of suburb'. The other 'type', as in 'The editor has asked me to return your typescript with thanks.'

Science, and especially mathematics, demands much more of type than do the humanities. You can write your sensitive evocation of coming of age with the symbols of a typewriter keyboard, but to express a mathematical breakthrough you will need an entirely different type of type as well. Subscripts. Superscripts. Subscripts of subscripts. Greek. Boldface. Arrows. Multiplication signs. Square roots √. Infinity ∞. And, most entertainingly, integral signs: ∫ (the sign of a lengthened S, standing for 'summa', as an integral is a kind of infinite sum). And all the symbols must come in a choice of sizes, possibly with different sizes in the same expression.

Stopgap measures, like the mathematical golfball for the IBM typewriter, were all right in their day, but could not cope with the need for different sizes. The problem is now solved, with the two computer programs troff (pronounced 'tee-roff', but you can hardly avoid thinking of pigs) and T_EX (pronounced 'tech' as in technical'). With these, if you want to let fly with

$$\sum_{i=0}^{n} \int_{-\infty} \pi^{\nabla \times x^2} \, dx$$

then you can do it (after a spell with the manual, of course).

The mathematics profession is moving to standardise on T_EX. It is the creation of Donald Knuth, of Stanford, one of the most interesting figures in theoretical computer science. He is most famous for his three-volume classic, *The Art of Computer Programming*, which did as much as any single effort to transform computing into a genuine theoretical science. That was in the 1960s; in the 70s, he came up with typesetting ideas. The first is T_EX (Knuth claims that the source program for T_EX is a work of art, comparable in aesthetic value to the greatest paintings and symphonies. Exercise: explain how to evaluate this claim). His second program is for those who have figured most of what T_EX does (!) and feel restricted by it. For the typesetter who has everything, Knuth has Metafont, the program for designing new fonts. Designing Metafont called for skill in the subtle matter of describing geometrical shapes: one must describe the 26 letters of the alphabet for the computer in such a way that one can say, 'In this new font, tip all verticals to the right'. It turned out that 25 letters were easy to describe. And then there was S... ■

James Franklin, our occasional guest columnist, lectures in mathematics at the University of NSW.

Cory's endgame, Ramos' first move

Cory Aquino survived her full term as President of the Philippines, and the man who helped keep her there, Fidel Ramos, now has the top job. ***David Glanz*** *and* ***Michael McGirr*** *look at his prospects.*

FIDEL RAMOS HAS BEEN INSTALLED as President of the Philippines, and the outlook from the Malacanang Palace is bleak. The simple act of a peaceful transition of presidential power from Corazon Aquino—the first such transfer in 26 years of Philippines politics—may well prove the highpoint of the new administration.

President Ramos faces a daunting array of problems, not least of which is political legitimacy. Despite the presence of 300,000 poll watchers, the elections were marred by vote-rigging, and although most commentators believe that the fixers cancelled each other out, so that the final result was probably correct, doubts will linger. Jaime Cardinal Sin, who as Archbishop of Manila had argued against a vote for Ramos—the president is a Protestant—moved to heal the breach on the grounds that 'the people have spoken'. But the trouble is that what they were saying is far from clear.

Despite support from Aquino and key business groups, Ramos won the backing of fewer than a quarter of those who turned out to vote. Further to the right, the constituencies of Imelda Marcos, and of the late Ferdinand Marcos' no.1 crony Eduardo 'Danding' Cojuangco, together carried similar weight. And snapping at Ramos' heels was the maverick candidate, Miriam Defensor Santiago. Some Filipino commentators believe she might have won, but for dubious allegations during the campaign about her mental stability, and a late panic among middle-class voters about a possible Cojuangco victory.

For those on the left, the new president is a far from reassuring figure. Steeped in military culture—he trained at West Point—Ramos headed the Philippines constabulary during the bloodiest years of the Marcos dictatorship and, as Defence Secretary under Aquino, directed her government's 'total war' policy against the Communist-led New People's Army. That policy has led to mass killings, rape, and the relocation of entire villages by the military.

Ramos' claim to liberal credentials—his last-minute support for Aquino during the 'People's Power' revolution in February 1986, and his defence of her administration against seven coup attempts—carries little weight with the left and is seen as evidence of his unreliability by the right. President Ramos may rejoice in the nickname 'Steady Eddie', but in army circles he is perceived as a ditherer. According to Australian intelligence sources, up to 80 per cent of the military are hostile to him.

To top this off, the president's party—formed shortly before the campaign when Ramos failed to win the endorsement of the dominant party, the LDP—won few seats in either the Senate or House of Representatives. With a narrow mandate, a weak political base and one eye constantly on the military, Ramos is handicapped from the start.

None of this would matter if he were facing a six-year term characterised by general political and economic stability. Neither is the case. In the immediate postwar period in East Asia, the Philippines economy ranked second to Japan's in per capita growth. But the rise of newly industrialising economies like Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong, and the dramatic growth of the Thai and Indonesian economies, have highlighted the Philippines' decline. The fall in status is widely seen as a national embarrassment.

NEARLY A QUARTER of export earnings are swallowed by interest payments on a foreign debt of $40 billion. Unemployment and underemployment are rampant. Inflation has been brought down, but only to about 9 per cent. In the closing days of her presidency, Aquino took care to cement in place a $US1 billion debt-rescheduling agreement with 33 creditors, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The terms include a strengthening of the by now familiar IMF-World Bank refrain of increases in taxes, fewer restraints on imports, and continued repayment of outstanding foreign debts.

As the militant trade union federation, the KMU, commented: 'This brazen effort to bind the next administration into implementing the desired economic

Photo: Michael McGirr

policies by the IMF-WB and other foreign banks for the Philippines, should have been a major issue to tackle in the campaign as this has grave effects on people ... It has rendered the election as nothing but a continuation of the Aquino adminstration and the previous administration before it.' In fact, all the candidates went through the hoopla of promising jobs and growth, knowing full well that their hands would be tied on gaining office.

The most urgent economic problem facing Ramos concerns power supplies. From April onwards, Metro Manila was hit by daily 'brownouts' which lasted up to 12 hours at a time. The cuts were thought to be costing the semiconductor industry alone $2.3 million a day. Eventually, about 1500 companies agreed to shut for a week while the National Power Corporation made repairs, depriving thousands of day-rate workers of an income. Some Filipinos suggest that the only option is to use the Bataan nuclear power station, which was built at a hugely inflated cost under the Marcos regime and has been mothballed ever since. The accident risk would be enormous—the plant sits at the foot of a volcano and was built on an earthquake fault line.

If the Ramos administration is to attract overseas investment, it will also have to calm business' fears of political unrest. There is still widespread anger over fuel prices, which went up with the Gulf War but which the government has since kept high. In July last year, about 400 firms were hit by a nationwide strike organised by the KMU over a demand for a cut in fuel prices. In January similar grievances led to a strike in Mindanao.

And the insurgency is always in the background. The government claims that the New People's Army is dwindling fast, although the rubbery official figures are regularly challenged by new NPA offensives. But it is true that debate has reopened among the cadres about whether, and when, a negotiated settlement might be acceptable. The collapse of communism in Europe, and the abandoning of guerrilla tactics by underground movements in places such as El Salvador and South Africa, has had its effect on the left in the Philippines. 'Talks about talks' were opened between the NPA and the government in Belgium earlier this year, and senior military officers say a negotiated settlement is possible.

It would be a feather in the new president's cap if he can end the civil war. Short of a complete collapse of the NPA, however, this seems unlikely. If Ramos offers anything more than an amnesty for those who lay down their arms, he will face opposition from the right and the bulk of the military. But if he offers no concessions on basic questions such as land reform, the guerrillas have no incentive to halt the fighting. The war goes on.

Ramos may have won the election, but it might yet turn out to be a vote of no confidence. ■

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IN THE LAST DAYS of the Aquino presidency, Manila played host to the 30th World Chess Olympiad. The event was a far cry from the revolution that brought Corazon Aquino to power in 1986. But, ironically, it was staged in the Philippines International Convention Centre, one of the gaudy projects that supposedly kept Imelda Marcos off the street. So when Aquino and Fidel Ramos arrived on 7 June to greet contestants from 110 countries, the past, present and future were all on hand. Ramos, who was then sporting the title of 'President apparent' used the event as an oportunity to make himself even more apparent. Aquino used it to look back on the gambit she played in '86, saying that she owed her presidency 'not to queen power but to pawn power'.

There was, however, a slight hint of fresh revolution. A flagbearer at the opening ceremony, Francisco Opao, got himself arrested after he was overheard saying that he would like to skewer the president with his standard. Aquino, meanwhile, had accepted the challenge of the world chess champion, 29-year-old Gary Kasparov, to a game. After two moves they agreed on a draw and smiled for the cameras. Some Filipinos say that a hard-fought draw might be the best way of describing the outcome of Aquino's six years in office.

The captain of the Australian men's chess team, Peter Parr, insists that chess is a sport. Perhaps, but it is a sport for more than the young and fit. When 600 chess Olympians arrive at a convention centre in a noisy glut, their number certainly includes the halt and the lame, the old and the very young. The large Russian-speaking contingent, for example, included both the 16-year-old Vladimir Kramnik and a 70-year-old former challenger for the world championship, Victor Korchnoi, who now plays for Switzerland. Korchnoi was recovering from an eye operation, so the ranks of the infirm in the convention centre almost included the blind as well as the halt and the lame. On the other hand, some of the players looked like body builders, and still others like business

men and women arriving for a day at the office. When the games finally got under way, a monastic silence descended. Perhaps the brainpower generated by 300 games of chess could have been harnessed to relieve the power shortages that plunged Metro Manila into periodic darkness.

The Australian chess men did pretty well. Going into the final rounds, they held their own in 12th place. Having got that far, however, they were matched against England and Bulgaria, two of the strongest teams, and sank to the middle of the field. But an Australian, Ian Rogers, won the silver medal for individual brilliancy, defeating an outstanding Brazilian player. Rogers is Australia's only chess professional, making a modest living from tournaments and a chess column in the *Australian Financial Review*.

At the inauguration on 30 June, the new president and Aquino again arrived together, to witness a parade that featured earth-moving equipment used in the clean-up after the 1990 earthquake, and after the eruption of Mt Pinatubo. There was only one tank in the parade. A cassocked priest sat in the turret, and next to him was the statue of Our Lady of EDSA, patroness of the '86 revolution. This ambiguous display was said to be a reminder of the power of prayer over guns.

Ironically, when the election results were proclaimed a week earlier, the traffic in EDSA Avenue had again been brought to a standstill on religious grounds. Thousands of members of a cult called Good Wisdom for All Nations filled the roadway, demanding an end of corruption and the building of a temple near Mt Pinatubo. The cult leader had promised his followers, mostly rural workers, building jobs on the temple in return for donations to his cause.

Ramos included a Muslim among those who read prayers at his inauguration. He then urged both greater religious tolerance and a greater separation of church and state. 'I am not the first Protestant president,' he declared, 'but the 12th Filipino president, and one who happens to be a Protestant.' Even so, Cardinal Sin did not attend the inauguration. Ramos had also invited a poor farmer, Mang Pandoy, onto the dais 'as proof of my resolve to obtain for families like his the humanities of life.' The president said his 'paramount objective', would be to 'uproot the poverty that grips our land'. He promised to curb degradation of the environment, and to end corruption: 'We will go after both the bribetakers and the bribegivers.'

At the back of the crowd, some Filipinos played chess all morning in the rain. Like Fidel Ramos, they were planning the next move. ■

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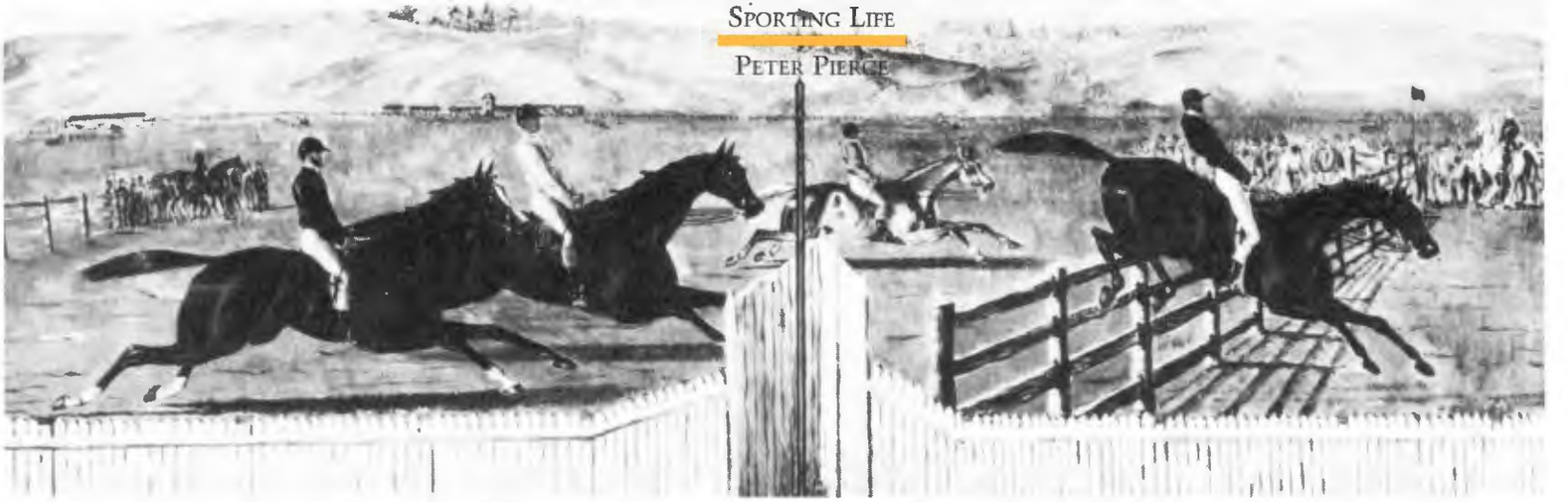

Hurdles to remember

Adam Lindsay Gordon winning on Viking, by Thomas Lyttleton. PHOTO: BILL THOMAS.

