EUREKA STREET

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A spot of bother in higher education

EUREKA STREET

Volume 8 Number 1
January–February 1998

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

The British novelist Frank Parkin wrote a book called The Mind and Body Shop *over a decade ago. It described the amalgamation of a university's philosophy department, which was facing fiscal stress, with the local brothel. The mind-body problem thereby found an institutional resolution of sorts in a grotesquely pecuniary environment. In a deregulated system everything is possible.*

—See Frank Stilwell on 'Hire Education' on p22.

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A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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COMMENT

MICHAEL MCGIRR

First day of play

THERE WAS A SMALL CROWD in for the opening day of the Australia v New Zealand test match in Perth last November, but the organisers seemed to have been expecting smaller. An excursion of about one hundred primary school children so swelled the numbers in the outer that the nearest food outlet ran out of hot pies before lunch. Meanwhile, their teacher inadvertently entertained the crowd by trying to take a class roll. The spectators nearby answered the call and began indicating their presence or absence with increasingly obscene reasons one way or the other. The children enjoyed this hugely, so much so that I doubt if the same excursion will be going ahead this year. It's a pity. If the point of the exercise was to expose youngsters to an aspect of Australian culture, then the object was surely achieved. Events on the field were of less interest to the children, but, for the record, the Australian team played like the AIF in Egypt, which was famous for catching everything. New Zealand batsmen left the arena in such rapid succession that one wondered if there were going to be any work for the Australians actually to stop in the industrial dispute which loomed in the background of the game. Evening came, the first day.

The series against South Africa hasn't needed school excursions to get a crowd through the gate. Boxing Day is named after the basic human instinct to pack a lunch and get out of the house after spending a day with rellies. In parts of the northern hemisphere, it is the traditional day for the start of the hunting season. In Melbourne, 73,000 spectators turned up for the cricket, more than had been through the turnstiles for the entire New Zealand series. The day started sedately, doubtless out of respect for the hangover being nursed by many in the outer, but at least it did start, more than can be said of the last South African visit to the MCG. On boxing day in 1993, constant rain put the lie to the rumour that water can achieve anything for a headache.

By tea the Australians had ground to a score of 92, but slow progress allowed the crowd to mull over important matters. A gentleman behind us stated his belief that the captain of the Australian XI should be *ex officio* the president of the new republic. His companion thought that would be OK if somebody like Mark Taylor was captain 'but what if you got a Bill Lawry?' Somebody else said that they had been at the Australia versus Iran World Cup fixture at the same ground a month earlier and had noticed uneven bounce in the centre wicket.

'But that was a soccer ball'.

'It doesn't matter. Bounce is bounce.'

One of our group reported seeing Merv Hughes in the bar and was indignant that Merv was asked to pay for his beer. We asked, since he felt so strongly, if he had offered to pay for Merv's beer himself. He hadn't. Another nearby spectator began reminiscing about Fred Astaire's visit as a guest commentator to the Melbourne Test Match in 1961. Unfortunately, Astaire didn't bat. He'd have lent new elegance to the phrase 'dancing down the wicket'. Meanwhile, Mark Waugh's grim performance prompted a disgruntled fan to say that Waugh had been drinking before he came in and that Taylor should have dropped him down the batting order to give him a chance to sober up. But Steve Waugh hit the first ball after tea for four and the game came alive. The

gentleman behind us, tired of discussing the republic, said that if Waugh scored a century before stumps it would replace the Mitcham by-election as the highlight of his year. Evening came and stumps were drawn, the first day.

South Africa held out for a draw in Melbourne and the circus moved on. Sydney is currently making sure it experiences every kind of organisational disaster before the Olympics. This is the only conceivable explanation for the farce at the start of the test at the SCG where you pay $10 to park and $25 to get into the outer. In Melbourne you pay $4 to park and $20 to get in. We queued for 35 minutes in Sydney to part with our money, prompting us to wonder why a crowd more than twice the size should queue for a fraction of the time to get into the MCG. Possibly patrons were hurriedly taking out mortgages at the window to cover the cost of admission. At all events, it hardly mattered because play was delayed for half an hour owing to the fact that a groundsman had decided to water one of the wickets neighbouring the test wicket before the start of play and had managed to wet the test surface. Add to this the fact that the gentleman singing the national anthem stopped in the middle of his karaoke performance, ordered the tape to be rewound and announced that he wanted to sing with less reverberation 'out of respect for the South Australian team.' The scoreboard knew he was wrong. When the South Africans started to bat, their score was initially attributed to Tasmania. The drinks cart broke down. Add to this an announcement that the Randwick Racecourse carpark was going to close at 4pm, a time that was later revised to 6pm, still half an hour before the close of play.

In Sydney, we had, however, found the perfect vantage point. Times were when TV went out of its way to make watching sports coverage as close as possible to the real thing. Now, sports promoters go out of their way to make being at the ground as much as possible like watching TV. The scoreboard puts up advertisements at monotonous intervals and replays parts of the game. This is why it pays to sit directly under the scoreboard. Whenever an appeal is turned down, the entire crowd on the hill stands, turns around and faces you so they can see what happened. Whenever a wicket falls, they turn around, face you and cheer wildly. You can close your eyes for a moment and feel like a god. ■

Michael McGirr SJ is consulting editor of *Eureka Street*.

COMMENT: 2
ANDREW HAMILTON

From those who have not ...

On December 21 last year, the Nobel Peace Laureate, Jose Ramos Horta spoke on behalf of the East Timorese asylum seekers in Australia. He told one part of their story—their suffering and oppression in East Timor and the hypocrisy of the Australian Government. It first denied Portuguese sovereignty in order to exploit the region's oil, and then used the legal fiction of Portuguese nationality in order to avoid accepting them as refugees.

There is, however, another part of the story which also needs to be told. It concerns the less spectacular but equally effective administrative devices by which a Government can leave its chosen victims defenceless. In this case the victims are on-shore asylum seekers, including the East Timorese.

Some 500 of these East Timorese asylum seekers have sought help in preparing their cases from the staff and volunteers of the Refugee Advice and Case Service (RACS). Because of the complexity of refugee law, refugees need legal assistance to make their case. RACS has provided it free of charge.

RACS staff and those from the Victorian Immigration Advice and Rights Centre (VIARC) have represented most of the asylum seekers without resources to pay for legal assistance. The funds which they have received from tendering for assistance to asylum seekers have underpinned its further voluntary work. Their work has been professional and successful. Indeed, Senator Vanstone in Parliament conceded of RACS and VIARC that 'both have well qualified staff—arguably the best in the voluntary sector.' They have also pleaded the cause of asylum seekers and particularly of the East Timorese. Their advice has been solidly founded in the experience of refugees themselves. But today, community groups that defend the rights of asylum seekers and particularly of the East Timorese, are automatically critics of the Government, which denies that on-shore asylum seekers are refugees. Critics annoy this Government.

So RACS and VIARC have been dealt with. In response to public concern, Senator Vanstone assured Parliament that 'Both organisations are likely to be funded at the same overall level this financial year as last financial year.' Then RACS promptly lost two thirds of its funding, and VIARC three quarters. As a result neither organisation is likely to be able to continue past June, 1998.

The Government defence of what was transparently a political decision was an appeal to its ideology of competitive tendering. The small pool of funds available for refugee advice was divided between three tenderers, including two from the private sector. For these firms, refugee work provides chocolate biscuits with their tea. For the community and voluntary sector, it provides survival rations. Through the mantra of competition, the Government can successfully wipe out any of the competition which attacks its policies.

Since much of the work of RACS is done by volunteers, however, it might have been possible to continue the work through these idealistic young law students and recent graduates. The Government, however, has moved to shutter this window of opportunity. From next March, volunteers will have to pay $150 or $100 to register as Migration Agents. The privilege of giving experience to volunteers would cost a penurious RACS about $7000.

If the Government has its way, too, asylum seekers will be unable to appeal unfavourable decisions to the Federal or High Court. Nothing will stand between the asylum seeker and the will of the Executive.

If one of the functions of Law is to defend the powerless human being against the tyranny of the State, these developments should concern us all. Once the protective net that separates little fish from monsters is broken, monsters are likely to turn their attention to bigger fish. ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ has worked with refugee communities overseas and in Australia.

FRANK BRENNAN

A free-speaking church-goer's guide to Wik in '98

WARREN ENTSCH IS A ROBUST PASTORALIST from north Queensland. He also chairs the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Native Title. When he called for a boycott of churches in the light of comments by church leaders about John Howard's ten-point Wik plan, the debate entered a new phase.

Perhaps naïvely, I contacted the office of Senator Nick Minchin, Special Minister of State, the morning after. I pointed out that the two Catholic bishops who had responded that morning—Saunders from Broome and Foley from Cairns—were not from dioceses full of leafy suburbs but rather with pastoral leases as far as the eye could see. Church leaders would not be backing away. And churchgoer Senator Brian Harradine would be pivotal to the Senate debate commencing a week later. The minister's office thanked me for the discussion and assured me Mr Entsch's remarks had 'nothing to do with the government'.

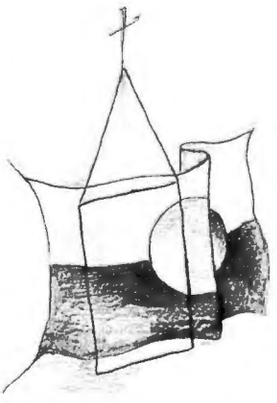
It was as if we were re-running the government's response to Pauline Hanson. Remember how her maiden speech of September 1996 had been followed by the Prime Minister's free speech credo to the Queensland Liberal Party and a month of silence because this is a free country and 'I'm not going to say what I believe through the prism of responding to what somebody else has said.'

But that afternoon, the Prime Minister stepped up to the dispatch box, not with a hose to douse the Entsch bushfire but with a fan: 'May I say of my colleague the member for Leichhardt that I understand his sense of frustration—and the sense of frustration of many people in rural Australia—about the way in which this debate is being conducted. I do not support a call for a boycott of church attendance, but I can understand the sense of frustration he feels.'

This was preceded by the Prime Minister's recitation of the written code for 'church figures' who wish to avail themselves of the right of free speech: 'The right to speak freely on a broad range of issues carries with it the obligation to speak in an informed, objective and constructive fashion ... Importantly, there is also an obligation on church figures who do enter the debate not to allow the impression to be created that they speak on behalf of all adherents to their particular church or denomination.'

This was all rather gratuitous, especially coming from the key participant in the debate who had so muddied the waters with the map on television falsely claiming 79 per cent of Australia could be subject to an Aboriginal veto.

John Howard then went overseas and left Tim Fischer in charge. The Anglican Archbishops of Perth and Adelaide had been taken to task by an Anglican vicar from Charleville, Queensland. The Acting Prime Minister thought it worthwhile giving Parliament the vicar's assessment: 'There are three words that could describe the comments made by the Archbishops. The first word is ignorant; the second word is uncaring; and the third word is hypocritical.' For Fischer, the vicar was 'the church leader I support in relation to Wik and Mabo.' John Howard's code was being liberally interpreted in his absence.

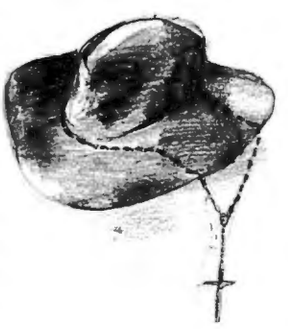


It was important for the government to put paid to the churches because the decision had been taken not to compromise one iota on the 300-page bill proposed to Parliament. The government would have to take on not only those critics who rejected the ten point plan out of hand, but also those, like Brian Harradine, who were prepared to allow the government to govern, provided the proposed legislation had a decent moral bottom line. The government knew it would be difficult to reject reasoned, constructive suggestions which enjoyed community backing—including from church leaders—unless there were a concerted campaign against all critics, including the churches. For a touch of spice, there would also be one last suggestion that the backyards were under threat, salvageable only by an unamended ten point plan.

The crunch issue was whether or not native title holders whose lands were subject to pastoral lease should retain the statutory right to negotiate with mining companies. Aboriginal negotiators were adamant that this issue was non-negotiable, a right to negotiate being much less than a veto. They had support from many quarters including the churches. Rather than

acknowledging this right, the Prime Minister took to describing it as simply 'a special arrangement entered into by the former government'.

The finesse of the government's response was demonstrated in the Dorothy Dixer asked of Tim Fischer on 3 December 1997 by Mr Kevin Andrews, noted Catholic Liberal member from Victoria, where there are no pastoral leases. Andrews was the advocate who had done so much to galvanise and present the Aboriginal perspective in the euthanasia debate, complete with a message stick from remote communities hand-delivered to the Parliament.



He asked, 'Will the government's proposed amendments to the right to negotiate under the Native Title Amendment Bill create greater certainty for the mining industry, jobs and rural communities?' Mr Fischer: 'I thank the Member for Menzies for his very relevant question. The short answer is yes, they will.'

After the question, Mr Fischer went back to have a friendly chat to the promising backbencher, returned to the front bench, later giving me a courteous wave up in the gallery. Message received. The main amendment was to permit State governments to remove completely the right to negotiate with mining companies if native title land was subject to a pastoral lease. All good Catholics had come to the aid of the party!

By the end of the Senate debate, the Prime Minister said Frank Brennan does not speak for all Catholics and disclosed that he (Mr Howard) had covenants with the miners and pastoralists. Covenants are to be kept. Aborigines were the only party without a covenant. Rational, constructive dialogue about proposed amendments was impossible because the covenants were in place. On 6 December 1997, John Howard identified four key sets of amendments which were 'in the eyes of the government, completely unacceptable'. He said the government would vote against them because they had 'substantially altered the thrust and the intent of the legislation'.

The four objectionable sets of amendments were identified as the threshold test, the six-year sunset clause, the statutory negotiation process for mining and development projects, and the proposal to subject the Native Title Act to the provisions of the Racial Discrimination Act.

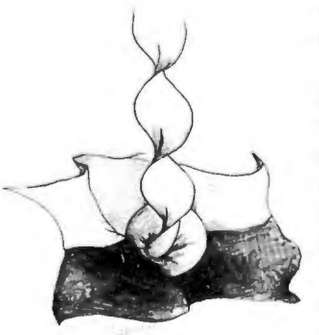
But in debate, the government was sympathetic to Senator Harradine's amendment to the threshold test, allowing Aborigines locked out of pastoral leases still to lodge a claim. Senator Minchin told the Senate on 1 December 1997: 'We have had a good look at Senator Harradine's amendment and we would be prepared to accept that amendment. In the light of the comments that have been made around the chamber, we think that is a not inappropriate amendment.'

A sunset clause is now completely arbitrary and unprincipled. Native title claimants can lodge a claim over their traditional lands which they occupy once any freehold estate or lease has expired and not been renewed. The effect of a sunset clause would be to permit a claim over land if the lease were to expire within the next six years, while barring a claim over land where the lease is to run out in another seven years without any prospect of renewal.

If a right to negotiate with a mining company is to be enjoyed by native title holders whose country is vacant crown land, that right should not be taken away from native title holders who suffer the disadvantage of having their land subject to a pastoral lease without their consent. The Prime Minister has only ever provided two arguments for taking away this statutory right. One is meaningless and the other unprincipled. Both are wrong. He says, 'Of the many ironies that are thrown up by this debate, none is stronger than the consequences of the Labor Party's insistence that the right to negotiate in the existing Native Title Act be left unaltered by the amendment bill, because that has two consequences. The first consequence it has is to prevent effect being given to the spirit of the Wik decision, because if you leave a right to negotiate there you cannot possibly give effect to the spirit of the Wik decision. The second consequence is that you are conferring a right on native title claimants that you are not conferring on pastoralists. So apparently in relation to a mining claim it is perfectly all right for a right to negotiate to be available to native title claimants but it is not all right for it to be available to pastoralists. There is no equity, there is no fairness and there is no justice in that outcome.'

The spirit of the Wik decision is not that pastoralists necessarily have more or the same rights as native title holders when it comes to dealing with miners. The spirit of the decision is that native title holders retain their rights provided there is no conflict with the rights of the pastoralists. Any conflict of rights between native title holders and pastoralists is resolved in favour of the pastoralists. Nothing in the Wik decision relates to mining rights.

As for the second consequence, the Commonwealth Parliament has an obligation to set an appropriate bottom line for relationships between native title holders and miners. It is a matter for the States to determine the relationship between miners and pastoral lessees holding state titles. The right to negotiate encourages Aborigines and miners to talk together and to work together from the beginning.



The Commonwealth Parliament has no power to make laws for the rights exercisable by pastoral lessees under State titles. The veto, negotiation and compensation rights of farmers affected by mining is a State matter. For example, some farmers in Western Australia whose lands are cultivated and enclosed have a veto over mining development. At the other end of the scale are those pastoralists who have only a right to compensation for disturbance to the land. The Commonwealth Parliament has the power and the responsibility to set a bottom line for relationships between native title holders and miners.

The right to negotiate with mining companies was not even mentioned by the Prime Minister in his address to the nation.

A right to negotiate with mining companies should be retained by all native title claimants who can satisfy a reasonable threshold test.

In the dying stages of the Senate debate, the Labor Party insisted that the legislation be read and construed subject to the provisions of the Racial Discrimination Act. When in government in 1993, Labor could not bring itself to agree to such amendments proposed by the Democrats and Greens because such complex legislation, which is designed to give all parties certainty about their property rights, would not accord certainty until the courts had determined the effect of the Racial Discrimination Act on each and every clause. Senator Brian Harradine was right on the last day of debate before the lunch at which he changed his mind when he said, 'There will be endless litigation about it. Why did we not put it in the 1993 legislation? For the very reason that we ought not be putting it in here. The Labor government at that time knew that it was a nonsense to put a similar provision in the Native Title Act. If the Labor Party faced up to the real world now, they would realise that it would be, and is, not an appropriate thing to do if you want to have the legislation work for the benefit of indigenous people—native title holders—and in fairness to the rights of other persons.' Despite the populist appeal of this amendment, the Opposition parties should back down in the interests of certainty, justice and workability for all stakeholders.

For a touch of spice, there would also be one last suggestion that the backyards were under threat, salvageable only by an unamended ten point plan.

On 6 December 1997, the Prime Minister told Parliament of his commitment to find 'an honourable, decent and worthy compromise'. He said, 'In a compromise, you do not surrender to one interest, you try to strike a fair balance.' In relation to the four issues of concern raised by the Prime Minister, such a compromise could only be effected by the Senate's dropping its insistence that the Native Title Act be read and construed subject to the provisions of the Racial Discrimination Act. The government should agree to a threshold test which unlocks the gates on those pastoral leases where the gates have been locked in the past. The government should also agree to drop the six-year sunset clause which will simply result in excessive claims being lodged in six years' time and which would preclude bona fide claims to areas no longer subject to lease or freehold after six years. Most importantly, the government should agree to Commonwealth legislation maintaining the right to negotiate with mining companies for all native title holders.

With this compromise, pastoralists and shire councils could be assured, by March 1998, the certainty they have been seeking with a new threshold test and the guarantee that they can engage in the same diversification on their leases post-Wik as they could pre-Wik. Without this compromise, the shire councils and pastoralists will be put on hold for an additional year with minimal possible gain. If the government simply wants to put all other stakeholders on hold for the benefit of miners unwilling to negotiate with native title holders on pastoral leases, the Prime Minister will be unable to sustain his claim that 'The Australian people will know that the government wants to bring it to an honourable conclusion and it has been completely frustrated in those attempts by the behaviour of the Labor Party and by the behaviour of the Democrats and by the behaviour of Senator Harradine.'

Back in July 1997, such a compromise was publicly praised by the Prime Minister's trusted friend and ABC Chairman, Donald McDonald, who said such a proposal would be welcomed by all fair-minded people as it would 'benefit all parties directly involved and help lead to an outcome of fairness and certainty longed for by the Australian people'.

This compromise would come at considerable cost to the Aboriginal groups and the Opposition parties in the Senate. It would result from minimal rewriting of the Howard bill simply so as to draw a just, workable and certain bottom line. Mr Gareth Evans, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, indicated the ALP's willingness to compromise, given the bottom line drawn by the Harradine amendments, when he warned against the choice of 'setting the country on a divisive and confrontational path, of setting loose those forces of fear and prejudice on one side, of hurt and humiliation on the other side, that are an absolutely inevitable part of any election which makes native title, for which read "race", a central theme'. He told the House of Representatives: 'We should have accepted, we should now accept, the Senate's amendments and move on.'

There are now two groups in the country anxious for a double dissolution on Wik. First, there are those opposed to native title rights being exercised on pastoral leases. They want the election so that the Howard government can implement its plan without the full range of Senate amendments. Especially, they want to do away with the right to negotiate with mining companies except on 'vacant crown land' subject to native title claim. In the past they have criticised the High Court for delay when the court took only six months to reach a decision. They have told Parliament, 'This legislation needs passing because time is not on our side.' But after a year of consultation and debate, these same people now urge the bush to wait another year—for the good of the miners. And this from a government that understands 'the sense of frustration of many people in rural Australia'. Second, there are the strong advocates of native title who believe that a double dissolution will give the Labor Party a real chance of election with a commitment to a full-blooded implementation of the Wik decision. For them the more draconian the Howard bill, the better in the long run.

There are many Australians, not stakeholders and some of them churchgoers, who are left wondering why a Senate compromise would not be good for all of us in March 1998. When a legislative package praised by Donald McDonald can be damned by John Howard within six months, one is left wondering whose interests are being served in the debate. Perhaps everyone, including John Howard, should reconsider the Senate compromise, whatever they think of his selective free speech code, and whether or not they go back to church. ■

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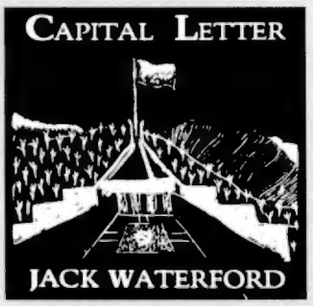

What, us worry?