AT FLEMINGTON IN OCTOBER 1868, the myopic, melancholy horseman and poet Adam Lindsay Gordon became the only jockey to ride three steeplechase winners in a day. In 1881 the first Grand National Hurdle was run there: the 112th renewal took place this 4 July. Vast and inhospitable, Flemington fronts the Melbourne city skyline. On a nearer hill are the burned out remains of the Pioneer Hotel, from which race callers miraculously plied their trade when the clubs barred them from tracks. (Nowadays racing journalists are co-opted by the authorities.) Two of them ran a Punters' Club in which a $20 stake bought a ticket in a large pool, thence the chance to share in bets beyond the dreams of mug punters.

This gimmick attempts to stem ever falling attendances. Only at the Spring Carnival are the abundant spaces of Flemington uncomfortably filled. On Grand National Hurdle day, in mid-winter, under lowering skies, the crowd was sparse. Yet impressions deceived. The track was so unseasonably fast that recent form in the wet was unreliable; punters were hammered and Explosive Wonder (at 25/1 a scarce and welcome winner for this writer) ran within 1.6 seconds of the 2000m track record of Let's Elope. Other champion gallopers of old gave their names to races on this program. The steeplechase honoured the great jumper Crisp, who after his deeds in Australia was taken to England, won a string of good races, but is best remembered for a loss. With a gallantry in defeat that marked him as a hero true to national type, he led almost all the way in the 1973 Grand National at Aintree, before being run down near the post by Red Rum, who carried 10½ kg less weight.

This year the Crisp was won by Yrangie. His trainer, Theo Howe, has had fine jumpers for decades. More than flat racing, hurdling and chasing are dynastic affairs in Melbourne. In 1969, Howe's hurdler Brother Bart won the Grand National Hurdle, ending the record string of nine wins by Lots of Time, jointly owned by Sally Wood and Jimmy Hannan. Twenty-three years later, the favourite was Hip Flask, coming to the race with seven straight wins. Victory would see him weighted out of Australian jumps races and probably on Crisp's path to England. Trained by David Hayes for his father Colin, Hip Flask was bred to win a Melbourne Cup but had never been told. Born a rig (a male horse with one undescended testicle), then gelded, he was so slow that he was used as a stable hack before being turned successfully to jumping. Thus he secured a second chance at racing life, which is to say life.

In a field lacking depth, only eight horses opposed him. Several were first season hurdlers. There again was last season's winner, Connorvilla, with more weight and the superstitious burden of having his photograph on the cover of the race book. Along the Maribyrnong River side of the track Hip Flask jumped to the front. For the next 4¾ minutes, the last 4000m of this 4800m race, he led. All that time the novice jumper leadenly named Normal John vied with and strained after him. In the straight, with a sitting shot and a weight pull of 9½ kg he looked bound to win, but Hip Flask came again after the last jump and triumphed, in one of the greatest and surely the longest two-horse battles in the history of Australian racing.

Critics of jumps racing have always ignored its spectacle, to say nothing of the unexampled skill and courage of horses and jockeys. They've been indifferent to the safer height of fences these days and the better schooling of horses. Had Hip Flask not been a jumper, he would have been pet food. Jumpers are killed while racing, as are horses on the flat. At the Grand National meeting two horses fell. The white Kil Ragi went down on his nose in the steeple, but he and his jockey Christine Reeve were unhurt. In the risible Shetland pony race, a piebald animal went down in a melee. Then, at the second last fence in the hurdle, Connorvilla stumbled on landing, broke his off foreleg and was pulled up. After being farewelled by John Meagher, his trainer, he was destroyed. Last year's winner left the course dragged behind a tractor.

It was a moment both poignant and ripe for clichés about how racing mingles tragedy and triumph. More profoundly, the two conclusions to the Grand National Hurdle indicated how unforgiving racing is as an industry, yet how indefatigably sentimental are those who live by and are loyal to it. Among the dwindling number of desperates who go to the races, both Hip Flask and Connorvilla will often be recalled. Is it principally with punters that the capacity for cultural memory abides in Australia?

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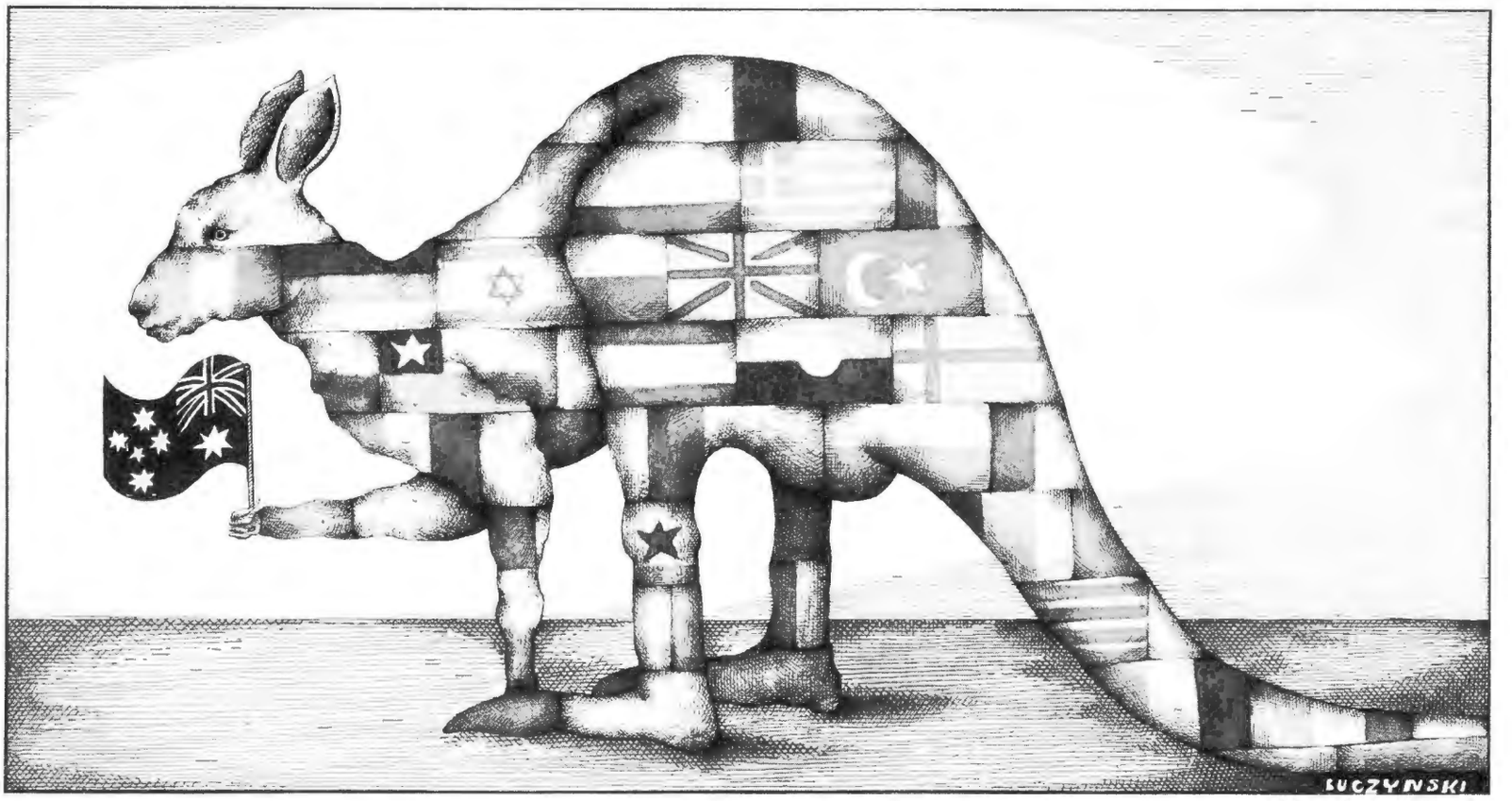
GRAHAM LITTLE



The flag my father wore

'It is tempting to give my qualifications as an Australian and to explain the sort of republican I am. I do not like the passion that seems at once petty and contrived, and the unnecessary polarisation, all the more so because ours can't be more than a storm in a teacup compared to Yugoslavia, the Lebanon or Ireland itself. ... If I am content when tomorrow Australia is a republic with a President whose powers are no more than those of our present Governor-General (so we preserve the present parliamentary system), and if tomorrow the flag is the Southern Cross on a blue background (but not stylised into the Eureka flag) or ochre-ish like the Aboriginal one, isn't that enough?'

MY FATHER WAS NOT IN THE LODGE and never sang the Orangeman's song, *The Sash My Father Wore*, and never even marched under the flag because the government dared not conscript in Northern Ireland, where a quarter of the population was Roman Catholic and not exactly pro-British. So he was an air-raid warden and carried a gas mask in blacked-out streets when other people were in bed. He was probably always a man who would emigrate.

I remember the red, white and blue of the flag from the Twelfth—'the Twalth' it sounded like—when huge Union Jacks, some with golden fringes and some with portraits painted on them, flew over green, treeless fields, and King Billy rode past on a white horse and we had picnics with lemonade and buns, sitting on a blanket. Later, of course, the people of the Bogside in Derry had reason to fear these annual displays of Protestant triumphalism celebrating the victory of a Dutch Protestant king over a Scottish Catholic one at the Battle of the Boyne. People hung flags from their windowsills too, and I suppose I never saw so many flags in what you might call domestic use until I went to America in 1969, towards the end of the Vietnam years.

I don't know how many people grow up already wise to their own country. I'm afraid my mother told us some stirring stories about the B Specials, admittedly mainly about how grand her brothers and her Da looked in their uniforms, and it was a long time before I knew any better about them or even Churchill's

Black and Tans. I grew up believing unwillingly but fervently in God as revealed in grainy lantern slides of *Pilgrim's Progress* and at Sunday school twice and church once on Sundays. (My parents were Methodist and Church of Ireland and lapsed soon after marrying, sealing the children's fate as hostages to the afterlife.) I believed more warmly and more hopefully in British justice, I have to say, which compared with God seemed noble and more on the side of the accused and the threatened, especially since the Gestapo was never out of my nightmares.

WE TOOK IT FOR GRANTED we were Irish. I did not know then that nationality could be so political. 'The Micks have stolen St Patrick's Day' was my mother's only political complaint about Australia, and indeed she and my father wore shamrock religiously every year we lived in England and made sure the children did too. Green, tediously, was the only colour and my mother would play *When Irish Eyes are Smiling* and *The Wearing of the Green* whenever there was a piano and a party. For all that, I think my father was sometimes embarrassed by the Irish need for attention and the stage-Irish role every Irishman seemed unable to refuse.

In Northern Ireland some people feel both Irish and British while for others, to put it mildly, it's one or the other. As schoolboys we felt very superior to the English and the most timid and protected of us thought we were street toughs by comparison, treating them with the pretended tolerance a Belfast Artful O'Dodger would have shown Little Lord Fauntleroy. As a schoolboy in England I was mocked for my accent, quickly learning not to say 'och' and 'wee' and 'mammy'. My father bridled and left the shop when a salesgirl screwed up her face when he asked for chips 'in a poke'. Being Irish meant being straightforward, plain, not trying to be what you weren't.

My parents went on trips to Dublin (they'd honeymooned at the Gresham in 1938), not incidentally bringing back to rationed Belfast those postwar rarities like chocolate and silk underwear we imagined the Free State abounded in. They solemnly told us that Dubliners spoke the most beautiful and the most correct English in the world, and they spoke of Dublin and the South almost as if they could agree that this was where Ireland seemed most itself. They were never treated as anything but Irish themselves. A bit later I saw them laughing and crying through John Ford's *The Quiet Man*, which for a long time was their favourite film. Maureen O'Hara looking a bit like my mother and my father said they had the same temper. My father didn't get much beyond reading and writing, but he ran to school with Victor McLaglen, who was in *The Informer*.

The Roman Catholic Church was another matter. It was the big catch in the enjoyment of the other Ireland. Still, their attitude was more complicated than might be expected, because, like a lot of Ulster Protestants, they had great respect for 'the nuns' and a convent education. I don't know how this could have been, but amid all the suspicion and separation Methodist and Presbyterian and Church of Ireland girls, and some little boys, would be enrolled with 'lovely' Sister Brigid, who was 'just like ourselves', and 'that really saintly one, the mother superior', who was something we'd never be. Above all, it was the kindliness of the nuns that my mother admired, their Irish faces well-scrubbed and red, or pale and visionary, promising to help with daughters it would be nice to raise both good and graceful.

There were good priests too, usually because they'd unbend and have a bit of fun where 'the minister', in his stiff greys, would stand apart and disapprove. A priest could be 'typically Irish'—a term of happy approval—and a bit of a cod, and there were plenty of stories of a priest who'd helped out a Protestant, sick perhaps and with no one to get a doctor, or a priest who'd talk to you and never so much as mention the Pope, or one with a sad face who never asked for a thing himself and lived to help the poor. The jokes we heard the adults tell had vicars in them riding by with their noses in the air and their bossy wives beside them, while the priests were discovered in betting shops or under beds and in pubs after hours, the jokes Dave Allen has lived off for 30 years. These priests may have represented a hidden side of themselves that my parents and uncles and aunts, as Irishmen and Irishwomen, were delighted to believe in or to be reminded was still there. In every Elder Sibling there is perhaps a Younger, Prodigal one whom even the sternest with themselves want to keep alive.

But the 'RC' as a type was anything but funny, and if anything not quite human at all. George Borrow's *Lavengro* gives the picture of a monstrous organisation using

Manning Clark's tricoloured history of Australia counterposes the Protestant, Catholic and Enlightenment traditions, and I had always thought Australian republicanism—Australia's full symbolic independence—would come from the third.

'mumbo jumbo'—the liturgy and the ornamentation—to enslave good men and women for its own unstated and horrifying purposes.

The most ordinary RC was a figure of mystery: I'm reminded of Hitchcock or *The Invasion of The Body Snatchers* (in which international communism rather than the multi-national church is the object of fear) because nice people, good neighbours and workmates, would be turned into specimens of slavery once you remembered they confessed to a priest and were under orders from the Pope. And of course, the legions of young boys and young girls brainwashed into leaving their families and living an unnatural life were proof positive of the Roman Catholic indifference to ordinary human needs and failings.

There was another Ireland, then, that an Ulsterman felt deeply for and which was at the same time a foreign Ireland, stolen away, as it were, by an alien power, an uncanny force that was as far removed from the friendly priests and kindly nuns as from Protestants and their churches. The point was not that the Pope lived somewhere else; 'Roman' the church was, but that was no mere geographical strangeness. This construction of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland—a paranoid construction whether it were true or not—has something to do with the Celtic past, with the paganism Protestant experience is so removed from. As we grew up Protestantly individualist, almost Protestantly secular, maybe what troubled us was that the 'other' Ireland, supposedly foreign, was strange only because it was so anciently Irish and deeply familiar, a call to a twilight religion within us.

In Dublin a couple of years ago, I was treated as an Irishman, my being born in the North making no difference at all; indeed I felt Irish as I rarely do in Melbourne, where the world of the Australian-born Irish-Catholic has no clear role for an Australian Irish-born Protestant. At the same time, seeing the mists rise from the Liffey, and watching the people crowding down O'Connell Street in a wintry three o'clock sunlight, something about Ireland frightened me, something both familiar and strange. It was as if Dublin itself were just a promontory of modern life and the ancient bogs were waiting in the gloom. I thought of Joyce's *The Dead.*

But all this may be irrelevantly fanciful and it is certainly more than I can, or need, explain at this moment, and there are far more pressing problems in Ireland than the emotional experiences of its people returning. More within my reach is my Aunt Florrie telling me how she and her Belfast neighbour, a Roman Catholic and 'a very nice woman', had talked over the fence for 35 years, never entering each other's house. And her whitehaired husband, photographed in *Life* magazine in 1969 after rescuing some Catholic youths caught in Protestant gunfire on the steps of his pub. A lifelong teetotaller who'd managed the same pub in 'a Catholic area' for three decades, and a loyal Orangeman for longer, my Uncle Joe Watson after this incident found himself needing a British armoured car to protect him from the bullets of fellow Protestants. 'But I did right, didn't I son?', tears tripping him, 'they're people too, aren't they? I couldn't just let them lie there and get killed. And they were only wee lads, that's what I can't forget, only wee lads.'

My family left Northern Ireland for England just before Christmas in 1948, with the promise of meeting Santa Claus at something called Selfridges and seeing the fairy lights in Regent Street. In 1954, we sailed on the Strathnaver for Australia. I'm not sure what nationality I was by then. Curiously enough I learned the violin for a term at a girls' convent school in Kent and later spent three years at St Anthony's in Hampstead, a Catholic prep school where we celebrated the coronation loyally but with dignified restraint. I'm not sure the headmaster wasn't embarrassed by what was left of my Belfast ways because the school was fairly toney.

Arsenal Football Club, Surrey County Cricket Club, Dennis Compton (and anyone who took an Australian wicket or scored against them), Randolph Turpin beating Sugar Ray Robinson, the *Schoolboys' Own* exhibition, the Science Museum and the Festival of Britain in 1951, *Just William*, Biggles, *Eagle* comics, a series of cocker spaniels, my father's Standard Vanguard, the *Dick Barton* radio serial (though I was already a fan in Bangor, Co. Down, through Radio Rediffusion), sailing boats on the Whitestone pond, Channel lifeboats heading to steamers aground on the Goodwin Sands, the Margate Hippodrome, Punch and Judy and donkey rides on cold beaches, Lyon's Corner Teashops,

kippers, Maltesers, the Tube, Muffin the Mule, and the Pantomime—all these and a multitude of similar ties began to make me English I suppose.

Later it was *The Goon Show*, *The Lavender Hill Mob*, Tony Hancock, Leslie Howard as the Scarlet Pimpernel, Dickens, Hardy, Trollope and Anthony Powell, Kathleen Ferrier and Hugh Gaitskell (and Nye Bevan, perversely), and *Macbeth*—rewritten and put on in the garage with a Lady Macbeth called Dorothy, me doing all the other parts—Lord Keynes, *Yes Minister*, *Minder*, *Monty Python*, Francis Bacon, Soho pubs, Le Carre, taxis and the Groucho club. Cockney language embarrassingly easily excites imitation and Ian Botham, whom Australians once used to claim as theirs, has pleased a man who as a boy suffered from Bradman *et al* in that hot summer of '48. My Uncle Jack, working round England as a foreman on a road gang, would turn up every few months 'for one of Winnie's fries', and to give us half-a-crown. He'd fought with the British army in Italy, but mocked me for English manners and threatened me with all sorts of pain if I ever forgot I was Irish.

But how deep did any of it go? In that postwar period the British were struggling between pride and dismay, pride because of what they'd gone through and achieved against Hitler, dismay because of their reduced place in the world (hence the bedraggled little Festival on the South Bank and three-wheeler cars) and at the real suffering that was dragging on far too long—partly inspired, I now understand, by a US Congress convinced that Attlee, who'd defeated Churchill, was the leader of a communist government. I wasted all my nationalistic energies in hating the loud and swaggering American servicemen of the postwar occupation. I did not forget to be Irish during these years, and I didn't in fact become English. I was British.

In the late '40s it was the children's turn to go over the war and try to digest it, and I was at the age when a social identity begins to form. 'British' meant savouring the experience of being one of the noblest of all peoples who, with a little American help, had faced down the terror of Hitler, whose bombs had invaded our dreams night after night. And of course, like my Uncle Jack, I could be this sort of British without being any the less Irish. The troubles were their quietest at this time. The Irish in England were less north and south than a wee girl from Dublin or a real boyo from Belfast or a grand man from Galway, from where our whiskey-smelling London doctor came. A long way ahead were soccer hooliganism and Bobby Sands (both linked in my mind with Thatcherism), the Paras, and The Guildford Seven.

In Keating's republican idea there are only two players, the Protestant British and the Irish Catholic, and his method of attacking the issue is the schoolyard taunt he learned in those days of appalling sectarian bitterness.

MANNING CLARK'S TRICOLOURED HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA counterposes the Protestant, Catholic and Enlightenment traditions, and I had always thought Australian republicanism—Australia's full symbolic independence—would come from the third. Australia was my escape not only from the responsibility of Northern Ireland but also from the sheer impossibility of it. I could hardly return to fight at Ian Paisley's side but by the same token it would take a more heroic person than I am to make myself over and pour scorn on the traditions, however flawed, of my uncles and my sort of Irish. I have been glad, like my father, just to be 'out of it'.

Mannix and the DLP were incomprehensible, though clearly important, the Loyal Orange Lodge never more than an anachronism glimpsed from the tram. Gradually, though, I developed a more positive hope in which Australia would become itself with Whitlamite panache and without any tribalism or harking back to the past. This was how I liked to present Australia to American academics and intellectuals in the early '70s and again during those fateful months in late 1975. I told them our easygoingness was the vital clue to the way we were and the way we would change.

I never thought that the symbolic completion of Australia's independence would come, not from the Enlightenment side, but from the tribal one, that it would be inspired by old enmities belonging to another place, or that it would be driven by the long-held wish to get even and, most surprising of all, by an Irish-Catholic Australian cringe as marked as the Protestant-Liberal Party one it deplored. This is from *The Australian* in May, reporting our distinguished writer Thomas Keneally in New York, in which a great deal depends on the little word 'partly': 'He also managed to put in a plug for an Australian republic, which will come about, he predicted, partly because the case for Ireland's independence from Britain is being strengthened by money from the European Community.'

One man's rag is another's flag, and vice versa. But it must be farce when the coalition, in a most un-Australian way, proliferates flags till their side of Parliament looks like a French post office or the immigration hall in Hawaii. Clearly, more worrying than the look of the flag is the newly obtrusive and provocative fact of the flag.

There is barely one of my 70 political science students who credits Mr Keating with much sincerity on the republican issue (or in anything else, for that matter) but they like his Question Time vaudeville, and when the television news shows Tory twits of no account in their own Parliament scolding our Prime Minister for his manners, there is no doubt whom they barrack for. The debating point about the flag is also obvious. What was one flag is all of a sudden two, ours and a foreign one in the corner. Thus a patriotic *gestalt* falls to ideological analysis and political opportunity.

Even if we put a rein on our cynicism about his motives—though he is a man who openly boasts in the Parliament about his backflips—there is still a question about the kind of republic Keating has in mind. I have been moved and excited by the pleasure Americans take in the diversity their republic is host to. For all its great faults, the American republic has sometimes been as generous as it hopes to be. I am not sure about Keating's republic. Certainly it has started narrowly—provincial, even parochial, rather than generous. 'Oh, God! Surely we're not going through all that again!' was the response of Catholic friends who'd been through it all before at home and at school.

Most of Keating's mileage is from lampooning straw Englishmen and, though he is said to be too smart to need to read books, from rewriting history. In Keating's republican idea there are only two players, the Protestant British and the Irish Catholic, and his method of attacking the issue is the schoolyard taunt he learned in those days of appalling sectarian bitterness. And I cannot follow what being a republic will mean for us if our Prime Minister must first apologise to countries not notably more democratic or generous than Australia for our part-British (and part-Irish) past. Just what are the ideals and the new ideas our new republic is setting sail with—are they more than Up Yours and You Should See Us Now, with French clocks and Italian suits supposed to make the mother country jealous?

A NATIVE-BORN, but not Aboriginal, Australian told me in the middle of the Keating furore that he wanted the flag changed because it made him feel colonised. I respect this greatly, and it led me to think that the native-born Australian should probably have more votes on the matter than an immigrant like myself, even one of nearly 40 years standing, whose loyalties are overlapping in the way I've described. On the other hand, some recent migrants would vote for removing all signs of the British past as soon as possible. The problem could be as simple as this, that I was too well colonised in Northern Ireland to be of any use in this debate.

It is tempting to give my qualifications as an Australian and to explain the sort of republican I am. I do not like the passion that seems at once petty and contrived, and the unnecessary polarisation, all the more so because ours can't be more than a storm in a teacup compared to Yugoslavia, the Lebanon or Ireland itself. 'Well are you a republican or not?'—but can't I march in the body of the column, OK, not in the vanguard (what sort of conversion from my past would that require, and would you trust it?) but not dragging my feet in the rear, either? If I am content when tomorrow Australia is a republic with a President whose powers are no more than those of our present Governor-General (so we preserve the present parliamentary system), and if tomorrow the flag is the Southern Cross on a blue background (but not stylised into the Eureka flag) or ochre-ish like the Aboriginal one, isn't that enough?

The assumption that Australia was moving steadily and calmly towards its future, not stirring old passions and avoiding the muddy malevolencies my father brought his family away from, may have been naive. Nevertheless, Paul Keating—who has never been as interested as a Whitlam or an Evans in our regular constitutional conferences—strikes me as a man too shallow to be playing fast and loose with history. On the matter of Australian identity he is like a boy playing with matches.

Admittedly, politicians are the people we choose to do our dirty work and we have no right to claim we thought matters could be handled more delicately; a dose of us-and-them works wonders for a jaded party facing an election and perhaps may even invigorate a depressed country. But I was hoping not to be made to choose between the two Irelands before I could choose Australia. Australia in fact made the other Ireland accessible to me. Maybe it is usual for migrants to discover that escaping their past is harder than they hoped. If that's so, the quicker Australia becomes itself, uncluttered by the old Irelands or any other foreign tribal disputes, the better.

PAUL KEATING'S REPUBLICANISM may be too much like going backwards but there are forward movements, though not particularly encouraging ones. Much has been made of how recently the Australian flag was fixed legally and how little it seemed to matter to us. Our symbols have been low-key and more diffuse, the flora and fauna, a certain look in the bushman's eye, the beach, even, perhaps ominously, the Holden car, while Aboriginal symbols have been quietly beginning to affect us all. The designer, and the design committee, of Parliament House helped to change that—above all, when they placed a massive flag above it.

Americans take their flag very seriously. Their national anthem is itself a song about the flag, a symbol symbolising another symbol. It appears that the American republic is so complex and explosive that the union can hold itself together only with very abstract ideals and enormous internal propaganda. In Britain in the '60s, the Union Jack became an item of popular art and a tourist earner. In Mrs Thatcher's '80s British Airways gave up its playful slice of the flag on the tail and its lower-case lettering for a pomp-and-circumstance flag, surmounted by a crown. Another development has been the devolution of the British flag, defensively, into England's own flag, the Cross of St George.

It is certainly not all down to Mr Giurgola, a distinguished architect who as a young man worked in Mussolini's Rome (which accounts perhaps for the frieze of 'ruins' at the front of the House and the look of the Florence railway station just inside) and learned about democracy in America, where he has mostly worked. He may not have understood that Australians weren't flag-worshippers, hand-on-heart like Americans, and that even after years of Monday morning salutes through primary school, the flag remained a formality, a piece of officialdom. (Perhaps in Catholic schools the alienness of the flag was stressed and feeling was stronger.)

But the architect may have been right after all, catching our drift towards being an Australia where the Parliament is a tourist attraction and our cultural symbols are concentrated and eye-catching, saleable and easy to make into logos. The 'C'mon Aussie, C'mon' campaign, begun under Malcolm Fraser, used the national flag until the green and gold one, with the boxing kangaroo, took its place. Our recent history, in other words, has seen a growing concentration on the flag and the growth of an attitude to it that is not our own and, ironically, more American than British.

IT IS DIRTY POOL when patriotic rage at his irreverence meets with the Prime Minister's scornful 'But people didn't die for a bit of cloth', when it was he who fired up passions about the flag in the first place. One man's rag is another's flag, and vice versa. But it must be farce when the coalition, in a most un-Australian way, proliferates flags till their side of Parliament looks like a French post office or the immigration hall in Hawaii.