THERE'S AN AMAZING SERENITY about the unfolding financial, economic, political and almost certainly social crisis facing our Asian nations. Our ministers keep assuring us that it will not affect us a bit. Well, a bit, maybe—a fraction of a percentage point off the growth—but not very much. Well, quite a bit, perhaps, but Australia is not fundamentally affected, partly because John Howard and Peter Costello took the medicine 18 months ago. Our fundamentals are sound, after all. So sound, in fact, that we can play good neighbour and kick in to some of the international rescue packages. We can even stand in the queue of western leaders hectoring Asian leaders and begging them to cop their punishment. And, of course, if they do, it will all be over very quickly and we can get back to trading peacefully with each other.

But is it that simple? A major factor behind the West's rushing in to assist Korea, in particular, came from the realisation that the crisis had the potential to bring on a major global recession. Whatever happens, international demand for our commodities and our soft exports—tourism, say, or education—are bound to fall sharply over the next few years. This in an economy which has been making a great public virtue about the proportion of our production that is turned over to international trade. And, in any event, if the movements in the Australian dollar are any guide, world confidence in our economy is not that profound either.

But there's a lot more to it than that. There's nothing particularly magical about the International Monetary Fund. It's an organ of the West, particularly the United States, just like any other. And its prescription for an economy in trouble may have some potential ultimately to rescue a country from financial crisis, but its agenda is far wider than that. You can see it even from the crude fiscals. First of all, one must get one's government in order, and one's budget in balance. Stop all of that wasteful expenditure on health, education and welfare. Force down demand. More widely, get the settings right. Stop all the regulation—let the market run free. Create regimes of transparency and accountability. Stop the corruption. Put the priority on reduction of debt, even if that involves selling off your assets or dragging money out of social programs. After all, you cannot afford them. And, if a couple of million people are thrown on to the breadlines, one cannot be too sentimental about it—they cannot, as things stand, sustain their present way of life anyway. When things are back in balance, the settings are there for true prosperity, even for them.

Now one can do these things, up to a point at least, with a financial basket case such as a Victoria and get away with it. Even in that state's darkest hours, there was a social security safety net and money coming in from Canberra, quite apart from the fact that political mutiny in Australia is a fairly civilised thing. It's not as simple in an Indonesia, where the glue holding things together is not so strong, where—even among those who are not so corrupt—ways of doing business or running governments are very different from those found in New York or Sydney, and where there was never much of a welfare safety net anyway. Not simple, moreover, where feeling the pinch means a lot more than postponing the purchase of a video-cassette recorder, and where it can mean starving to death. Or roaming around in mobs looking for scapegoats for the collapse of the social order.

But recognition of the fragility of the social fabric is not grounds for continuing to support authoritarian rulers whose families dabble in corruption. We might all want more democratic governments, and welcome some of the pressures which transfer real power back to the people. Which way, however, does the sovereignty pass when a country is in effective receivership? And can one be sure that the domestic forces that the market will unleash will be counterbalanced in the new power vacuums? And, if things do go horribly bad, is Australia, which itself boasts it's a part of Asia, in quite the same position to tut-tut and walk away as some of the IMF daleks?

I'm not saying that Australia should not have been a good neighbour when Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia, then Korea and others fell victim to a crisis of international confidence. But if we truly had an independent foreign policy, and were investing in the long term, we might have done better for ourselves than to have been a shrill echo of, say, Bill Clinton. The United States knows where its interests lie, and Australia's are not necessarily the same. The resentment that persuades some of those countries to focus on Australia, as a cat they can kick, should not be underestimated. It fits neatly, after all, in with the perception that Australia has not really shed its colonial past.

YET, IN THE MEANTIME, the political and bureaucratic backrooms are drawing up a budget for an election—probably for the end of the year. If the blithe self-confidence is correct—and Australia is not too shaken by the Asian earthquakes—there's some money in the till, and some scope for new tax proposals.

And while this is going on, others will be debating the shape of a republic for a new millennium. For many, of course, merely becoming a republic has powerful emotional and sentimental force, marking a formal severing of ties with Britain and a reaffirmation of our nationhood. There are businessmen, too, who see in a republic an opportunity to 're-package' Australia abroad—to help us shed some of our reputation as an outpost of Empire—bumptious, arrogant, and blissfully unaware of other nations, cultures and ways of doing things. A useful lot, perhaps, because they, like many young Australian people, are desperate to see resolved issues such as Aboriginal reconciliation, which stand in the way not only of some international respect but a mature and forward-looking sense of ourselves.

Alas, re-packaging requires more than a new name and slogan. It comes from actions too. And if, as is quite possible, the problems of Asia come to dominate most of the domestic political year—making many of our own difficulties seem trivial and engulfing many of the plans of our own politicians—it may be our own fault for building on the wrong fundamentals. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

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. If submitting by e-mail, a contact phone number is essential.
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Bedevilled (1)

From Heather Elliott, International Campaign to Ban Landmines (Victorian Network)

Martin West's article, 'Small devils' (*Eureka Street*, November 1997), rightly highlights the difficulties of ensuring a universal ban on anti-personnel landmines, and the ironies of this DIY (do it yourself) and DYI (do yourself in) 'weapon of the poor'. However, he is incorrect in asserting that the Australian anti-landmine movement was destroyed by the government's (April 1996) announcement of a moratorium on operational landmine use.

Such a policy shift was indeed the focus of the Australian Campaign to Ban Landmines up to that point, but rather than having 'quietly died', the movement has continued to lobby for this new policy to be given teeth and permanence. In 1997, this mostly meant urging the government to support the historic Ottawa treaty. In May, a National Day of Action—featuring 'minefields' in most Australian CBDs—yielded over 14,000 petition signatures, a motion in the Senate (passed) and media coverage. In July, the Australian Campaign hosted a large regional gathering of government and NGO delegates— including representatives of the Burmese military government—which focused on the Ottawa treaty's importance. In October, we delivered to the Prime Minister's office the petition signatures and another 15,000 personal messages from Australians urging signature of the Ottawa treaty.

I am sorry if West has relied on media coverage as an indicator of the strength of the Australian Campaign. The Melbourne Day of Action was (necessarily) overshadowed by the Reconciliation Convention held on the same day; despite frequent media releases from June 1997 onwards, coverage nationally has been patchy, with more interest shown in overseas events, such as Princess Diana's work and the Ottawa process, than in local events.

Australia signed the Ottawa treaty, which will enter into force six months after its ratification by 40 countries; by ratifying, Australia will confirm, inter alia, its intention to 'work strenuously towards the promotion of its universalisation' (from the treaty Preamble). The treaty's specific terms must take effect by various subsequent deadlines. Rather than resting on our laurels, the Australian Campaign will be urging the government to ratify and implement the treaty as soon as possible, and then to fulfil its stated intentions—including that of influencing mine producers or users, and increasing support for mine clearance and mine survivors. Contrary to West's assertion, in all our lobbying we have consistently encouraged the government in the latter direction, and in fact worked to have this aspect included in the Ottawa treaty itself.

Heather Elliott
Melbourne, VIC

Bedevilled (2)

From Sr Patricia Pak Poy RSM, National Coördinator, International Campaign to Ban Landmines (Australian Network)

Martin West's item 'Small devils' ('The Month's Traffic', *Eureka Street*, November 1997) was disappointing to this reader because many of the writer's judgments—e.g. on the work of Ms Jody Williams, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the Australian Network of the Campaign—seem to be based on inaccurate or incomplete knowledge.

For the record, and for other readers, may I make the following points:

- The Australian campaign has not 'folded'. Its first concern was to build a strong network of citizen support for a total ban on anti-personnel landmines, for mine clearance and assistance to victims. It lobbied the government of the day, and continued to lobby until the present government resolved its internal difficulties, and decided to sign the Convention on the Prohibition of Landmines in Ottawa. The Campaign is still active.
- The issue of landmines is mainly a humanitarian issue warranting a common policy across parties. Labels such as 'left' and 'right-wing' are not helpful in addressing the complexities of the issue.
- The Australian campaign is still working with government to increase Australia's already commendable contribution to mine clearance and assistance to victims. It is also urging early ratification of the Convention.
- ICBL and the Australian Network are working with those countries still resistant to a total ban, including Myanmar/Burma, China, Russia, India, Pakistan and the United States.
- Burma sent representatives to the Asia/Pacific Colloquium on Landmines, hosted by the Australia campaign in Sydney, July 1997. We have also had informal talks with leaders of so-called 'rebel' factions, to promote a ban.
- The Nobel Prize to Ms Jody Williams, the International Coördinator of the Campaign, is viewed by all as a recognition of the significance of the

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

Campaign and a tool for promoting the work of the Campaign in making the ban global. Civil societies must continue to work constructively with governments.

ICBL—and its 65 national campaigns—is engaged, and would welcome the engagement of others.

Patricia Pak Poy RSM
Adelaide, SA

Ragging the Reds

From David Glanz

In the light of Sophie Masson's letter in the December issue, I read once again John Sendy's review essay on the Russian Revolution, published the month before. Unlike Masson, I did not find it courageous but enormously sad, for two reasons.

The first was that in the process of distancing himself from the events of 1917, Sendy reduced to one paragraph the achievements of Communists in Australia. Yet for at least 40 years, members of the CPA played an often magnificent role in the fight against reaction.

To expand on Sendy's brief list, it was Communists who organised the 1930s unemployed who had been dragooned into work for the dole, who organised against racism directed at Italian migrants in the Queensland cane fields, and who were central to spreading solidarity with the Wave Hill Aboriginal stockmen whose 1966 strike laid the basis for land rights.

As those who have seen the film *Mabo, Life of an Island Man*, will know, it was Communist-led wharfies in Townsville who encouraged Eddie Mabo's political education, thus contributing along the way to this decade's seismic shifts in official thinking on land ownership on this continent.

The second reason for sadness was the way that Sendy felt constrained to reject the entire Russian experience in order to dump, at last, his mistaken hero worship of Stalin and all his works.

It means that he has to ignore or marginalise the very real initial gains of the revolution, like land to the peasants, control of industry to the workers, the end of World War I on the Russian front, full legal rights for women such as legalisation of abortion and divorce, legalisation of homosexuality, the end of the legal concept of bastardry, and the right of oppressed nationalities to self-determination.

He has jumped from one position, that Stalin represented the triumphant continuation of October 1917, to another, that the original revolution was doomed to turn into bloodthirsty dictatorship. Yet I would argue that both are flawed.

The key leaders of October 1917, Lenin and Trotsky, were emphatic that the revolution could survive only if it spread to the industrialised West and gained access to advanced technologies and other wealth.

Fourteen foreign armies invaded Russia to back up the Whites. Their aim was never to establish parliamentary democracy but to smash the new workers' state and hand the factories back to the bosses and the land to the landlords. Meanwhile, lack of experience saw new Communist Parties let slip revolutionary opportunities, above all in Germany in 1918–19 and 1923.

Russia survived the civil war but remained isolated and economically devastated. It was into this unwanted, unplanned and awful vacuum that Stalin's bureaucracy expanded. Sendy mentions Stalin's crimes against the population at large and his purges of the cream of the Bolsheviks but ignores an obvious conclusion—that Stalinism represented not the triumph of 1917 but its nemesis.

Sendy may feel that he wasted much of his political life. There remain today new socialists who admire the best of the CPA's work while refusing to subscribe to the suspension of critical judgment that made Stalin-worship possible.

Some of us understand that when Stalin devoured the revolution's children, it was isolation and western hostility, not innate reactionary urges, that sharpened his terrible appetite.

David Glanz
Brunswick, VIC

Citizen's Gain

From H.J. Grant

Some argue that the title 'Commonwealth of Australia' should persist regardless of whether this country maintains or changes its current constitution. The proposal has merit and ought to be fully canvassed at the Constitutional Convention in February 1998.

Plato and others including St Augustine and Sir Thomas More consider a Commonwealth the ideal republic. Indeed it is described as a nation or state with a representative form of government in which supreme authority is vested in the people. It is also a group of sovereign states and their dependencies linked by common objectives and formally associated by compact.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is Head of the Commonwealth of which it is assumed Australia would remain a member whether or not it became a republic. England's active experience as a commonwealth occurred in the period 1649-1660. The then Parliament abolished the House of Lords and the monarchy and established the commonwealth with Oliver Cromwell as chairman (Lord Protector) of the council of state.

It must be said that Cromwell in his puritanical zeal for reform did not play the game according to democratic rules.

If the Constitutional Convention is to be more than an expensive gab fest it would deliver a contemporary model of representative government that includes the duties, powers, election and title of the head of state. Expressed also and expanded in a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities should be the historic status and entitlements of our indigenous population within a culturally diverse society.

The *Constitutional Convention (Electoral) Act 1997* required that delegates to the Convention be citizens of Australia. Such an important requirement is a sign that cannot be disregarded. Since 1948 when legislation was enacted to create Australian citizenship, successive governments have stressed and endeavoured to enhance its status.

Embodying therefore the concept of citizenship as an integral feature within the Constitution is not only logical and pressing but also central to self-determination and identity. Furthermore, enshrining citizenship in language consonant with Australia's diverse origins would facilitate legislation that acknowledges formally people's links and associations with other countries.

H.J. Grant
Campbell, ACT

No-hopery

From Garth Rawlins

Some years ago I visited a Catholic bookshop and felt critical of some of the material I found there. Being of somewhat orthodox views, I asked the Sister in charge what such stuff, much of it virtually anti-Catholic, was doing there. 'We have been told that it must be available,' she said. In those days of my inordinate conservatism, I wrote an honorary article, as a working journalist, in a Catholic publication 'ridiculing' the notion that this kind of material should be available in a Catholic bookshop sanctioned by the Church.

Over the years since, I have come to accept such policy as being enlightened. Fortunately, as the Church came to its decision on the old *Index* of forbidden books, we are not prone to censor others quite so much. (One knows that some protections must continue against obscenity and pornography et cetera, and bearing in mind that every newspaper retains censors, even in this modern world ... we call them sub editors.)

Author Graham Greene was advised by Pope Paul VI to go on writing his books at a time when Catholics were crying *heresy*.

The early Christians never censored or blue-pencilled the vacillations of the disciples, such as St Peter denying Christ and his companions running away when things got too hot for their skins! Or their Master's admonitions ('You of little faith') It was all recorded and remains for posterity. Likewise, *Eureka Street* is right to encourage debate. Hilary Charlesworth's lecture on *Religious*

and Human Rights was properly given full rein (*Eureka Street*, November). I humbly ask indulgence for an unsophisticated comment on her academic view of theology and the law.

Perhaps she felt the Gospels and divinely inspired Church authority did not come within her purview. But she was certainly selective in her comment that 'At the international level religious traditions are used in a complex way to preserve the power of men. The appeal to the sanctity of religion is considerably reduced if it is the case that it is being used to bolster the distribution of power and privilege'. And are the scriptures really being used to justify exclusion of women from the priesthood?

It's not ethereal to recall that the number of women saints far outnumbers those of the male gender, although all belong to the same communion, and one thinks of the tremendous changes wrought throughout history by those who took on the tremendous men: the likes of St Joan of Arc, St Catherine of Siena, Sts Teresa and Thérèse, St Birgitta (whose long trek from Sweden to Rome to warn the Pope of the coming of the Reformation went unheeded with such dire consequences for mankind) ... to say nothing of the Queen of Heaven herself, whose interventions are still being heard in our modern world almost daily with scant attention.

Let's not lose sight of prayer and right good feminine example in these matters that Hilary Charlesworth and others raise. By all means go on lecturing us, but the academic view isn't the whole picture.

Garth Rawlins
Fulham, SA

Not impressed

From Michael Polya

Michael Morgan's letter (*Eureka Street* December 1997) calls for some comment.

I have not heard Sir John Gorton's speech, only reports of it in the media. He might not have expressed very clearly his reasons for not considering Aborigines landowners and the fact that they did/do not grow crops is insufficient argument per se, however I agree with him on the following grounds. Ownership of land implies an equity in the land, which can be acquired only by either purchase (not necessarily the current owner) or by investment of labour, or money, or both in effecting improvements and thus enhancing the value of the property. The two methods are usually combined. Pastoral lessees and miners have done just that and Aborigines have done neither. Contrary to Morgan's assertion, Aborigines were nomads, who roamed the land in search of food, regardless of the size of the area they roamed on. They were territorial occupiers like all creatures that live off the naturally occurring produce of the land, which makes the defence of territory essential due to the limited capacity of it to carry a population. Most of the fauna is territorial in that very sense. Just because no value is added by the occupier, length of occupation makes no difference and the title of any occupier is no better than that of any of his predecessors or successors. None of them have equity in the land and therefore may be chased away, but cannot be dispossessed of what they didn't own in the first place. In contrast with the Murray Islanders, who were established horticulturalists and had improved their land by working it and erecting improvements and in whose favour the Mabo judgment had been delivered, mainland Aborigines did not fulfil the criteria of ownership which was imputed to them by the then government by manipulating the judgement of the High Court.

If rights to freehold ownership can be acquired by mere presence, no matter how unproductive, why are seventeen and a half million Non-Aboriginal Australians also present in the land and on the whole much more productively so than the Aborigines, denied it? Is that not racist? There is also the semantic confusion, which, rightly allows all nearly eighteen million Australians, including Aborigines, to call Australia their country, but only Aborigines may convert their presence into freehold. It may also be true, that a grazing property might only support one family (and presumably their employees, if any) and it might support 50–500 Aborigines, but it produces meat and fibre for export and makes a valuable contribution to the nation's economy, which would not happen if a whole group of Aborigines would subsist on it. Aboriginal enterprises don't have a very good record on the whole.

Your other correspondent in the same issue, Anthony Brown, doesn't seem to realise how cursory Cook's contact was with the Aborigines and does not seem to appreciate the difficulty, nay impossibility, of making agreements with very numerous small and primitive tribes. The British always tried to rule their colonies through the existing hierarchy, but in the case of Australia this was, clearly, not feasible. Hence *terra nullius*. In the judgment of the British authorities, the Aborigines did not constitute a nation, or power the British Empire could enter into treaties with, which does not denote an uninhabited land, as some ignorami like to pretend. M. Baudin must have been very naïve or stupid to even imagine, that the advanced British settlers might adapt their ways to become like the Aborigines, who evidently did not impress them very favourably.

Michael Polya
Dickson, ACT

Talking Points

WORTH TAKING A LOOK at is Brian Howe's *Housing for the Twenty-first Century: Building on Barnett*, Ecumenical Housing Inc. and Copelen Child and Family Services (ISBN 085821 139 4). Clear evidence that there is life after politics.

Oswald Barnett was a pioneering researcher into poverty in the earlier part of this century. Such research has enabled governments in the more Keynesian past to make substantial investments in public housing. But the poor are always with us, and at least partly because they still have to pay so much to keep a roof over their heads. There is much to give one pause here, particularly the cogency with which the connection is drawn between affordable housing and the eradication of poverty.

It seems a truism, but surprise, surprise—reliable studies quoted here show that when government policy provides affordable decent housing, people can rise in the world, and often need no further assistance.

The story for those at the mercy of market forces is not so happy: low-income private renters and buyers must struggle to keep afloat as what little they earn pours away into the pockets of private landlords and banks. The poor always pay more, by proportion of earnings, for housing, whether it be for rent, or stamp duty, which is proportionately higher for lower priced houses.

Howe, as former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Health, Housing and Community Services under Labor, was always one of the more humane politicians in Canberra, and now as an academic can be unfettered in his commentary. This will be an essential addition to secondary school libraries and an important resource for senior students or indeed anyone interested in social justice. ■


THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC


On whom the bell tells

Bellman and Pescott: a sort of literary biography (or, My Life as a Dog)

We tend to attribute enormous influence to the printed word, seeking to find the explanation for this person's greatness—or that person's fatal flaw—in the books that they have read. I found *Bellman—the Story of a Beagle* in the $1 bin outside a second-hand bookshop in Camberwell. And although it was the book's title that attracted the attention of this beagle owner, it was the inscription on the flyleaf—in a child's hand, *Roger Pescott*, and an address in Ballarat—that prompted its purchase.

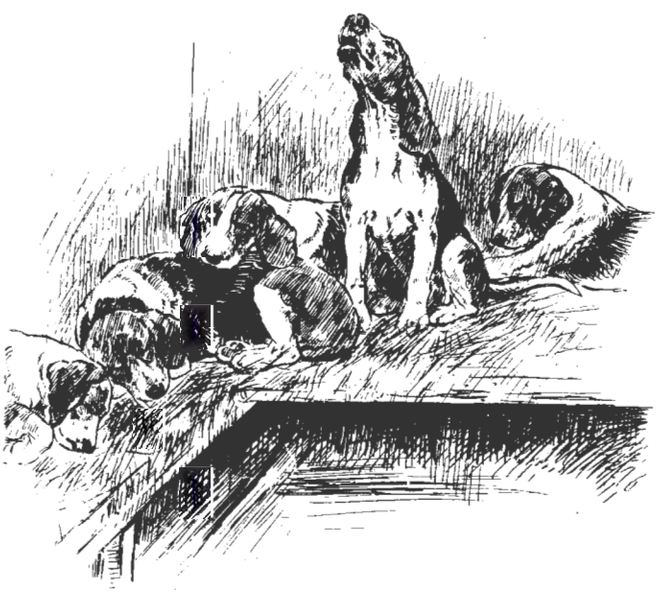
A little research soon confirmed that the address given was indeed that of the childhood home of Roger Pescott MLA, one-time Deputy Leader of the Victorian Parliamentary Liberal Party and, until very recently, the Member for Mitcham. And this finding led to a rather obvious line of further inquiry. Had the young Roger found a role model within the pages of this book, or the values that underpinned his political career? Did Bellman contain the key to Roger Pescott's character?