Clearly, more worrying than the look of the flag is the newly obtrusive and provocative fact of the flag. Television, predictably, bears some responsibility for this. It wants symbols but it wants them in McDonald-size bites and as easy to swallow. In this new age of nationalism, flags are the rage again and Australia is catching up fast. The trouble is, the handier and more concentrated our symbols become the more easily politics can manipulate them.

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CHRISTINE BURKE

Boff calls it quits

BRAZILIAN THEOLOGIAN LEONARDO BOFF has announced his resignation from the priesthood. Boff's extensive academic and inspirational writings on Jesus Christ, on liberating grace, on the church, on the Lord's Prayer, all seek to show the gospel's dynamic relation with real life, social and political.

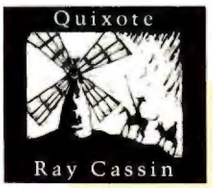
His commitment to the poor has led him to raise questions about church structures, questions that have generated tensions with the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He complied with their demand for a year's 'silence' and prayerful rethinking in 1985. Bishops from Brazil as well as fellow theologians and members of his Franciscan order defended him strongly to the Roman authorities.The pressures continued. He was forbidden to teach theology, and all that he wrote was censored. He published a letter (quoted by *The Age* on 3 July) in which he says, 'the sensation I have is that I've arrived before a wall and that I can go no further. To go against this would mean sacrificing my dignity and renouncing my many years of struggle'. He has left the priesthood but will continue to be 'a theologian for the poor'.

Pain, compassion, shame, anger—an odd mix—but all are present in my response to Boff's announcement that he could no longer stay in the priestly ministry of a church whose authorities have pursued him relentlessly since 1977. The question, of course, goes beyond the case of Leonardo Boff. In a world so divided between rich and poor, can we afford to block the voices that tell us what it is like to be poor, hungry or imprisoned? Can a powerful world church afford to stifle these voices from basic communities whose existence constitutes a critique of former models of church? In an ecumenical age, can the Catholic Church afford to continue to show a form of centralism and a style of magisterial control that puts fear into the hearts of other churches?

The Age report of Boff's resignation claimed that 'liberation theology may not survive the loss of such a tenacious figure'. Some may hope so. But Boff does not stand alone. Behind him and others like him stands the emergent church that, numerically, is now based in South America. Already even western academic theology and practical spirituality have been changed by liberation theology's demand for action: we hear the gospel on new frequencies because of the Latin American proclamation.

Killing messengers and prophets has rarely been a successful way to stamp out an unwanted voice, though it remains the accepted practice. ■

Christine Burke IBVM is studying at Monash University's Centre For Religious Studies and Theology.



Making the break

'How long are you going to keep pretending that it's romantic to live in a slum?'

'I don't. Live in a slum, I mean. And if I did, I wouldn't think it was romantic. And I certainly wouldn't pretend that it was.'

'You know what I mean. It probably wasn't a slum before you moved in. But look at it now. That used to be a courtyard,' she said, jerking a thumb towards the luxuriant vegetation piled against the glass doors.

'That's just the outside.'

'I know, and it's the best bit of the flat. When are you going to get some real furniture, instead of rearranged piles of books?'

'My books are very important to me.'

'Yeah, yeah, just like Don Quixote. I've heard it before.' She dusted off the several years' supply of telephone books, built a kind of leaning tower with them and sat on it. 'You'll always live like this as long as you've got so many excuses not to be at home. Your life is just a continual search for distractions, which you dignify with all sorts of romantic nonsense about mean streets and knight errantry.'

We adjourn the argument to the mean streets, and to a conducted tour of favourite haunts. The pub run by the couple who used to be customers until a year ago, when the former owner committed suicide and left it to them in his will. The pizza restaurant run by two brothers who offered to help me break into my flat the night I locked myself out. I had tried to call the landlord from a pay phone in the restaurant, and on hearing my plight one of the brothers produced a bag from under the counter. It contained a jemmy and an electric drill.

We take a table in the pizza restaurant and I tell her the story of breaking into the flat. And its sequel, which is even better. The next time I called into the restaurant, only one of the brothers was present, and there were no other customers. He asked if I would mind the place for half an hour because he had 'some business to attend to'. How can you not like people who carry housebreaking equipment around with them, but are prepared to leave their business in the hands of someone who is only a casual customer?

'All right. Thank you for showing me your special places.' She sips from the cappuccino placed in front of her by one of the jemmy-wielding brothers, and leans forward to deliver the *coup de grâce*: 'But don't you think you're a little *old* for this stuff?'

Crushed, I buy peace by agreeing to inspect the flat to which she is proposing I move. It is, of course, much better than my present abode. It is the sort of place that would encourage any sensible resident to stock it with real furniture. You could feel quite comfortable there. Which is good, because outside the flat there are no mean streets to divert you. There are some pizza restaurants not too far away, but their proprietors do not look like the sort of people who own housebreaking equipment. This new flat is in a garden suburb.

Two days later, I have decided to move. I do not completely understand why, but can produce a set of reasons if required to do so: the new place is bigger, more like a house than a flat; the mean streets and their inhabitants, like old friends in jail or an asylum, can still be visited at any time; I don't have to stay in the garden suburb for ever; and I will have now a much quieter place in which to work. Ah, work, that's a good one. Yes, it must be the yearning for a life of sequestered scholarship that is summoning me to the garden suburb.

The phone rings. It is another friend. He asks what's new. I tell him. He asks me to repeat what I have just said. I do. He laughs.

'You're moving *where*?'

'I've already told you twice.'

'Yeah.' Silence. Then, tentatively: 'I'm sure it's a good place. But, uh, do you think it's your kind of good place? I mean it's, well ... '

'Suburban.'

'Yeah, suburban. Not very quixotic.'

I proffer my list of rationalisations. He listens, makes a well-I'm-sure-you-know-what-you're-doing remark and hangs up.

Later, there is a call from the friend who introduced me to the garden suburb.'You sound depressed. What's wrong?'

I explain about the first call.

'Well, let him think what he wants. It was your decision to move.'

'It's not what he thinks that is the matter. It's what *I* think about what people think. It's a question of honour.'

There is a sharp intake of breath at the other end of the phone. She says she has to be somewhere else very soon, and hangs up.

The next day I travel to the garden suburb, after collecting the keys from the new landlords, who are very nice people. When I enter my new sitting room, the first thing I notice is that there isn't a Leaning Tower of Telephone Books anywhere in sight.

I open the shutters in the bedroom and gaze down the street. Can't see any windmills, either. ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.

Studley House,
Nolan Av. KEW.
4th. October 1949.

Hon. E.G. Theodore

Dear Ted,
Last week Pat Cody returned from a short visit to West Aust. after spending a little time at the Great Boulder Mines in company with the Managing Director (Mr. Coulson). Unfortunately Haddon Smith, who was to be also one of the party, was compelled to return from Adelaide, owing to illness.

I understand from Pat that, as a result of the recent currency depreciation, the prospects at Great Boulder are now much more favourable than previously when, with the ever increasing costs having reached a point where it was difficult to continue operations at a profit, the outlook for the future was uncertain.

Whilst at Kalgoorlie, an estimated budget for the calendar year 1950 was discussed with the management and, according to this forecast, it is expected that a working surplus of £383,000 should be achieved for the year, after allowing for further inevitable cost increases. From this amount would have to come the usual mine capital expenditure and, according to Pat, there should be something like 2/- per share available for distribution to shareholders.

It is also proposed that, for the remaining portion of this year, as well as for the first three periods of next year, when, owing to labor shortage, lower tonnage can be expected, slightly higher grade ore will be treated. This is considered desirable in order to take advantage of the present gold price before any attempt is likely by the Government to filch the profits by way of taxation or possibly the re-imposition of the gold bonus payment.

Since my recent discussion with you on immortality, I have been very worried in case your convictions on the matter should prove to be erroneous.

If your view is correct, it does not matter but, on the other hand, if it is not so, what a great risk you run and what a great prize to lose. I would dearly love to be associated with you in the here-after enjoying eternal happiness and in my morning and evening prayers I earnestly pray that the Almighty may change your views as I believe He so suddenly changed mine.

I was pleased to learn from you that you were baptized a Catholic, that your mother was a devout one and your sister a Nun. What a great joy to them and yourself to be united with you in heaven.

Indeed one is fortunate in being fortified with the rights of the Holy Catholic Church, established by Christ on earth for the redemption of mankind. Even in this troublesome world, it is something to look forward to and is most comforting and consoling.

I trust you will not conclude that I have got a bee in my bonnet and that I have suddenly become a religious crank.

Sincerely yours

'A vaudeville of devils'

New light on John Wren.
Eureka Street *publishes two of John Wren's previously unpublished letters, to E.G.'Red Ted' Theodore, and to James Scullin. The letters were provided by John Wren's grandson, Christopher Wren, and the commentary is by* JAMES GRIFFIN[1].

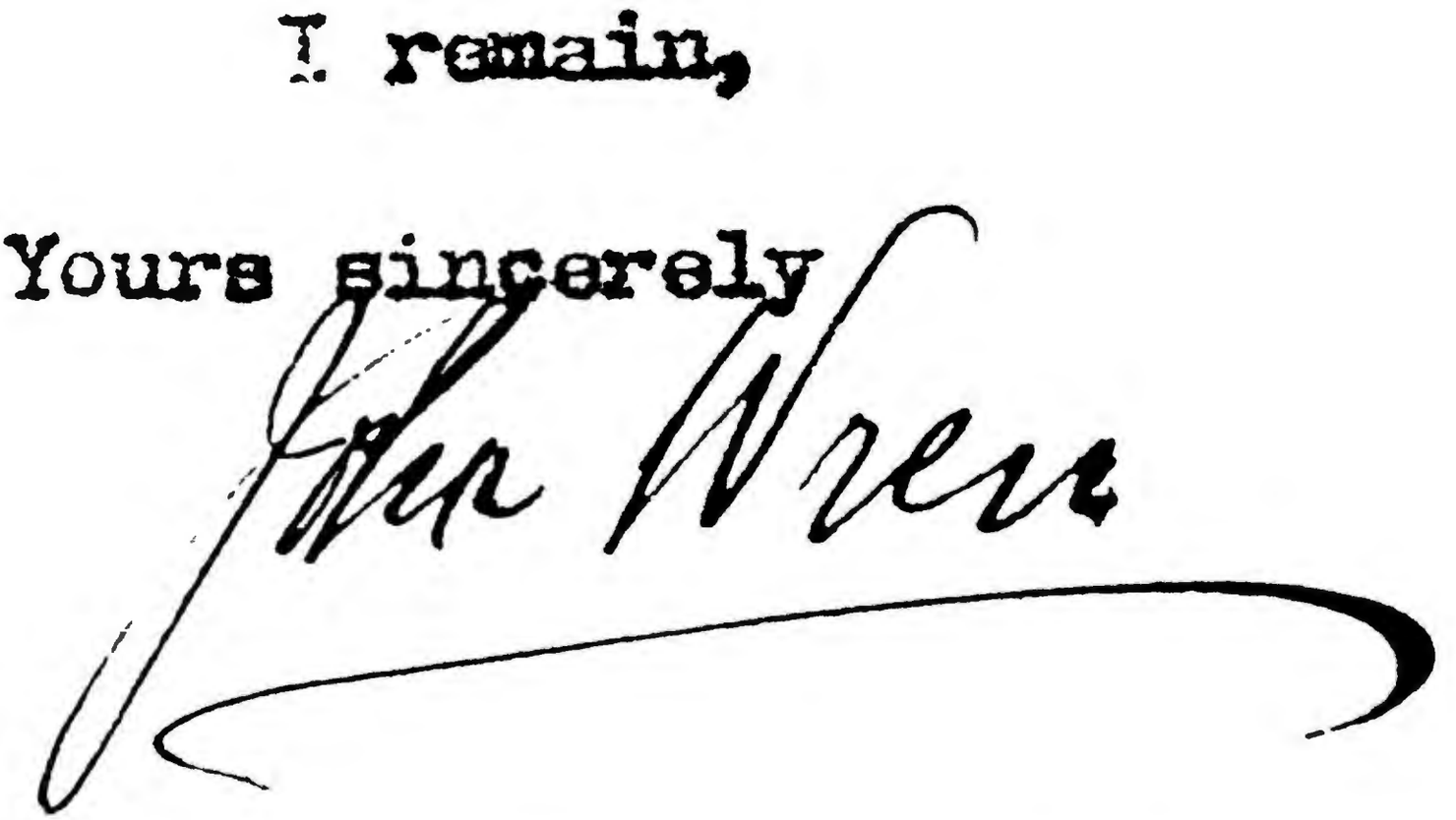
'... in such a situation I really need a friend like you'
—'Bert Evatt' to 'Dear J.W.' on 4 October 1946,
when he was looking for support for
the deputy prime ministership.

YET THERE IS ONLY ONE REFERENCE to John Wren in Kylie Tennant's authorised biography of H.V. Evatt (1970) and that is apropos Archbishop Mannix. Following Niall Brennan's stricture in his biography of Mannix (1964), Tennant deplores the archbishop's 'friendship with a generous member of his church, the wealthy John Wren, who had a finger in the underworld and more than a finger in Labor politics' (p26).

Nothing else, although Jack Lang thought Wren was responsible for getting Evatt onto the High Court in 1930[2] and Arthur Calwell says he first met Evatt in Wren's company[3]. Indeed, although Wren's son had convinced me when I was writing Wren's entry for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol.12, that there was some friendship between Evatt and Wren, I deferred to sceptical colleagues and incredulous Evatt fans by saying only that 'Justice Evatt was prepared to be seen at the football with him [Wren]'. And, to balance this, I also noted that '(Sir) Robert Menzies appeared for him in litigation.'

My implied point, supported by other august names, was that for a man with such an evil reputation, Wren kept extraordinarily respectable company, and that alone might suggest that the odium surrounding him, conferred firstly by wowser and 'loyal' Protestant lobbies and, above all, by Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory*, was largely undeserved and that it arose generally from class and sectarian prejudice. Of course, if you believe with Hardy that everything was rotten in the politics of Australia, then the association of notables with Wren just proves your point. What else could be expected, you will say, of Mannix, Curtin, Menzies, Murdoch, Scullin, Theodore, Evatt, Calwell, McTiernan, Dyett, Prendergast, Hogan, Packer, to name a few, and a heap of (supposedly) cadging, superstitious and hungry nuns to whom Wren was an indulgent godfather.