It was the sort of book little Australian boys like Roger and me were given as birthday and Christmas presents in the fifties: good British stuff promoting grit and determination and 'playing the game', with just a little blood and guts tossed in. But the 'hero' is a dog—a beagle named Bellman—and the story follows his life from his earliest days through to the beginning of what promises to be his golden period, top dog in a pack of hounds.

Bellman had a great deal going for him right from the start. He was courageous, intelligent, well-bred and well-built. Even as a pup he 'could always hold his own at the [feeding] trough', and at his first show, Bellman 'was easily the most likely-looking of the whole lot. He walked in on the tips of his toes, stern erect, looking every inch of him a hound', and the Judge awarded him the prize for best male puppy.

Here I was somehow reminded of the portrayal of Roger Pescott by the Victorian Press, particularly in the early days of his political career. In February 1985, as Liberal candidate for Bennettswood, he was characterised by the *Age* as 'Western District charming, Geelong Grammar-educated and wealthy', and in October 1987, after this newcomer came remarkably close to toppling Jeff Kennett as Liberal leader, the same newspaper reported that his 'main qualifications for the leadership, if you believe those promoting him most strongly, were his "breeding", his good looks and his family'.

Even when, as shadow tourism minister and arguably the most effective member of the Liberal Opposition, Pescott forced the resignation of Victorian Tourism Commission chairman Don Dunstan, and then that of his successor Bob Nordlinger, the Press seemed reluctant to acknowledge that he should be taken seriously as a politician. His pursuit of Labor's appointees was dismissed as 'scalp-hunting', undertaken merely to advance his standing as a contender for the Liberal leadership. And when Pescott challenged this interpretation of his actions, the *Age* reported him doing so 'in that languidly self-assured manner that Geelong Grammar seems to instil in its products'.



For me, a re-reading of the newspaper accounts of the events leading to the resignations of Dunstan and Nordlinger brought to mind the description of Bellman's first 'kill'. He 'growled over the portion he had wrenched from the jaws of a third-season hound, Ranter. This hare tasted ... warm and bitter, and Bellman's eyes glowed and his hackles lifted as he tore at it savagely.'

Unfortunately, none of Pescott's talents and achievements brought him lasting success. His various spells as deputy leader, minister, and shadow minister, were overshadowed by longer periods of back-bench exile.

Here again there seemed to be some parallels, for our beagle hero experienced his share of adversity. He was lost on the moors, caught in a snare, and stolen by a gypsy, but survived them all. He was exposed to temptations that could—and did—lead some young dogs astray. Several of his contemporaries developed an unfortunate appetite for sheep: Bellman was of stronger stuff and never deviated from the role to which he'd been born and bred, hunting hares whenever he was given the opportunity to do so.

Bellman knew exile too, being given away by the owner of the pack into which he was born. This was not as a result of any inadequacy on his part, but rather because he excelled at his vocation, constantly finding and felling the hare well ahead of the rest of the pack. And 'it was a strict rule of the Master's that no matter how good at hunting a hound might be, he absolutely refused to keep one that was faster than his mates in the field'.

At this point, the grand theory I'd been developing fell apart. The pack-owner's kennel staff disapproved of his decision and recognised (God bless the common sense of the working class!) that there was another option. 'I'd sooner be losin' any 'ound in the kennel but 'im,' the old kennel master grumbles. 'Yes,' his assistant responds, 'but he [the Master] would 'ave to get rid of the 'ole pack and get a new lot as could keep level with 'im.' And of course, as this is just a child's story book where—in the fifties at least—truth and justice and grit and determination must triumph in the end, that is what finally happens.

—Terry King

Left behind

ACTIVE ON THE MONARCHIST SIDE in the postal ballot for the convention to review the Australian constitution is the Samuel Griffith Society, formed in 1992. Griffith had been the first Chief Justice of the High Court from 1903 almost until a year before his death in 1920. Earlier, he had been Chief Justice and Premier of Queensland, though not at the same time. As well, he had been a delegate to the conventions that produced the Commonwealth Constitution, much of which he drafted in 1893.

Under Griffith, the High Court initiated a narrow interpretation of Commonwealth powers. States Rights were paramount, except in wartime when his Court argued that the Federal Government should be able to do almost whatever it liked. In that emergency, Griffith became a centralist.

That flip in Griffith's judicial outlook serviced the needs of the British Empire, and so will not embarrass the tories who have taken his name as a talisman of Constitutional rectitude. Of potential embarrassment to admirers such as John Stone, however, are the arguments that Griffith published in favour of 'The Distribution of Wealth' in 1888–89. Those who still value social equality will be diverted by his laying into those he called the 'worshippers of the great god Mammon'.

Griffith began his analysis from 'the fact that there is something radically wrong with the present system, under which capital is constantly accumulating in greater masses than ever in single hands'. He dissociated himself from economists for whom 'the "Wealth of Nations" consisted in the accumulation of what is called Wealth, and not in the well-being of the individuals who compose the nations'.

Furthermore, reluctance by the possessors of productive property to discuss redistribution led Griffith to wonder whether capitalists had 'an uneasy sense that the means by which they have acquired their present possessions will, somehow, not bear scrutiny'. Might that possibility have relevance to the opponents of Mabo and Wik?

Griffith asked 'how is new or additional wealth produced?' His answer was 'by the application of labour to already existing wealth'. He pursued 'the evil, or error' of the present system by questioning what the possessors of existing wealth had contributed to its increase. Unless they also had laboured, Griffith considered their role 'passive'. All they did was to allow their 'property to be worked upon for wages'. Instead of asking why the suppliers of labour should get a larger share of the new wealth, Griffith believed that the question had to be recast as 'why should they [the workers] not have all the profits?'

Next, Griffith asked who would take the new wealth that labour produced. He observed that while the labourers get their wages as one of the costs of production, all the profits went to the processor of capital whose role had been passive.

Employers who assisted with hand or brain to the increase in wealth deserved wages for those efforts. But, Griffith noted, under the existing system of 'free competition', the owners would also take the profits towards the creation of which they had contributed so little.

Such mal-distribution must intensify, he added, unless workers formed trade unions to improve their wages. Only through such combinations could employees achieve the strength to bargain against the power of the employer.

Griffith's support for unionism began from the premise that 'a man's labour is not something outside of himself, but is part of himself'. Hence, he reasoned, the sale of labour can be civilised only 'if the seller and the purchaser are dealing on perfectly equal terms'. But 'if they are not equally free, this bargain, like any other obtained from under influence, is open to be impeached in the forum of morals and of natural justice'.

In reply to his own question about whether 'such a freedom of contract actually exists', Griffith recognised that 'it is notorious that there is not, ordinarily, any such equal freedom of contract between the employer and the employed.' To the extent that 'a measure of freedom of contract exists it has been obtained by combination on the part of labourers. This very combination is an effort of strength put forth against the other party to the bargain, who, but for the combination, (and sometimes in spite of it), would be stronger.'

Without unions, Griffith concluded, freedom of contract must be a new system of slavery. These views about individual contracts and enterprise bargaining will not please Peter Reith, as well as being too militant for Kernot's New Labor. Still less will his views endear Griffith to the anti-arbitration H.D. Nicholls Society, despite the overlap in membership.

Some of Griffith's notions and his vocabulary were those of Karl Marx, whose *Capital* he had just read, one of the few nineteenth-century Australians to have done so. Their views coincided in part because Marx had extended certain principles of classical political economy about the contribution of capitalists to the creation of wealth.

At the same time, proponents of the rights of capitalists had developed the defence that profits rewarded the owners of wealth for their 'abstinence'. In other words, by investing in an expansion of wealth, the wealth-holders had denied themselves the pleasures of living it up in the present. In return for this self-denial, they deserved to be rewarded with all the profits.

But did that logic extend to their heirs who had made no such sacrifice? One proponent of the 'abstinence' thesis, the American Nassau Senior, thought not. Hence, no right of inheritance followed from the then conventional justification for capitalists taking all the profits.

Griffith nonetheless confined his reforms to 'the distribution of wealth to be hereafter produced'. Even by 1888, he was too seasoned a politician to believe that he would get any hearing for confiscating previous accumulations, no matter how much 'natural justice' might require it.

By the early 1890s, Griffith had slipped away from all his radical insights. However, when capitalism seemed in danger of being overthrown in 1919, he again reached for unorthodox solutions to ward off proletarian resentments.

Should the spectre of Griffith as a red-ragger cause the eponymous Society to expunge his name from its masthead, to whom might its executive turn for

inspiration? Charity compels me to a caveat. The year after Griffiths' retirement, the High Court brought down the judgment that denied his doctrines about States Rights and opened the way for the continuing drift towards central power in our Federation, so loathed by Richard Court.

That case had been brought by the Amalgamated Engineering Union and was won for the union by a twenty-five-year-old Melbourne barrister. His name was Robert Gordon Menzies.

—Humphrey McQueen

For example

While Australia is still grappling with the concept of native title, in Indonesia the concept is not new. Traditional rights to land, air and water, known as *Hak Ulayat*, or the rights of traditional communities, include areas such as graveyards and spirit refuges, forests, ponds and uncleared lands adjacent to the village, commons and open fields used for recreation and social intercourse. As with traditional law developed to accommodate common practices of its community, law regarding traditional rights on land is reasonably flexible. For example, when an individual clears and cultivates an unused field, the community relinquishes the land to him. And when he later leaves the field, the community reclaims possession.

One fundamental aspect makes the traditional rights in Indonesia different from Australia's native title rights. Indonesian law is based on the Dutch colonial code of law which, right from the start, recognised the plurality of the Indonesian (then Dutch East Indies) society. The legal division of the population into three groups —the Europeans, the Foreign Orientals and the Natives—has allowed the different societies to co-exist.

This fact makes a sharp contrast with the concept of *terra nullius* adopted by the British vis-à-vis Australia when they first came to claim this land in 1788. In Indonesia, traditional rights were well recognised, first in the Dutch colonial *Agrarian Act 1870*. Then after independence, these rights were reinforced in *Basic Agrarian Law 1960*. *Agrarian Act 1870* specifies that a governor-general has no power to lease lands belonging to traditional communities, or take over lands that have been cultivated or are being used by traditional communities. It is obvious here that the Dutch Colonial authorities recognised traditional ownership of lands before their arrival.

While *Basic Agrarian Law 1960* reinforces these traditional rights, disputes concerning ownership and management of lands do occur in Indonesia. There is the question of whether a community can still be regarded as a cohesive traditional community, and whether the land in question is still actively used or cultivated. And chapter 1, section 3 of *Basic Agrarian Law* specifies that enforcement and implementation of traditional rights should not contravene the interests of the nation and state. Here, unless a traditional community has good lawyers, it is very likely to lose out to the argument that the enforcement of its rights will have a negative impact upon 'national development'.

Better still than competent lawyers is the opportunity—as well as the ability—to use political muscle, if recent events in Denpasar, Bali can be held up as a parameter.

According to Balinese Hindu cosmology, all estuaries are sacred places where religious ceremonies should be held. One such place is the beach of Padanggalak. For over a century Padanggalak, seven kilometres off Denpasar, has been used by Kesiman traditional villagers for *melasti*, part of *nyepi*, a series of major Hindu ceremonies in Bali.

In September last year, however, Padanggalak nearly followed the fate of other beaches like Mertasari or Uluwatu, where the opportunity to hold religious rites has been significantly reduced.

The continuous roars of mechanical shovels and loaders shifting rocks startled the villagers of Kesiman. They later discovered that a developer, *P.T. Graha Sanur Dinamika* (GSD) was working on reclamation of the beach, for the purpose of building a tourist hotel there.

The 17,075 hectare beach originally belonged to the state, and was available to locals for religious ceremonies, fishing and general enjoyment. After the local government claimed it as its asset, it began, in May 1991, to issue rights of development and management to the Civil Servants Coöperative and Bali Regional Companies. When the Civil Servants Coöperative measured its 8.9 hectare allotment in March 1997, it discovered that erosion had swallowed most of its land, leaving it a mere 2.9 hectares. The Coöperative then entered into a joint-venture with GSD, where the developer was to reclaim the land before commencing building. For the rights of developing and managing the project, GSD paid Rp350 million (then AUD$195,000) to the Coöperative.

GSD then obtained a virtual permit or a 'permit in principle' from the Governor of Bali, and began the land reclamation work. The developer did not deem it necessary to obtain an official permit from the local government or complete an environmental impact study before commencing work.

The local people, outraged by the way they had been ignored in the process, joined forces with their religious leaders in voicing their protests. They threatened to wage a *puputan*, a war where the warriors fight to the death. It was no empty threat: Bali has indeed recorded several formidable *puputan*s against the Dutch colonisers, in Badung, Klungkung, Tabanan, Jagaraga and Margarana.

Under the leadership of the head of Kesiman Temple, Anak Agung Ngurah Kusuma Wardana, who also happens to be a member of the Regional Legislative Assembly of Denpasar, the protesters demanded that the reclamation work be stopped, and the Padanggalak beach be restored.

In this case, the locals had one trump card. The governor, Ida Bagus Oka, was in a vulnerable position: he belongs to Kesiman village. This means that all his rites of passage have to be conducted by the Kesiman religious community and presided by Kesiman priests. Moreover, nine years ago when Ida Bagus Oka had just taken up his governorship, he actually exhorted Balinese not to sell their lands to investors. He was quoted as saying that land was the mainstay of Balinese culture, and without it the culture would disintegrate, thus gradually wiping out tourism as well. The protesters naturally reminded him of his earlier stance.

The religious community of Kesiman reportedly exerted the most powerful pressure on the governor. Unless he reversed his 'permit in principle' to GSD, he would be excommunicated. In Bali, excommunication from one's religious community carries an extremely painful penalty. No one will bless the family, no priests will carry out the ceremonies for the children's rites of passage, such as initiation into adulthood and marriage. And worst of all, no one will organise the excommunicated person's funeral. He will never make it to heaven. His after-life will be worse than hell: he'll be eternally in limbo.

By the end of October, Kesiman villagers had their prayers answered. Governor Ida Bagus Oka revoked his permit to GSD, and demanded that the beach be restored to a state suitable for religious ceremonies.

That was the story of Kesiman traditional village, where luck, it appears, played a major role in the enforcement of traditional rights. Unfortunately for some villagers elsewhere, luck has often been elusive. Where traditional rights clash with modern society's demands, these rights have time and time again been regarded as conflicting with national interests.

While traditional law specifying traditional rights is well established in Indonesia, interpreting and enforcing that law is no easy task, especially in this era of necessary geographical mobility for most traditional communities.

—Dewi Anggraeni

No Thais to Queensberry

FRIDAY NIGHT AT THE FIGHTS is a little different in Bangkok. First, there is no Festival Hall or Sydney Stadium but Lumphini, or in this case Rajeumnern, as the venue. Second, hawkers are selling the punters dried squid and strange-coloured drinks in plastic bags instead of meat pies and cornettos. But I was not about to complain, not when surrounded by 10,000 Thais lost in biffo-frenzy under the stars at the Grand Palace.

Muay Thai it's called, and it does for the sweet science what Australian Rules does for football—regulations are seemingly dispensed with and just about anything goes. You can punch, kick, wrestle, elbow, head butt, even steal your opponent's wallet if he's not looking. Of course there are rules but most of the time the referee looks like a cosmetic addition, dancing around the ring trying to avoid getting smacked. The only time he is called upon is to prise the fighters apart when they are bound-up in a clinch (clinch is too weak a word for it, it is more like a Russian bear-hugging contest after an obscene quantity of vodka has been consumed).

We arrived an hour and a half before the first bout in what was an exhibition card in honour of the King's birthday. Somewhere on one of the stages in the open area that was playing host to this annual festival, the new Prime Minister, Chuan Leekpai, was intoning earnestly to the crowd. The language might have passed us by but the tone was familiar. Those gathered around the ring squatted on the rocky ground with heads bowed, enduring easily what our foreign backs could not. As the Prime Minister was finishing, an attendant clambered up a pole in one of the corners to unfurl the Thai flag. To do so he had to balance himself precariously over the canvas some 15 feet below. He managed to clip it to the wire connecting the soup-bowl lights illuminating the ring without incident. The falls were to come later.

When the combatants for the first match were announced, the crowd came to life. The two small but wiry men warmed up by stretching and bouncing as if to some unheard music. They followed each other around to the four corners where they stopped and paid homage with a bow. Then it was over and the bell had been rung. Prancing towards each other like a couple of dancing Spanish stallions, they sized one another up for a moment before unleashing a flurry of punches and kicks that sent their sweat flying into the crowd.

What was more extraordinary than the ferocity of these pint-sized pugilists was the reaction they received. The crowd had grown to fill every available space; there were even bodies hanging from the scaffolding in the speaker stand. Each spectator marked an effective punch or kick with a low-pitched groan. This no doubt helped the judges score, who would have needed only to put a mark on their page each time they heard the booming 'ooh!' from behind them.

But the punters were not only there to watch, they were there to punt as well. A serious amount of money was passing between hands before and after each fight. The median weekly wage in Bangkok is around $A40, yet this amount and more was going on the back of one combatant or another. And this crowd was not part of the Mercedes-driving set that don't know how poor they are yet. These were the security guards, laundrywomen and street sweepers who know only too well how little they've got because they've already had their paltry wages cut. Between fights, a nasty incident erupted when a girl started screaming at a stony-faced young man for her money back.

After three fights involving Thai boxers exclusively, some foreign guests stepped up to take on the local talent. Champions of Muay Thai from France, New Zealand, Spain and Australia had been invited to give the exhibition a festival atmosphere, and it was apparent from the buzz in the crowd when the first of them entered the ring that this was what they had been waiting for.

A Frenchman with the sobriquet 'Yamani' took on Anwar the Cinderella boy from the streets of Bangkok (he is probably the son of a millionaire logging contractor but it sounds more like Rocky this way). Anwar gave away a lot in bulk to his opponent but with skill and speed he managed to match it with the bigger Frenchman. For four rounds they put on a highly acrobatic display that had the crowd boiling. Anwar had obviously surprised himself with how well he was doing because he saluted the crowd at the end of the fourth with one round one remaining. When the ref whispered 'No son, that was the bell lap', into his ear he seemed a bit deflated. Sure enough Yamani powered over the top of him to win the fifth round and the bout.

After another fight we left, as the consensus was if we stayed any longer we would be unable to get up. The entertainment was good, but four hours on my haunches next to a wizened old bastard in a bad safari suit who kept trying to dislocate my knee with every good blow had taken its toll. As we left, the crowd gave me, the only whitey in the group, a bit of a cheer. One guy latched onto me and kept yelling 'thank-you, thank-you, thank-you' as we pushed past. I didn't know why at the time but I think I found out later.

Berm, our Thai friend, who used to be a boxer himself, stayed around until 12:30 to watch the rest of the bouts. He told us that all the *farang* (foreigners) had won except the Aussie. Maybe that bloke knew the fix was in or that only an Australian would do the polite thing and lose.

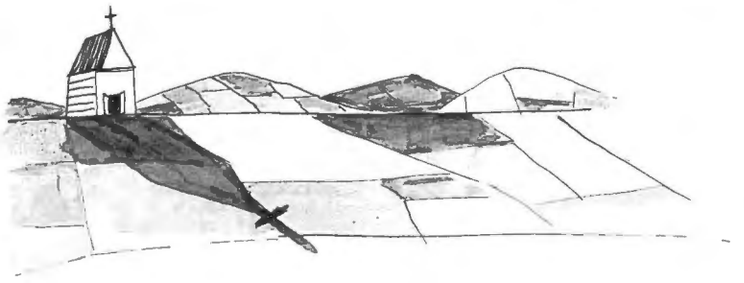
—Jon Greenaway

This month's contributors: **Terry King** is a beagle-fancier and an education officer with a major white collar trade union. **Humphrey McQueen**'s most recent book is *Suspect History: Manning Clark and the future of Australia's past*. **Dewi Anggraeni** is a freelance writer. **Jon Greenaway** is *Eureka Street*'s South East Asian correspondent.

Wik's challenge to theology

CHRISTIAN LEADERS across the mainstream Churches have spoken out against the proposed Wik legislation and in support of the Aboriginal Native Title rights to coexistence. A number of church people at the grassroots support their stand. These supporters have woken up to the history of the violent dispossession of the Aborigines.

But there is also anger and disappointment among many church people in the affected rural areas. Their families have, perhaps long ago, invested their lives and finances in their pastoral leases and now believe themselves (rightly or wrongly) to be grievously threatened. These folk complain that the Church has changed: 'We did not hear this tune before'.



In the middle, in both city and country, are the uncertain majority, their feelings mixed. Many clergy too are caught in this uncertainty. They see the opposing groups firing at and past one another from positions growing daily more entrenched.

Country people have a point when they say that the Church has changed in becoming concerned to support Aborigines as a matter of justice. Twenty-five years ago—or even less—many country people would not have heard this church support for Aborigines. How do we explain it? It is, in part, a development of theology.

To this, rural folk could reply: 'Well, should not theology be more fair to us?' The question is important, because for Christians, theology does and should come into the Wik case.

How then has the Church's concern for the cause of the Aborigines been influenced by theology?

Theology is still seen by many people as a dry, esoteric system focused on otherworldly realities, and in the scholastic mode inherited from the Middle Ages it was often very abstract. Since World War II however, theology has increasingly shucked off the abstractness of the systematic. Its failure in the face of the world-wide disasters of the 1930s and 1940s shook theologians into seeking a more adequate method.

In Catholic circles the new approaches gave vitality to Pope John's Vatican II: this Council in turn gave new energies for the continuing revitalisation of theology.

This theology has been opening itself increasingly to the social and cultural realities of the historical situation, notably in liberation theology, which begins from an examination of the social and economic situation. It asks: Who is suffering? Who is being discriminated against? Who is benefiting? How do the powerful keep the powerless under their control?

Liberation theology seeks to awaken the mass of the people who are poor, to read the scriptures in the light of their oppression. In the scriptures they meet a God who hears the cries of the poor, a Jesus who cares most for the marginalised and the despised. Christ's words ring out in judgment: 'I was in prison and you did not visit me. I was naked and you did not clothe me.'