The late John Robertson's 1974 biography of good James Scullin (MHR 1910-49; PM 1929-32) provides an amusing example of the fastidiousness with which reputable scholars can approach Wren. Scullin, he says, 'was somewhat puritanical in character. It is hard



to imagine him finding congenial companionship in John Wren, a shady Roman Catholic entrepreneur who made money through catering for some of mankind's less exalted pastimes, by arranging boxing matches and running an illegal totalisator ... suggestions that he exercised political influence over Scullin are not supported by evidence and do not square with the latter's nature.' (p123).

The juxtaposition of 'shady' and 'Roman Catholic' is a delightful giveaway. The (no sarcasm intended) worthy, if obviously strait-laced, Robertson is unaware of his own (no doubt shallow) sectarianism. He almost implies that Scullin was an exception to some Catholic rule. And his research, comprehensive in official and journalistic sources, is still clearly inadequate—and not because of the small cache of letters now available following the death of John and Ellen Wren's last surviving and eldest son, John Francis Wren, on 12 April this year. A little oral history would not have gone amiss, even if it had to be prompted by Hardy's pitiful caricature of the West/Wren, Summers/Scullin, Malone/Mannix relationships. For example, two of Wren's sons were available and former Labor activists like Stan Keon (1913-87), Scullin's successor in the Yarra electorate, or J.P. Loughnan, sometime mayor of Richmond and a Scullin aide, still happily extant, could have told Robertson a different story[4]. Had he been alive, Evatt could have too: in one letter to Wren of late 1940 or early 1941 he refers to 'your great friend Scullin' (underlining by Evatt).

But now we need not rely on questionable oral sources. The letters released by courtesy of J.F. Wren's nephew, Christopher Wren, show that John Wren was on sweet terms with both Evatt and Scullin. Those relating to Evatt require an article on their own. In this issue only Evatt to Wren (as above), Wren to Scullin (22 November 1941) and Wren to E.G. Theodore (1894-1950) (4 October 1949), are published. They provoke a sardonic comment on Manning Clark's olympian judgment of Wren in his *History of Australia*, Vol. V (1981). Somewhat incongruously for a flayer of 'straiteners' and 'frowners', Clark sees Wren as having 'preyed on his comrades' when as a youth he took their bets in the boot factory where he began his working career (p273), and having, like John Norton of *Truth*, tried to 'debauch' and 'deprave' the masses.

Wren was 'an Australian version of the American dream, he had risen from the slums of Collingwood to the opulence of Kew by methods which had stained his soul, and left him not with the sweet taste of success but with the bitter taste of damnation in his mouth.' (p273)

Wren, says Clark, was 'exposing the rottenness beneath the veneer of civilisation without holding out the prospect of better things to come' in 'bourgeois Melbourne' just as Norton did for Sydney. For them 'life without God was indeed a vaudeville of devils' (p298). To ram home their salience in the period, Clark has a page (opposite p304) with their respective photographs over a portentous caption: SEEKERS FOR SALVATION OR PREYERS ON HUMANITY?

It may seem harsh to liken Clark's research—and he had academic assistants—to Hardy's risible 'research' in the pubs of Richmond and Collingwood. However,

Clark could only get within six years of Wren's actual date of birth although, for example, in 1958 the *Australian Encyclopaedia*, Volume 9, got it right. Apparently he did not even know about Hugh Buggy's *The Real John Wren* (1977) or Niall Brennan's *John Wren, gambler: his life and times* (1971), both of which try to exculpate Wren from Hardy's slanders. Repeating the vilification of Wren in the *Lone Hand* (1907) and *Power Without Glory*, Clark asserts that Wren 'fixed all the starters to allow Murmur [his own horse] to win the 1904 Caulfield Cup' although Maurice Cavanough's *The Caulfield Cup* (1976) could have disabused him, if common sense could not, of this absurdity. All this from the Manning Clark who believed that Phar Lap won two Melbourne Cups (*History of Australia* Vol. VI, p404).

CLARK DOES RECORD that Wren in 1912 was 'the most generous donor' to a testimonial for the recently deceased Rev. Samuel Judkins, the demagogic wowser who denounced Wren for years for promoting 'a Vesuvius of carnality and greed'. However, although Clark says the testimonial celebrated Judkins' 'crusade for homely virtues' (p359), he attributes to Wren neither a regard for Victorian domestic morality nor even a sense of humour.

The letter to Scullin falls into two parts, the second protesting against double taxation of his Fiji gold mining income, the first claiming the right to personal consideration if equitability cannot prevail. Several points are notable: Wren is a familiar of Scullin's; he has direct access to Prime Minister Curtin; he is not getting his own way (nor is his cobber Theodore), which is unusual for a so-called Tammany boss. This plea should be about the same issue which provoked the only reference to Wren in L.F. Crisp's *Ben Chifley: a biography* (1960). Curtin told Crisp that Wren rang him to protest over a taxation bill (no date given). Reconstructed, the conversation goes as follows:

> J.W.: 'This bill hits Mr Theodore and myself very severely, and I want you to do something about it.'
>
> J.C.: 'It's a taxation measure about which I know little but I'll speak to the Treasurer about it'
>
> J.W.: 'Well, you'll have to do something about it as I propose to talk to Mr Theodore.'
>
> Wren rang again the next night:
>
> J.C.: 'I have spoken to Mr Chifley... He said to inform you that the Bill is going on and to let Mr Theodore know that the Senate rejected a similar provision introduced by him in the days of the Scullin government' (p158).

And there is nothing implausible about Wren's self-advertisement in the same letter. Wren was a hero to many trades unionists and Collingwood people. He was a contributor to strike funds. Only towards the end of his life did his adherence to the ALP sour. The party was changing and he foretold its ruin as the Movement appeared to him to inject destructive sectarianism into its policy process and pre-selections.

The letter to Theodore is more markedly in two parts, the first self-explanatory. The second adumbrates what appears to be a 'born-again' stance but accompanied by an awareness that his old mate may find his reconversion to Catholicism incongruous. Wren did not practise Catholicism for most of his life and argued the toss about the true faith with clerics (though hardly with Mannix) at his dinner table but he seems always to have taken out eschatological insurance in the form of daily prayers[5]. Theodore had had some Catholic education; and was buried in Catholic ground. John F. Wren maintained his father did coax Theodore back to the fold before he died (as well as his right hand man, Frank Lawrence). Fr William Hackett SJ, an intimate of the household, at least after the war, found no serious fault with Wren, although he rather comically lamented that out of the £2 million that Wren said, casually not boastfully, he had given to church foundations, not one penny went to Hackett's Central Catholic Library[6]. Wren was not bookish.

So much for the conclusion of *Power Without Glory* where bitter, haunted old John West 'dozed restlessly and fitfully' and 'stirred in the bed and cried out in his sleep'. As for Manning Clark's 'vaudeville of devils' —music-hall history. In fact, the 'devils' lurk in Clark's inherited and millenarian prejudices; the 'vaudeville' in passing them off as research. ■

James Griffin is emeritus professor of history, University of Papua New Guinea. His contributions to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* include the entries on John Wren (vol.12) and Daniel Mannix (vol.10)

References

1. A paper by J. Griffin and Geoffrey Browne, 'Some light in shady places: thoughts towards a biography of John Wren, sportsman and entrepreneur', was delivered at the *Sixth Irish-Australian Seminar*, Latrobe University, July 1990, and will be published soon under the editorship of P. Bull and N. McLachlan, convenors. It goes into more detail on some of the issues raised here. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of G. Browne in bringing the Wren letters to my attention and himself and N.B. Nairn in interpreting the recently released letters, but they have no responsibility for opinions expressed here.
2. K.H. Kennedy, *The Mungana Affair*, St Lucia, 1978, p93.
3. A.A. Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not*, Melbourne, 1972, p194.
4. Both were interviewed for the ADB entry on Wren.
5. Interviews with J.F. Wren, 1986.
6. Hackett papers, Society of Jesus archives, Hawthorn, Melbourne.

Next month: John Wren and Doc Evatt.

Photo of John Wren courtesy of The Age.

Studley House
Studley Park Rd.
KEW E.4.
22nd. November 1941

Right Hon. J.H. Scullin M.H.R.
Parliament House (PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL)
CANBERRA

Dear Jim,

I desire to convey to you my sincere thanks and appreciation of your just efforts on my behalf, in connection with my Fijian gold-mining interests.

Apparently, after more than fifty years of effort and practical support of Trades Unionism and Labor in Australia, the number of true friends, on whom I can rely for justice, is limited. This is indeed very painful to me.

At the age of fourteen, when I was employed in a boot factory at the wages of 5/- per week, my father asked me to accompany him to a meeting at the Melbourne Town Hall, which was held for the purpose of raising funds to help the London Dockyard Employees Strike. One of the principal speakers was the late Rev. Prior Butler, whose eloquent appeal on behalf of these downtrodden workers, had such an effect upon me that I induced my father to allow me to donate my weekly wages to the strike fund until its termination. From then on, I have been an enthusiastic and practical helper in the cause of Trades Unionism and Labor Politics, in which period, I have spent in the vicinity of a quarter of a million pounds helping the cause I believed in.

As a mark of appreciation of my efforts on behalf of the various Trades Unions engaged in the great building strike about thirty-five years ago, I was privileged to be presented with five beautiful illuminated addresses, which I have at my home. During the course of this strike, to which I contributed £5000, the Master Builders brought pressure to bear on the Brick Combine, which resulted in some of the Contractors, who were agreeable to the men's terms, being unable to obtain supplies. At a Public Meeting, in a speech which was reported in the press of the day, I stated that I would try to prevent the men being starved into submission and undertook to make the necessary arrangements to start a brick works in opposition to the Combine. I advertised in the Age and Argus for clay land suitable for brick making with the result that in forty-eight hours, the Brick Combine climbed down and decided to supply the Contractors who were agreeable to the men's terms. My support of the men in this strike created bitter hostility towards myself from the opponents of Labor.

In nearly every strike, before and after Arbitration, I have never refused a genuine appeal for financial assistance.

At all elections, both Federal and State, I have never hesitated to support, in a practical way, the Party and individual candidates, very often to my material disadvantage, my predominant desire being to help the class from which I sprang.

It makes me indeed very sad to now find that the Party which I have supported so fully in the past should now select me and my friends for the harsh and unjust treatment of what amounts to confiscation of our Fijian gold-mining interests, for this is what the Government proposals really mean.

In support of this statement, I would point out that the potential production life of the Emperor mine, as shown in the latest figures of proved ore reserves, amounts to five years (any further extension of this period being in the lap of the gods) and during this period the annual dividend expectation is approximately 1/6 per share or 7/6 per share over the five years. Surely the Government does not realise the actual effect of their proposals in regard to the taxation of these dividends as they are not profits but a realisation of the asset, which at the end of five years, if no further payable ore is proved, will have disappeared altogether.

As you will see from the enclosed memo, I sold 20,000 shares in this company since the Government's proposals were announced, the price for same averaging just a little over 8/- per share. My broker advised me to stop selling as it was likely that, if I continued, the market would fall to an alarming extent, thereby devaluing my holding by many thousands of pounds. I might mention that these shares were quoted at about 12/- before the announcement of the Government's proposals.

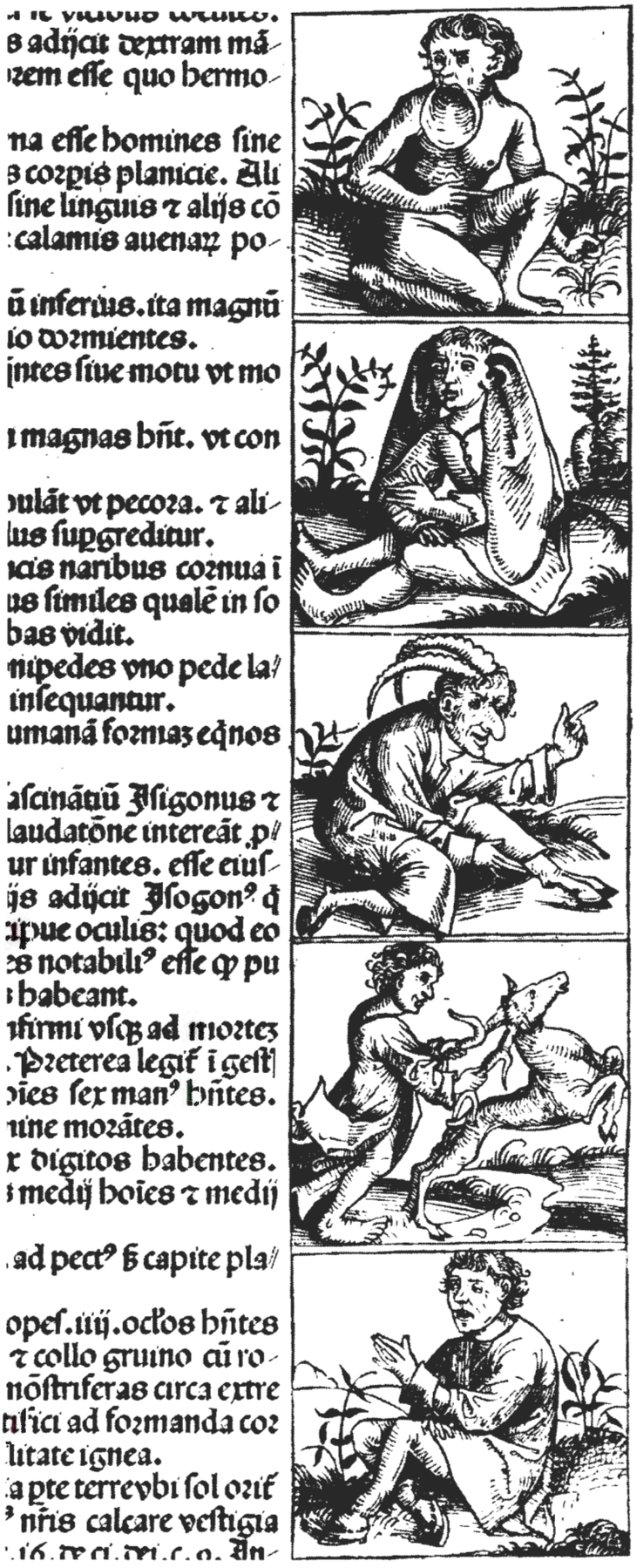
Why the Government should differentiate against these Fijian mines as compared with gold mines in Australia, New Guinea and Papua, all being component parts of our British Empire, is a mystery to me. I spoke to Mr. Curtin on this aspect of the matter and the only reason he gave me was that the Australian and New Guinea gold mines paid an Australian Gold Tax of approximately 20/- per oz. Well, why not impose a similar levy on the Fijian mines rather than practically confiscate them. At the present time, these mines are subject to a royalty charge of 5 per cent and an export tax of 1 per cent and, in addition, they are subject to Fijian Income Tax.