Liberation theology spread to places like the Philippines, South Africa and to Aboriginal Australia. The great Aboriginal pastor, the Reverend Charles Harris, centred his vision on Jesus as the Liberator for Aboriginal people.

Pope John Paul II, while critical of some aspects of this theology, has taken up its key themes, and in his visits around the world has reached out to the poor. His 1986 address to the Aborigines at Alice Springs supported their call for land rights and encouraged their recovery of their spiritual culture.

The criticism of liberation theology is that it is sometimes weak on dispassionate investigation of the socio-economic situation and on scholarly study of the Christian Scriptures and tradition. But with the mass of the people in Latin American countries and the Third World living in oppressive conditions and under unjust social systems, a frontier theology such as liberation theology was needed. In places like Europe, North America and Australia the situation of the mass of the population is different and theology there seeks to retain its more scholarly and empirical self. But liberation theology has had an impact on the Australian church, requiring it to consider the condition of the Aboriginal people in the light of justice. That partly explains why country folk are finding that Church leaders speak out as they did once not. In those former days, the attitude to the Aborigines was more one of charity for their needs rather than justice for their rights—a big shift.

Should there not be a theology that is fairer to all parties in conflict?

The situation in Australia is morally complex: on the one hand, Aborigines have been oppressed over generations in the manner perceived by a liberation theology. There is little doubt historically about the violence practised by the colonists, the summary 'justice' and massacres, the shifting of people from their homelands, the dumping of them in other areas. Later came the 'protectors' of Aborigines' movements, the pathetic education systems and the introjection of racial inferiority.

BUT MANY RURAL PEOPLE do not see themselves (rightly or wrongly) as having had a hand in this injustice. If there was a blindness and a covering-up of the treatment of Aborigines, they feel that city people, too, connived at this.

How can theology mediate in this situation of opposing views? Theology does not presume to solve the details but it would seek to offer an *authentic horizon of conversion,* whereby those with opposing views might come first to a dialogue and then, one hopes, to a reconciliation.

When Dietrich Bonhoeffer, living under the Third Reich, saw anti-semitism among the German people being fanned and exploited by the Nazis, he spoke up: Jesus was a Jew and loved his own people. This simple pointer illuminated a whole horizon for Christians. It not only helped subvert the Nazis' campaign but it made many Christians aware of their own anti-semitism, and it underlined the Churches' long complicity in this. It provided the spur for Christians to be converted from their bias or their fear.

Again, Pope John Paul's declaration in Canada 1984: 'Jesus in his members is a Native Indian'. This statement points the way—Native Indian and Euro-Canadian Christians could embrace one another in brotherhood and sisterhood. It recognised the equality of Native Indians in their human and spiritual dignity, thus cutting across colonialist redneck ideology.

The Pope could have said in Australia 'Jesus is an Aborigine'. The same opportunity would be constituted here: a brotherhood and sisterhood under God, regardless of race, power, history; a willingness to 'pass over' to the side of the other with sympathy and then to come back to reconsider one's own positions.

We might find it in ourselves to discuss in peace the issues that follow from this fellowship upon the earth. A Christian understanding of stewardship of the land puts property ownership into a perspective. It resists the capitalist extreme that is intent upon exploiting the land merely to gain wealth without concern for ecology or social cohesion.

Such a dialogue between people who have respect for one another's dignity would surely consider that there be equitable access to the land.

Is all this unreal? It depends upon conversion to the reality of human brotherhood and sisterhood under God. And in this conversion lies the chance of true dialogue. ■

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SUMMA theologiae

Relationships

JIM LYONS WAS A FATHER OF THE JOINT THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY which provides the raw material for this column. He was an enthusiast for libraries, once accused of harbouring a secret ambition to catalogue every word that had ever been spoken on earth.

Whatever of that, Jim was certainly convinced that all things, even the most unlikely, are interrelated. So are theologians, although for the most part they confine their attention to more likely things. And so to this month's column.

An article on modernity and the construction of Roman Catholicism caught my eye in the Italian journal, *Cristianesimo nella storia* (June 1997). In it Joseph Komonchak, one of the best historians of the Second Vatican Council, surveys the relationships between church and council. He dismisses the views that the Council was a necessary and total revolution, that it was a betrayal and that it was a good idea subsequently perverted. He argues that the shape of the Church that preceded the Council was moulded by the nineteenth century.

The church was set in resolute opposition to modernity, an opposition which was expressed in its devotional life, in its centralisation around a pope whose personality and role were both held in high honour, and in a rigorous control over writing and opinion within the church.

The church was resolutely opposed to the nineteenth century emphasis on individual liberty and the emancipation of societies from tradition and church tutelage. But the ways in which it responded to this new world were very similar to the response of the contemporary sovereign states.

The Vatican Council affected the church more radically than those who participated in it could have imagined, because its three main emphases undermined the pillars of the peculiarly nineteenth century church. Reform of the liturgy and church practice eroded the assumption that patterns of church had a timeless authority. The opening to the modern world undermined the unyielding opposition to modernity. Encouragement of local churches to express their life in ways appropriate to their culture called into question centralisation of power and uniformity of practice central to the nineteenth century settlement.

The last twenty years have shown that, despite all the best efforts, genies cannot be put back into bottles. But once let out, they are not easy to befriend, either.

This discussion of the church may seem a long way away from Paul Molnar's article on God's self-communication in Christ in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* (August, 1997). In it he compares the ideas of the Protestant Thomas Torrance and the Catholic Karl Rahner. The point at issue is how we know God. Torrance emphasises God's freedom to speak to us or not, and so our total dependence on God's word. Since God has spoken to us in Jesus Christ, we can only find God in the world when we know Jesus Christ. Rahner, on the other hand, argues that all speakers, including God, depend on a hearer prepared to hear what they have to say. When God addresses us in Christ, we have already been formed by long experience of the world, in which we have unknowingly been engaged in a dialogue with God. We recognise in Jesus Christ the God whom we have already known implicitly. The differences between Rahner and Torrance illuminate the contemporary debate about the church. The Catholic counterparts of Torrance emphasise the authority of God's Word, its unique embodiment in Jesus Christ, and its authoritative interpretation by the hierarchy. Where a society is not Catholic, they are likely to see it as hostile to faith.

Those who emphasise the importance of experience in faith will see faith as a simultaneous dialogue with the world and with Christ. In interpreting the faith, we are all teachers and listeners. God is always waiting to be met in the world.

The differences about church, then, may be deeply rooted in differences about God. If all things are ultimately interrelated, some relationships will inevitably be conflictual. ■

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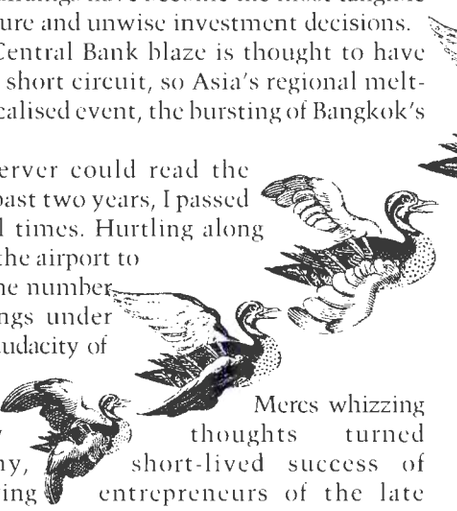
Flying Duck Logic

***Peter Mares** scrutinises the Asian currency crisis and the IMF's remedy.*

WHEN THE TOP FLOORS of Indonesia's Central Bank Building burst into flames in early December, it was a fitting and tragic metaphor for Asia's economic woes. Around the region, central banks had been forced to look on helplessly as their national currencies went up, or rather down, in smoke.

The brand new twenty-five storey tower—one of a pair overlooking Jakarta's central business district—was surely meant as a symbol of Indonesia's growing economic maturity and confidence, another gleaming monument to 'the Asian miracle'. Instead, high-rise office buildings have become the most tangible evidence of economic failure and unwise investment decisions.

Just as the Jakarta Central Bank blaze is thought to have spread from an electrical short circuit, so Asia's regional meltdown was sparked by a localised event, the bursting of Bangkok's property market bubble.



Even a novice observer could read the warning signs. Over the past two years, I passed through Bangkok several times. Hurtling along the expressway between the airport to the city, I marvelled at the number of new high-rise buildings under construction and at the audacity of their architects. But as I lost count of the BMWs and Mercs whizzing past in the traffic, my thoughts turned inevitably to the flashy, short-lived success of Australia's own high-flying entrepreneurs of the late 1980s. Pride before the fall.

Despite repeated warnings about the fundamental problems besetting particular Asian economies, few could have predicted how quickly and how widely the contagion would spread. Wave after wave of Southeast Asian currency devaluations rippled around the world. Stockmarkets as far away as Hungary and Brazil tumbled as nervous investors pulled their money out of so-called 'emerging markets' to seek the relative safety of the established economies.

One of the seers of contemporary capitalism describes it as 'the defining event of the post Cold War economic era'. David Hale, global chief economist for the Zurich Kemper Investment Group, and a favourite 'dial-a-quote' target of business reporters, says the crisis raises 'provocative and profound questions about the whole character of the [global] financial system at the end of the twentieth century'.

He points out that highly efficient computer systems and falling communications costs have dramatically increased the speed of capital movements leading to 'great speculative excesses' as billions of dollars surge around the world.

Hale now asks whether financial markets have become 'too efficient', permitting money 'to move so quickly on such a large scale that they do create the risk of instability'.

'If we are going to have a global financial market in which emerging markets can obtain access to tens of billions of dollars of capital, then there will have to be simultaneously a development of far better systems of regulation and supervision.'

If Malaysia's Dr Mahathir had not muddied his message with anti-semitic demagoguery, then perhaps his own warnings about the dangers of unbridled speculation may have found more resonance in business circles. Mahathir's calls for greater international financial regulation were echoed by the very man he most liked to attack. In an article published by the *Australian Financial Review*, billionaire financier George Soros gave his own critique of market rationality: 'The private sector is ill-suited to allocate international credit. It provides either too little or too much ... Its goals are to maximise profit and minimise risk. This makes it move in a herd-like fashion in both directions.'

Unfortunately, the spectacular bursting of capital bubbles did not only exist as electrical impulses flashing on banks of computer screens in the trading rooms of financial houses. When creditors rushed 'herd-like' to withdraw their money, work on the high-rise buildings ground to a halt. In and around Jakarta an estimated two-and-a-half million workers had lost their jobs by the beginning of January, many from construction sites. Those laid off will no longer have spare rupiah to buy a bowl of soup from street-traders after work and so the deflationary effects of the crisis will spiral down, reducing demand throughout the economy.

IMF rescue packages designed to stabilise the financial system will only worsen these social consequences. The fiscal rectitude imposed on Asian governments will cut public spending, keep wages down and further slow growth.