Under the Government's proposals, I will be subjected to very heavy taxation on my Australian income but I do not object to this because it is income and the asset is preserved whereas in Fiji it is a wasting asset.

Again thanking you for your assistance,

I remain

Yours sincerely



REVIEW ESSAY

PETER STEELE

Swift in exile

JONATHAN SWIFT MISTRUSTED the theatre, so it is unlikely that his fiery shade was present at the Melbourne Theatre Company's recent 'adaptation' of *Gulliver's Travels*. This is just as well for all concerned. Swift was himself a master of travesty, but he liked to do it deliberately, and for sufficient purposes. Had he seen what has been done, in this version, to his masterpiece, the 'fierce anger' which, in his epitaph, he hoped to leave this side of the grave would have plumed up again in eternity.

Andrew Bovell is reported as saying of his adaptation, 'there was a real moment with 'Gulliver' when the story became my own. Suddenly I didn't care what Swift thought: I was telling the story.' Ah, yes. That explains, no doubt, why, where Swift has Gulliver decline trampling on a crucifix, this version makes him get on with it; why, at the end of the performance, instead of Gulliver's becoming the most vivid image in English literature of despairing pride, he is converted into a cut-price Faust in rags, full of adorable romantic yearning; and even why, in the place of Swift's stark and elegant prose, we have for the most part a cobbling of melodramatic verbal flourish with prosy chat.

Essentially, it was a night out for a deaf person with a short memory. There was plenty of spectacle, some of it dexterous, some of it engagingly vivid, and some of it merely hobbledehoy. Usually I like circuses, and I wondered why this one depressed me. Then it dawned on me that I was in fact reenacting the perpetual debate about *Gulliver's Travels*: are we, or aren't we, to take it seriously?

An early reader of the book said that it was full of improbable lies, and that he didn't believe a word of it. This booby is a kind of patron of all those made uneasy by the work but unready to address its challenge. In the nineteenth century, Thackeray told his readers how to handle the matter: 'As for the humour and conduct of this famous fable, I suppose there is no person who reads but must admire; as for the moral, I think it horrible, shameful, unmanly, blasphemous; and giant and great as this Dean is, I say we should hoot him. Some of this audience mayn't have read the last part of *Gulliver*, and to such I would recall the advice of the venerable Mr Punch to persons about to marry, and say, "Don't".' Yet the same Thackeray concludes, 'An immense genius ... So great a man he seems to me, that thinking of him is like thinking of an empire falling.'

IT HAS BEEN SAID that Swift kindled a volcano to light a child to bed. It has also been said that *Gulliver's Travels* is 'by its own premises the only extensive work of English literature written by a horse.' The blandishments of charm wait at our elbow when we read, or think we read, this unique work. Swift as Puck, Swift as Dave Allen, mounts in the imagination: we are, as with a stage magician, seduced by the skill. But Swift, whose brilliance as an entertainer is beyond challenge, was also one of the most serious people who have ever lived. Whenever he opened the theatre of the mind, he was going into battle.

Sometimes his targets were figures now entirely forgotten, but his

essential enemies revive like the heads of the Hydra. Leonardo da Vinci called war *pazzia bestialissima*—'bestial madness'—and Swift would have found this literally exact. He thought that we always tend to degenerate into beasts, and that war institutionalised this. Recently I read the sentence, 'There is a drill ground in Nuremburg extensive enough to accommodate two million men'. The diabolical figure for whose adoration all this was contrived did not make the drill ground himself. Human beings—you's, I's—planned and planed this locale for the orchestration of madness. The sick-hearted, lucid-eyed, spirit of Swift was there while it all went on, and while the dream of blood washed away all wits and conscience.

I also read, of a Latin American city, 'A million people share space with the dead in this cemetery'. From my window, I have a prospect of a cemetery which holds three-quarters of a million dead; a sign within it forbids loitering. The million loiterers, the half-alive, half-dead, in that other place, are evidently my mortal kin, and as evidently yours.

Swift, who was in many respects an alien in Ireland, was also the premier denouncer of the policies and practices which reduced most of the Irish to shufflers in the queue for the graveyard. He schooled himself in what Paul Edwards calls 'Christian Hate'. He hated injustice. He hated with all his heart the sight of the raw-fleshed men and women who are its outcome. He could walk like a cat through prose, but he walked like a lion through moral depravity.

He was almost 60 when he wrote *Gulliver's Travels*, and it had not been an easy ride. The policies about which he had advised the Prime Minister of England had come to nothing, his own ambitions had gone the same way, personal loves had been frustrated. It would be understandable if, gifted as he was with a stylistic power which has never found a competitor in English, he had resorted to pure denunciation. In fact he wrote the book which licenses the finely-carried-off puppetry of the MTC's production, a book of Shakespearean finesse and gossamer-spinning, a book which also shows the cloven hoof of the devil. Swift was that rarest of intellectual performers, the one who invests everything in trenchancy while remaining sceptical about reductivity. He mollifies the scars which he makes.

SUCH FIGURES ARE ALWAYS timely, which is what we mean by the secular metaphor, 'immortal'. There is today a temporal chauvinism which denies the possibility of this, and which gives the ribbon of the Legion of Honour to every lemming of the imagination just before it goes over the cliff. I expect that the fashion, like the lemmings, will soon go away. Swift, a much-condescended-to conservative, thought that the deathly bad and the mortal good both had recurrent vitality. Orwell, who, in the best formulation of Swift ever offered, called him a 'Tory Anarchist', was magnetised by things in Swift which he found horrible, and wrote *Animal Farm* partly as a result. Andrei Sinyavsky, with Yuli Daniel the carrier of Pasternak's coffin, and endurer of Soviet imprisonment for no worse crime than for what gives most western journalists their living, mused on and celebrated *Gulliver's Travels*. These hurt and resolute selves found the vexed, meditative Swift, on an inconsiderable island in the past, an inescapable presence. It is possible that they were wrong, but it is not likely.

When, recently, Adam Michnik was in town, there were the usual non-developments. The television cameras were elsewhere, goggling at whatever our Lilliputian surrogates for political life had to say, do, cut, eat, wield, or wear. My own favourite Australian bird is the Spangled Drongo, but I do not see why its human equivalents should be offered as engrossing our national attention.

When, recently, Adam Michnik was in town, there were the usual non-developments. The television cameras were elsewhere, goggling at whatever our Lilliputian surrogates for political life had to say, do, cut, eat, wield, or wear. My own favourite Australian bird is the Spangled Drongo, but I do not see why its human equivalents should be offered as engrossing our national attention. Times without number, we have come to the conclusion that the cutting down of tall poppies is/is not a good idea, but we are still dwarfish when we attempt to consider what may help us to redefine our permanent reality. We often carry on our affairs as if the MTC were right. Heidegger used to talk about 'chatter' in the articulation of significant human developments. Politics is about the licensing of talk even if it is chatter; literature is about the distillation of talk until it is no longer chatter.

Michnik, Poland's better-tempered Swift, has spent an adult's lifetime in the same line of business as his Irish/English predecessor. Were he to write a 'Michnik's Travels', it would be a fierce, but not a coarse-grained, thing. The evidence for this is abundant. For instance, writing an essay called 'Maggots and Angels' (1979), he says:

'WE SHOULD NOTE, then, that reality is viewed in one way by the active oppositionist, in another by the intellectual who is giving an account of it, and still differently by the moralist who is judging the "visible world". Each of these points of view has its light and dark side. The oppositionist's view, for example, is inevitably tainted by one-sidedness; this helps him to reshape the world but prevents

Monstrous races from the edges of the Earth (detail) by Hartmann Schedel. From *Liber Chronicarum*, Nuremburg, 1493. —RARE BOOKS AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, STATE LIBRARY OF NSW.

him from perceiving its many different dimensions. Moralism enables the individual to notice the ethical traps that lie in wait for anyone who takes on an active responsibility, but it also favors an exaggerated cult of "clean hands".

'The spectator's view more easily encompasses an understanding of the complexity of the human condition but clouds the search for solutions to such questions as "What should be done?" and "What is good and what is evil?" '

READING THIS, some would suppose it to be yet another intellectual fandango, a way of indulging the spirit of enquiry while averting the spirit of judgment. They would have mistaken their man. Michnik, living in a Poland scarified by uniformed criminals, ends his essay by referring to 'the secret policemen with their creased faces and stone eyes.' A few years later, writing from prison to General Czeslaw Kiszczak, Minister of Internal Affairs, and his ultimate gaoler, and protesting about a specific abuse of power over a man supposedly impotent, he writes:

'You are incapable of thinking of us in a different way because, doing so, you would inevitably—if only for a split second—be forced to fathom the truth about yourselves. The truth that you are vindictive, dishonorable swine; the truth that even if there ever was a spark of decency in your hearts, you have long buried this feeling in the brutal and dirty power struggle which you wage among yourselves. This is why, scoundrels that you are, you want to drag us down to your own level.'

One does not write in these different veins if one's wits are in coarse-grained shape. Nor does one conclude a whiplashing letter like Michnik's to Kiszczak's in this fashion, unless the tears of irony are stinging one's eyes:

'As for myself, I hope that when your life is in danger, I will be able to appear in time to help you as I did in Otwock when I helped save the lives of those few of your subordinates, that I will be able to place myself once again on the side of the victims and not that of the victimisers. Even, if, afterward, you should once more wonder at my incorrigible stupidity and decide to lock me back in prison all over again.'

The fact is that Swift belongs with Orwell and Michnik—always did, always will. He belongs with them, or they with him, in virtue not only of the passion and precision of his judgments, but of the mind-capped, heart-tested, cast of the prose. Neither of the writers in English went to gaol, though Swift risked his neck; both of them, though, knew the intimate bonding between spinal writing and life's severing. All three knew what it was to generate suppositions while intensifying allegiances.

These days, in sunny Australia, which is more the land of my dreams than any I expect to find, we are shadowed by conjectures about appropriate ways for the conduct of our future. We are irritated on the rare occasions which provoke us to think about our very being.

Somebody said once that the function of an ideologue was to say, 'I've got an answer—who's got a question?' Australia, by that criterion, often looks like Ideoland, with an ensemble of headgears vying for authority. The heads under most of those hats dislike, very much, the notion that our reality, our being, is still up for envisagement and for accomplishment.

Still, it is. We are not amenable, entirely, to moral engravement, to metaphysical articulation, to liberal or illiberal castings. The human being is on a course of self-enquiry, self-concession, and self-transformation which may take millions of years, compared with which our various present demeanours will be as incidental as they are enthusiastic.

On the other hand, of course, some gypsy of an asteroid may abolish our activities before we can knock them into articulable shape. Either way, Orwell's, Michnik's, or Swift's modellings of the human will retain their pertinence. Humanity is guess-work: but it is very far from being a game.

TO RETURN TO the beginning: do I wish us to be without the stage? Heavens, no: we have nothing else. Whatever the cocksureness of so many definers, allegedly secular or allegedly sacred, we are all the improvisers of the human, better or worse at allowing for wind and weather when we take our shots at it. Even the Christ who was blown away by conquistadors, collaborators, and bonesmashers did not ambition offering the last word on anything. Whether in the human or in the divine milieu, and even though there are a few things for which some would, appropriately, die, the interrogation of the human goes on. We are exploring an agenda which in part we have been given, and in part we contrive. Daily, we stage the experiment. The critics of our follies, so far, may become the encouragers of our endeavours.

PERHAPS SOMETHING was going on, beyond vomitous lunacy, at Nuremburg: perhaps something at the squatters' graveyard. If our imaginations are still functioning, and are not entirely cajoled by the hireling media which have it as their business to debauch us, we may envisage the possibility of offering to our children a plausible agenda of the human.

A Swift walking among us today would find it, at the very best, an open question. Stalin and the Stalinoids disposed of more human beings than Hitler and the Hitlerians ever got their hands on. Any apologies? Not on your sweet life. Twenty years ago there was a weapon on offer for every person alive. Any change? Guess.

There is not now, any more than there was in the past, a point in panic. Swift, the maestro of verbal and therefore of intellectual poise, would have been the first to acknowledge that. But if there has to be a formula for his staged art, it should be, 'the Theatre of Distress'.

It has no condescension about it, no dangling of sensibility on display. It is hurt turned art, and thus confirmed as hurt. Out of every sensitive rendering of *Gulliver's Travels* there flows the question, 'Do you have to behave like this?' Underline 'you' and 'this', and a new pungency is offered. These are not matters to be handled with a flourish of puppets.

The mind's thrash, the heart's spring, are at issue instead.

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

BRENDAN BYRNE

Pesher? Pshaw!

Jesus the Man: A New Interpretation from the Dead Sea Scrolls
Barbara Thiering, Doubleday, Australia, 1992.
ISBN 0 86824 444 9. RRP $39.95 (Cased and jacketed).

CONTROVERSY ERUPTED ACROSS Australia early in 1990 when the ABC made known its intention of screening on Palm Sunday a TV documentary, *The Riddle of the Scrolls*, based on the work of Sydney academic Barbara Thiering. In the weeks surrounding the event Thiering became something of a media megastar, with widespread coverage in interviews, debates, talkbacks across the country.

Scholars in the field had long been aware of the eccentric theories upon the Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian origins harbored by their Sydney colleague. All were taken aback at the speed with which these views became matters of far-reaching interest and debate. For several heady weeks Thiering became the darling of the media, who correctly sensed here a potent mix of obscure ancient texts, codes cracked, reports of odd sexual / marital customs and other revelations sure to discomfort the religious and academic establishment.

Projected into the public arena, Thiering proved an able and articulate communicator of her case. Few, presumably, grasped the total theory in all its labyrinthine detail. But her supreme conviction, the constant reference to the recondite, all-explaining term 'pesher', the somewhat weary claim that behind the results lay years of hard work and scientific testing—all this proved very persuasive. ('Pesher' simply denotes a well-known method of explaining *ancient* texts in such a way that they tell the story of one's own contemporary community—like finding allusions to the Gulf War in the biblical Book of Revelation.) Many fair-minded members of the wider populace, lay persons in the field, doubtless came to the conclusion that maybe she did have something to say.

Scholars, long convinced of the opposite, found the attempt to stem the tide wearisome and frustrating. On the one hand, the media hardly provided an ideal forum for debating the niceties of paleography and biblical interpretation. On the other, what mainstream scholarship believed to be the truth of the matter was so much more familiar and less exciting.

Thiering's portrait of a Jesus stripped of all accoutrements of the miraculous and divine, a simple human campaigner against social and religious narrowness in all its forms, was set to make wide appeal to the post-religious. Here was a Jesus one could accept without mental genuflection to church dogma—a social reformer of highly admirable aspirations in modern terms. Perhaps at long last a lone Australian woman was poised to deliver the *coup de grâce* to the whole tyrannous religious construct falsely erected on his memory.

AFTER SEVERAL WEEKS the affair died down. Its most interesting aspect, perhaps, had been to show the extent to which matters religious can still stir depths and passions in Australia. In any case, public attention returned to more comfortably secular concerns. The religious edifice survived—possibly minus a few already shaky adherents. And scholars went back to tasks more fruitful and congenial than that of rebutting Barbara Thiering.

Now we are having it all over again with the publication of the book of the movie—a handsome volume, with the (curiously non-inclusive) title, *Jesus the Man*.

The main points of the theory appear in readable short chapters taking up only about a third of the book. The remainder consists of a daunting sequence of charts, tables and the like, providing, as it were, the fine print.

Outwardly, it is all very impressive. In reality nothing has changed. The same fatal flaws undermine the entire construction. Tedious though it be, let us list once more the chief among them: the completely wrong-headed application to the gospels of the Qumran pesher technique of interpretation (it applies to texts *distant* from the writer and regarded as scripture, not to those currently being written); the utterly implausible identifications of Qumran figures ('Teacher of Righteousness', 'Wicked Priest') with the gospel characters of John the Baptist and Jesus; the postulate of a vast, apparently worldwide 'Kingdom of the Jews' (or 'Essenes'), co-existent with the empire of Rome, yet unmentioned by historians of the day such as Josephus; the fantastic story of

the resuscitation in the tomb (the co-crucified thieves providing, despite their shattered legs, skilful and successful first aid for Jesus); the idea that the Paul who wrote letters such as 1 Corinthians, explicitly affirming the resurrection (cf. ch.15), did not believe and base his life on the truth that Jesus died and rose again.

All this strains credulity to the utmost. It is based upon a highly selective reading of key documents, with pesher used as a kind of talisman to make a text or allusion mean whatever is necessary for the all-embracing theory.

IN ONE RESPECT, of course, things *have* changed significantly since the original broadcast. We now have the results of the radiocarbon-dating tests performed upon selected scrolls in Zürich, Switzerland. These new tests have provided remarkable confirmation for the earlier, paleographically based dating of the major Qumran texts—something which Thiering has to overthrow by a good century or more in order that they be late enough to refer to Christian origins.

I can find no mention of these recent tests in the book, though in the media Thiering has been quick to dismiss their significance, appealing to a distinction between a document and the parchment upon which it is written. Valid in itself, the distinction will not save her theory here. We have to ask whether the Qumran sectaries would have kept parchment (skin) for a century before using it for their key documents. This might conceivably happened in the case of one text. That it should have occurred in the case of the 10 or more tested is simply incredible.

The fact remains that no scholar of competence in the field—Jewish, Christian or religiously uncommitted, male or female—gives Thiering support in any way. True, the dust-jacket blurb of the present volume suggests there might be a solitary exception in the shape of British orientalist Philip Davies. In fact this is quite misleading. In a letter published in *The Australian* (4 June 1992), Macquarie University academic Chris Forbes states that he has contacted Professor Davies, and ascertained that this quote was used out of context and against Davies' express wishes.

Like all religions, Christianity has its essential measure of myth and symbol, miracle and mystery. As such, and in view particularly of its historical anchoring around the person of Jesus Christ, it is constantly exposed to the kind of rationalistic probing of which the Thiering construct purports to be a fresh and finally all-revealing instance. Theologians and other apologists have rightly to reckon with rational and historical inquiry in order to uphold the reasonableness of belief. They will face more formidable challengers than Barbara Thiering.

The irony is that the kind of Jesus whom Thiering wishes to present—in all sincerity and zeal for the truth, let us not doubt—is fully derivable from a more orthodox reading of the gospels, one that is fully critical in a modern sense but also sensitive to the kind of ancient literature with which one is dealing. Take, for example, the excellent and highly readable account of Jesus presented by Marcus Borg in *Jesus: A New Vision* (Harper, 1987). One could add John Meier's as yet incomplete *A Marginal Jew* (Doubleday, 1991). Here is a Jesus whose ministry, in social terms of inclusiveness and liberation, gives all that Thiering herself is most anxious to provide.

THE DIFFERENCE, of course, is that the gospels present not simply a hero of history but community testimony to a living Lord. That testimony can be used, and has been used, to justify the worst forms of religious and social tyranny. *Corruptio optimi pessima!* It can also be, and at its best has also been, a firm asset for the check of evil and the growth of true humanity. More usually, perhaps, in the perception of many it falls somewhere in between, and this is what ensures the Thierings of this world a certain hearing.

I doubt that we have heard the last of her. I'm left wondering what scholars read the work in manuscript and advised Doubleday to publish. But, frankly, I'm going back to fish in more productive waters. ■

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MURDER

JACK WATERFORD

Assistant Commissioner Colin Winchester: 'the most senior police officer ever killed in Australia'.

Photo: The Canberra Times.

Capital crime

The Winchester Scandal, Roderick Campbell, Brian Toohey and William Pinwill, Random House, Australia, 1992. ISBN 0 09182663 2 RRP $16.95

SHORTLY AFTER 9pm on 10 January 1989, Assistant Commissioner Colin Winchester of the Australian Federal Police drove to his house in Deakin, Canberra, after visiting his brother in Queanbeyan. As he turned into his neighbour's driveway, he was fingering a box of ammunition he had bought for a planned hunting trip. He stopped the car and moved his hand to the door handle. As he opened the door a person came from behind and shot him in the back of the head. His head slumped forward. The person, only feet away, fired again, and the second bullet entered his right ear. Either bullet would have killed him.

Colin Winchester was the most senior police officer ever killed in Australia. Police were on the scene within 15 minutes, and soon set roadblocks around the area. Within 24 hours, as media speculation began to run riot—most focused on the idea that it was a Mafia assassination—the most extensive, if not the most competent, police investigation Australia has known was in full swing. To date, it has consumed about $10 million—including a long-running though inconclusive inquest—but has gotten nowhere.

This book, by *The Canberra Times* legal reporter Rod Campbell, and veteran investigative reporters Brian Toohey and the late Bill Pinwill, is a meticulously documented history of how and why a massive bureaucracy failed to do its job. That the police should be unable to solve any particular crime is not of itself remarkable—successful detection depends first of all on luck. But people make their own luck, and in the Winchester investigation the Australian Federal Police, which projects itself as an elite organisation, could scarcely win a trick from the start.

The crime scene was trampled down by enthusiastic investigators. It took days for the two spent shells they had trodden into the dirt to be located. The area was not fully secured, and it is possible that the murderer might have driven away down an unblocked road. An empty caravan nearby, which could have given shelter to the murderer as he or she lay in wait, was only cursorily checked, as were statements by people a block away who said they had heard running footsteps.

There was no lack of suspects. Colin Winchester had been the bumbling coordinator of an ill-fated drug-growing operation designed to locate Mafia Mr Bigs, and at the time of his death the cultivators were about to stand trial in Queanbeyan. Was he killed to stop him giving evidence, or as some sort of Mafia warning to the world? In his early days Winchester had been a senior detective in the local ACT force, which some believed was corrupt. Had its tolerance of an illegal gambling house come back to haunt it?

As an assistant commissioner, Winchester was responsible for the careers of other officers. Had some present or former policeman killed him in revenge, or to stop him doing anything? Like almost everyone else in Canberra, Winchester had argued with one of the ACT's most colorful characters, David Eastman. Had this man, who often spoke in violent language, taken revenge for Winchester's refusal to drop a prosecution against him? Was it something from Winchester's private life? The questions

raised 100 possibilities and touched on1000 items of scuttlebutt.

The investigation was headed by two detectives who had been close associates of Winchester for many years. Each of them had some record of success, though not against criminals of any sophistication. And one was to quit the investigation after a television program reported information that, if true, might have made him a suspect in the case.

Within weeks they had settled on David Eastman as the prime suspect and the resources of the investigation were focused on him. Some forensic material seemed to point to Eastman, although this initial evidence eventually proved to be of no use at all. In a way that is reminiscent of the Chamberlain case, ambiguous forensic material helped to harden a police mindset about the case.

And so Eastman was followed, harassed and raided. His house was bugged, almost every path he had ever trodden was carefully combed, and the waterways beside them dragged for a rifle. Even his lawyers were warned off, and in the ensuing years he got through more than a dozen of them. David Eastman is probably a more complex personality than the book's authors, who describe him as essentially an anti-establishment stirrer, have recognised. But the case against him was astonishingly weak, and the police campaign against him will chill the blood of anyone who believes in orderly justice.

Whoever murdered Colin Winchester was cool, lucky and a planner—not terms that spring to mind in connection with David Eastman. He is a man of brittle temper, and there is some evidence that the campaign of harassment was meant to break him. But he is also a highly intelligent man, and it is unlikely that the detectives had the wits to match him.

THEIR OBSESSION WITH Eastman raised questions about whether they had closed their minds to alternative lines of inquiry that, for political reasons, they did not want to explore: anything connected with rivalry between the old Commonwealth and ACT police forces; anything associated with corruption in the old ACT system; and anything connected with Winchester's personal life. In time some of these possibilities were explored by other police task forces, but this opened old wounds and resulted in police wasting time trying to discredit each other.

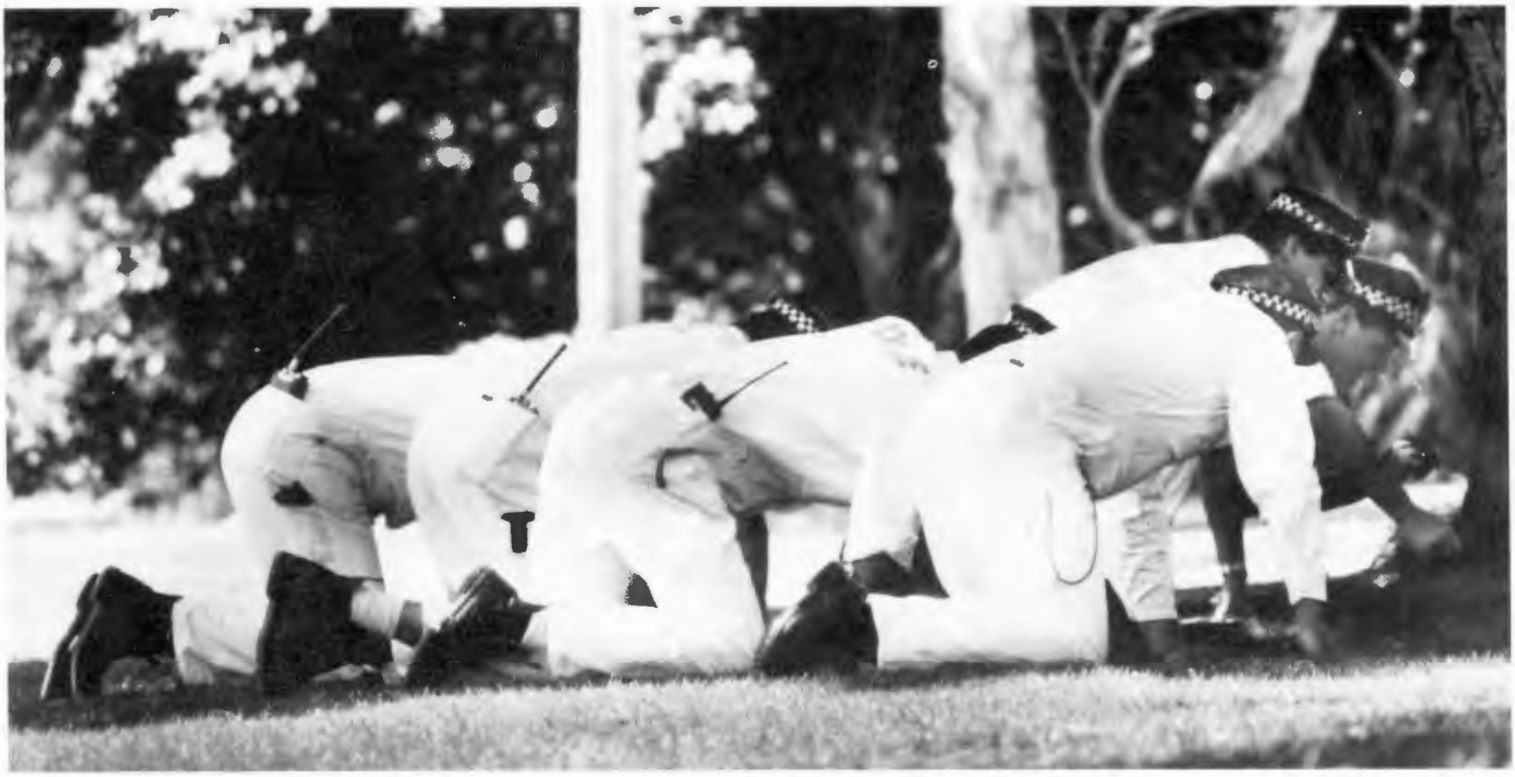
An inquest was opened when the coroner, concerned at increasing criticism of the investigation, decided that a hearing might clear the air and demonstrate that investigators were doing a good job. It quickly became unmanageable, a mini-royal commission. The inquest detailed the drug-crop debacle and a gambling casino scandal, and provided a field day for lawyers. More than 500 hours of evidence was taken from 200 witnesses, and 8000 pages of transcript was produced. None of it got any closer to answering the question of who killed Colin Winchester, and why.

The Winchester Scandal is more than a record of the case. It points to gaps in the investigation and draws lessons for the future. The book should cause profound unease, not only about the competence and professionalism of what is supposed to be Australia's premier law-enforcement agency, but about its respect for old-fashioned notions like dispassionate investigation and concern for police procedure. If this is how they behaved in their star case, how do they behave in run-of-the-mill cases? ■

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

Hot on the trail: 'It took days to locate the two shells enthusiastic investigators had trampled into the dirt'

Photo: Jon Beale The Canberra Times.



FLASH IN THE PAN

Batman Returns, dir. Tim Burton (Village). Tim Burton has now served up two films about the Caped Crusader, and the trouble is that the central character has failed to turn up on both occasions.

Former comedian Michael Keaton walks through the lead role in each film looking bored but slightly annoyed, as if suffering mild constipation. Such is Keaton's indifference as Batman's alter ego, the insufferably rich playboy Bruce Wayne, that his metamorphosis into superhero crime fighter prompts the suspicion that he gulps down anabolic steroids while sliding down the Bat Pole into the fabulous Bat Cave.

That said, *Batman Returns* is still highly enjoyable. It has an often witty script and a tolerable subplot about corrupt politics and big business. More striking is the High Gothic style carried over from the first *Batman*, with knockout sets, killer costumes and high-tech wizardry.

Michelle Pfeiffer, as Catwoman, throws off enough slinkiness to suggest that she could purrsuade any number of Old Testament musclemen to shave their heads, do handstands or whatever. She also packs a punch, and her demure-secretary-gone-feral act is helped by some surprisingly good lines. Danny De Vito plays the Penguin as a kind of pilchard-eating Fagin who happens to dwell in the sewers of Gotham City. He's also got some good lines, but lacks of the oomph of Jack Nicholson's Joker in the first *Batman*.

I took it as a litmus test when two kids in the cinema began wrestling during De Vito's big speech exhorting an assembly of penguins to do very bad things. But flat spots and mixed reviews will make no difference to this film, such is its accompanying hype. *Batman Returns* took $US45.7 million on its opening weekend in North America, the best film opening on record.

—Mark Skulley

Strictly Ballroom, dir. Baz Luhrmann (Screened at the Melbourne and Sydney film festivals, soon for commercial release). Paul Mercurio's earnest performance as Scott Hastings, a talented dancer marooned in the suburbs, is one of many strengths in *Strictly Ballroom*, the Australian film that won the Prix de Jeunesse at Cannes this year. The film studies the politics of ballroom dancing and the lives of those, such as Scott and Fran (Tara Morice), who are tempted by its aura of glitzy hope.

The ballroom in question is a shrine to Meretrix, a flash of magnesium in an otherwise meaningless suburban nowhere. It has its sacred vessels, its video bibles and its oligarchic representatives of dance orthodoxy. Scott has some new steps that, to the oligarchy, represent the end of empire. And since the stakes are absurdly high when the world is absurdly insular, they decide he must be stopped or corrupted.

Fran, an ugly duckling eventually revealed as a swan, is beautifully played by Morice. Her self-discovery is evoked not only by Scott's crash-course in ballroom dancing, but also by an awakening to the values of her own Spanish peasant culture, in which people dance not for prizes but from the heart.

A quibble is that the staples of backstage showbiz tales, used to great satiric effect in much of *Strictly Ballroom*, are applied inappropriately at its climax, when the Dance Federation president gives a phoney version of the downfall of Scott's father. This is suitably presented as burlesque, but the father's own appeal that his son should no longer live in fear requires more earnestness. Because it comes from the heart it should be unalloyed, yet the script renders it as a set of clichés.

—Peter Fleming

Alien^3, dir. David Fencher (Hoyts). The problem with *Alien*^{3} is that it just isn't very frightening. A bit of a problem for a horror movie. Worried that audiences have seen aliens bursting out of the bodies of people too often, *Alien*^{3} resorts to its star alien bursting out of the stomach of a puppy.

Sigourney Weaver puts in a terrific performance, and her relationship with the prison doctor on the convict settlement where she (and the obligatory alien) have crash-landed almost gets interesting. But alas, he turns into alien fodder too early for us to care.

The prison camp itself (a monastery in Vincent Ward's original script) is nicely atmospheric, but the film generally is let down by Fencher's direction. His background as a director of Madonna video clips is easy to see in the final scenes—gratuitously bizarre camera angles of the kind designed to grab your attention for two minutes, but which get very irritating after a while. I never want to see another alien-human chase through a corridor upside down.

Eureka Street Film Competition

From one kind of bat man to another ... Tell us what you think Dracula would say to the Caped Crusader and we'll award two tickets, to the film of your choice, for the answer we like best. Write to: *Eureka Street* film competition, PO Box 553, Richmond, VIC 3121. The winner of our June film competition was Sheila Byrne, of Glen Osmond, South Australia, the first person to let us know that the film which shocked Marlene Dietrich was, of course, the film that made her famous—*The Blue Angel*.

Advice? Get out *Alien* or *Aliens* from your local video store. Then if you really want to see what happens to Ripley, go along to *Alien*^{3}. (Hint: the ending is almost exactly the same as *Terminator 2*'s.)

—David Braddon-Mitchell

City of Hope, dir. John Sayles (independent cinemas). In *JFK* Oliver Stone gave us politics as a kind of thwarted morality play: the forces of evil are everywhere, but if we cling to the One Just Man they shall not hold sway forever. *City of Hope* does not quite turn this upside down, though its subject is the evident scarcity of just men and women. Sayles' film is about a gritty world in which low deals and compromises abound but grand conspiracies do not.

Nick (Vincent Spano) lives in the fictitious Hudson City, New Jersey. He is estranged from his father (Tony Lo Bianco), a property developer accustomed to buying the favour of public officials, and this family quarrel comes to affect the political prospects of Wynn (Todd Morton), a black city councillor whose constituents live in slums controlled by Tony's father.

The slum dwellers are contemptuous of Wynn, who wants them to play the white, middle-class game called politics. Some future in that for him, perhaps, precious little for them. When he is finally presented with a means of turning the game to their advantadge, it involves smearing a white teacher accused of molesting two black youths. The teacher is a former colleague of Wynn, who knows him to be innocent.

The eventual resolution of this dilemma, if resolution it can be called, makes *City of Hope* a kind of two-cheers-for-democracy exercise, and the reference to hope in the title only partly ironic. Sayles, who also wrote and edited the film, gives his audience recognisable human beings in every line and frame, and it is possible to sympathise with them even at their worst.

Best of all, the sympathetic note is never allowed to degenerate into schmaltz. This is especially so in the final scene, a father-and-son reconciliation that *City of Hope* manages both to endorse and to undermine.

—Ray Cassin

Buy now, rule later

The lure of political power can sell many things, including real estate. This advertisement was spotted in the property columns of *The Age*: 'Four-bedroom, double-fronted family home, modern kitchen and bathroom, built-in robes, ensuite. Close to schools, transport and shops. Marginal seat.'

Isle of woes: I

Catch 22? Or should that now be Caught 22? The Italian government is building a maximum-security prison on the island of Pianosa, a bleak rock in the Mediterranean just beyond spitting distance of Elba. This not-so-fragrant isle has intermittently been used as a prison camp since the the days of Tiberius, and the carabinieri now intend it to be a dumping ground for some of Italy's least fragrant Mafiosi. But Pianosa's greatest claim to fame is as the setting for Joseph Heller's spoof on military bureaucracy, *Catch 22*. We think future inmates of Stalag Pianosa should read the fine print in their sentences very carefully.

Isle of woes: II

The unthinkable has happened. The Press Association reports that the Garda Siochana are investigating the origins of a *snake* that bit a Dublin man on the foot as he left a pub. And St Patrick, of course, is supposed to have long ago banished from Ireland these reptilian reminders of the Garden of Eden and the Fall.

Lest the site of the serpentine assault occasion some scepticism, we hasten to add that the snake was not of the illusionary pink variety commonly seen in public houses, but of the real, scaly variety not commonly seen in Ireland. It was in fact a ribbon snake, a non-venomous species, and has since been apprehended by the gardai and placed in Dublin Zoo.

Yet its very appearance in the Island of Saints and Scholars remains deeply mysterious, and cause for disquiet. Is it an indication of divine wrath? Have the true confessions of Bishop Casey overturned all of Patrick's good work? Are those slithering tempters now on their way back? If someone gets bitten by a venomous snake, we'll know that Ireland's in real trouble.

Guilt? Forget about expiating it. Just so long as it pays, right? *Photo: Bill Thomas.*

From p8

Santamaria and the Movement he leads.

Paul Ormonde's 'revelation' that the Australian Catholic bishops agreed to support the Movement to the extent of £10,000 simply emphasises another Santamaria achievement. Every year *News Weekly* publishes a list of financial contributors who regularly support the 'fighting fund' to the tune of $150,000 or more.

With 15,000 *News Weekly* subscribers and an *AD2000* readership in excess of 7000, Santamaria's publications set their rivals a daunting target. I am sure the publishers of *Eureka Street* will be in a much better position to evaluate Santamaria's achievements when they can match these figures. The so-called 'loyalty' to the bishop—the subject of Edmund Campion's address—with its 'stay in and fight' tactic, has merely led to the transformation of the Labor movement, which is now dominated by careerists of every hue.

Having joined the Movement immediately upon my return from war service in Europe in 1945, I see the renewal of the Movement through each successive generation as one of the truly hopeful signs for Australia's future. My question to the conference panel is this: How many of these Santamaria knockers expect to have their life's work reviewed 50 years down the track?

A.J. Murphy
Fairfield West NSW

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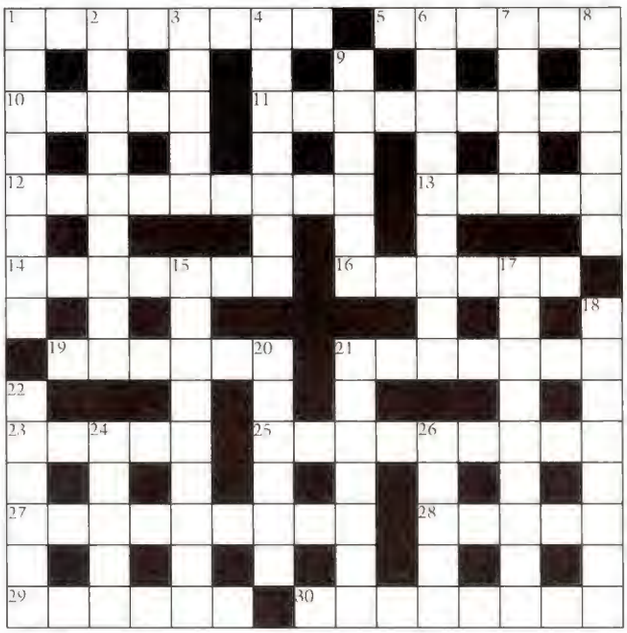
Father Leo, OSM,
Servite Priory,
PO Box 94,
PARKVILLE, VICTORIA, 3052
Tel: (03) 347 8191.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 5, August 1992.

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS
1 Christmas song in E? With 30, she is now off the note. (8)
5 Oh, Tom's not like Esau (Gen 27:11). (6)
10 Double this for the outback. (5)
11 In or on August I celebrate the blossom. (6,3)
12 A mean person grovelling in the soil creates more wrath. (9)
13 Is the mountain feline a lightweight? (5)
14 They and I reign. What dost thou? (7)
16 Fixing her ski, she uttered a piercing cry. (6)
19 Spring on board to see them in the rolling ocean. (6)
21 Stay replete? On the contrary! (2,5)
23 A kind of particle found in scalp hair. (5)
25 On the menu for those who don't like to take a night class. (3,6)
27 Strange that barren cod should produce such a meal ... (9)
28 ... that can be taken about midday. (5)
29 The rest are different to hers (6)
30 The church is by the oak tree, where 1 finds her name. (8)

DOWN
1 The capital is able to be a rest and recreation centre (8)
2 The wives arrived, anyhow, not sad to see the school with its fluvial aspect. (9)
3 What a churl! Staggering around with a swaying gait. (5)
4 Fresh wine in this beach resort. (7)
6 A misty blue morn extends east to the southern metropolis. (9)
7 Look back and study the ancient days. (5)
8 Ah! Deny, foolishly, the Queen's representative. (6)
9 Draw them or leave them to decay, the game is over. (6)
15 It could be a roan bull right there on the plain. (9)
17 A common language containing several synonymous senses per antonym (9)
18 Can one have harm in a suburb of 20? No question. (8)
20 My desire rises to have days without a care in this harbour city. (6)
21 Had George, initially, any woolly awareness of this Queensland town? (7)
22 A wild marsupial and a runaway cab converge on the river. (6)
24 Is it, perhaps, the PR city par excellence? (5)
26 Still goggles at girls even when the girl guides are absent. (5)

Solution to Crossword no.4, July 1992

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

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