This will create some new opportunities for capital. Health Care Australia, an arm of the Mayne Nickless group, is looking at expanding its investment in private hospitals in Indonesia and other Asian countries, confident that affluent sections of the middle class can still afford to finance their own health care. The collapse in asset values and currencies will make it cheaper to buy up existing hospitals while the economic crisis

has 'restricted the capacity of Asian governments to fund public hospital development' (*Australian Financial Review*, January 5, 1998).

This does not augur well for the displaced building worker or the soup vendor who has lost all her customers. The flip side of HCA's business opportunity is a growing gap between rich and poor with explosive social consequences that can still only be guessed at.

It is worth remembering what gave rise to the post-war era of Keynesian economic policies. As historian Eric Hobsbawm reminds us in *Age of Extremes*, interventionist economic policies were seen as a vital safeguard against political extremism. Fascism had just been defeated; communism still threatened. Each was seen as a by-product of economic collapse and there was a widespread conviction that the Great Depression of the thirties must never be repeated: 'In short, for a variety of reasons the politicians, officials and even many of the businessmen of the post-war West were convinced that a return to laissez-faire and the unreconstructed free market were out of the question. Certain policy objectives—full employment, the containment of communism, the modernisation of lagging or declining or ruined economies—had absolute priority and justified the strongest government presence'.

IMF rescue packages designed to stabilise the financial system will only worsen these social consequences. The fiscal rectitude imposed on Asian governments will cut public spending, keep wages down and further slow growth.

Analysts are still debating whether Asia's economic afflictions will deteriorate into global depression, but so far the recommended remedies are remarkable only for their lack of imagination.

The cure for Asia is to trade its way out of trouble through more export-led industrialisation. An orthodox Hong Kong economist once described the Asian miracle to me using the analogy of flying ducks. Japan is the lead duck, winging its way from old fashioned heavy industry to a more high-tech future. South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong follow in the first row of the formation, and fanning out behind them come Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Having passed through an era of low-wage manufacturing, these countries are establishing themselves as producers of computers, electronic goods and automobiles or as centres for financial trade and services. The final row of ducks is made up of striving economies like Indonesia, China, The Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, where toiling workers busily produce cheap textiles and footwear for the international market.

THE IMAGERY OF FLYING DUCKS IS APPEALING, suggesting a relentless movement towards a place in the sun. But if each new member of the flock is trying to sell the same products to the same buyers, then the system has a built-in fault. As former US trade negotiator Clyde Prestowitz told ABC Radio: 'When everybody is pursuing the same kind of export-led growth there's just not enough markets to absorb all the capacity.'

In the post-war era, the ducks all headed for the USA where consumers obligingly charged up their credit cards and bought. Little has changed. Concerted attempts to convince Japan that it should help soak up Asian exports by releasing pent-up demand (that is, encouraging people to spend more) have so far failed. The Japanese are reluctant to abandon so quickly the high savings habits that have served them so well in the past.

'The US right now is the only buyer in the world,' says Prestowitz. 'We are the market of last resort. Without the US market right now the system would collapse.'

How many sports-shoes and T-shirts can North Americans wear? How many cars can they drive? How many TVs and VCRs can they watch? According to John Welch, chairman of General Electric Company, 'there is excess global capacity in almost every industry'.

The current crisis will make Asia's hyper-exporters even more competitive. High unemployment will help keep wages down and labour docile, while depreciated currencies make their manufactured exports cheaper. A fresh flood of cheap imports will bring further 'hollowing out' of traditional manufacturing in the USA (and of course Australia), as local industries either close down or relocate offshore. It will bring a return to ballooning US trade deficits as Asian nations sell to the USA but import little in return. Remember the tool-kit rhetoric of the late 1980s? Washington's trade negotiators used to talk of prying open the Japanese market with a crowbar and politicians liked to smash the odd Japanese-made radio with a sledgehammer. We can expect more of the same, except this time Japanese imports won't be the only target. In the US, flying duck logic is headed for a political brick wall.

A successful surge in exports from Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and South Korea will also put pressure on China to devalue its currency so as not to lose its share of sales. One analysis sees the roots of current problems in the 30 per cent devaluation of China's currency in 1994, a move that undercut rival exporters. So if China devalues again, that will renew pressure on other Asian currencies and the whole downward spiral will take another turn.

Underlying Asia's economic problems is a crisis of over-production—or under-consumption. Hobsbawm says that capitalism's Golden Age (from 1945 to 1972) was based on 'enormously increased demand' and high levels of government intervention in the economy: 'At the same time the political commitment of governments to full employment and—to a lesser extent—to the lessening of economic inequality, i.e. a commitment to welfare and social security, for the first time provided a mass consumer market for luxury goods which could now become accepted as necessities.'

In other words, according to Hobsbawm, 'the Golden Age democratised the market'.

This is not to suggest that post-war Keynesian theory offers a simple solution to our current woes. But if a way could be found to 'democratise the market' for Jakarta's displaced building workers and customer-less soup sellers, then perhaps the system could be stabilised more quickly, and remain stable for longer, not just economically, but politically as well. ■

Peter Mares is a broadcaster with Radio Australia and former ABC correspondent in Hanoi.

THE NATION

FRANK STILWELL

Hire education

The West Committee's interim report on universities is in tune with the economic mood of the Government, but how adequate is it as a blueprint for the future of tertiary education in Australia?

THERE IS A PERMANENT POLITICAL TENSION between conservatism and liberalism. Over the years and in different places the labels have varied—Tory and Whig, wet and dry, moderate and radical right. In recent years the traditional conservatives have been on the defensive. The ascendancy of neo-liberalism, with its audacious advocacy of the market mechanism as the panacea for social problems, has been the dominant political force for change. Now it is higher education's turn for the treatment.

The irony is that this neo-liberal push is coming from a committee chaired by a former schoolmaster generally thought to be of conservative inclination.

The West Committee was set up by the Howard government in January 1997 to:

- undertake a broad ranging review of the state of Australia's higher education sector;
- develop a comprehensive policy framework to ensure the sector meets the needs of students, industry and society in general; and
- identify options for the financing of higher education teaching and research.

The final report is due in March 1998 but the 'discussion paper' issued by the Committee in November 1997 gives a clear indication of its thinking on these issues.

Elements of traditional values are evident. The Committee chair's personal preface speaks eloquently of the need for an educational environment 'that will produce women and men who are fully, lovingly and confidently human'. The higher educational system 'has served the nation well', it is stated, but ... 'change is unavoidable and urgent'. So on with the neo-liberal agenda. 'There is a need for further freeing up of the higher education sector, with less reliance on centralised administrative planning', the report claims, so 'deregulation strategies must prepare the existing institutions for a more competitive environment'. The rhetoric is familiar. It echoes previous moves to deregulate financial institutions, eliminate tariff barriers and promote competition in Australian industries.

Essentially the West Committee report embodies three assumptions:

- universities cannot go on as they are: their funding arrangements have to fundamentally change;
- tertiary education is in the process of becoming available to all, rather than restricted to those demonstrating high academic standards; and
- educational funding should become student-centred rather than institution-centred.

It is a chain of reasoning which leads towards the advocacy of a system whereby each student has a 'learning account' for her/his entitlement to public financial support for higher education. This is a voucher system by another name. The financial viability of educational institutions would become yet more dependant, like any other businesses, on their capacity to attract customers. They could be expected to compete more vigorously in terms of the prices of their courses and in terms of product differentiation.

The assumption that some fundamental change to existing funding arrangements is needed contains an element of circularity. The very first line of the West report states that 'the policy framework that has regulated the development of

Australia's higher education system over the past decade is under stress'. Indeed it is, but the main source of stress is the cuts in government funding to the universities. Projected government funding of tertiary education will taper off to a level in 2000–1 which is 18 per cent lower than it was in 1996–7. Student–staff ratios have risen from an average of 11.2 to 1 in 1981 to an average of 18.2 to 1 in 1995. Therein lies the principal source of stress—the continuous pressure of 'doing more with less'.

Of course, it may be argued that funding cuts are a necessary response to the seemingly permanent fiscal crisis of the Australian state—that education must bear its share of the burden of fiscal restraint in order that the national government can 'balance the books'. Setting aside the question of whether tertiary education is bearing more than its proportionate share of the cuts (it is), this is in any case questionable economics. It ignores the important role which education plays in generating national income in the longer term through fostering skills and innovation. The 'balanced budget fetishism' of the bookkeepers triumphs over a more creative view of the role of economic and social policy.

The crisis to which the West Committee is responding is thus a partly manufactured crisis. This is not to deny that other changes are affecting tertiary education, including changes in information technology and growing competition in the international market place, but the perceived need for change in institutional *funding* originates from Canberra.

IT IS AT THIS POINT that the demand for University places enters the story. Certainly, existing funding arrangements would become subject to more stress as the proportion of people getting tertiary education continues to rise. As the West report reminds us, only 32,000 students were enrolled at Australian universities in 1949: now it is almost 660,000. In certain respects the trend towards the universalisation of tertiary education is welcome. If tertiary education is effective in 'civilising society' (to quote from one of the consultants' studies appended to the West report), the more the merrier. Incidentally, that same consultancy report notes, with refreshing frankness, that another role for tertiary education is 'reducing youth labour supply' (Appendix 11, page 39). This means keeping the unemployment statistics from looking too outrageous.

To the extent that investment in education is ultimately wealth-creating then the broadening of access has an admirable economic logic. Universal entitlement has obvious appeal from an equity perspective too, to the extent that it overcomes the traditional socio-economic bias of entry to University education. However, the story must necessarily be more complicated than this in practice. What is the appropriate form of tertiary education when it becomes a universal entitlement? The range of student abilities will presumably become yet wider. The capacity to undertake University vis à vis TAFE courses becomes a key issue. The West report makes much of the need to make the University–TAFE connection 'seamless', but what this means in practice has been a moot point ever since the Carmichael Report initiated discussion on how to gear the education system more directly to the economic needs of 'the clever country'.

A hierarchy of educational institutions will continue to exist, and indeed may become more sharply differentiated in practice as there is growing specialisation. One reading of the situation is that the West proposals would take tertiary education back to the pre-Dawkins era, with an even sharper distinction between the élite institutions and the rest. In this respect, at least, the neo-liberal prescriptions and a more traditional conservative view of education converge.

The student-centred funding process would certainly accentuate that process of differentiation. There is much to be said about the pros and cons of funding students rather than institutions. Certainly, there are evident attractions in giving students greater choice in how they allocate their funding entitlements, especially if that enhances their personal commitment to that which they have chosen. However, the general assumption that students can be regarded as *consumers*—and that the educational sector is an *industry*—has more far reaching implications. It is likely to result in the sector taking on more and more the general characteristics of consumer capitalism.

The very first line of the West report states that 'the policy framework that has regulated the development of Australia's higher education system over the past decade is under stress'. Indeed it is, but the main source of stress is the cuts in government funding to the universities.

Year 12 students David Marshall, Heather Benbow and Rebecca Adler (left to right, behind) with tutors Johanna Steegstra and Brendan Gladman (left to right, in front). Above left: Jackie Waring (Forestry). Photographs by Bill Thomas.

New 'products' will come on the market and sometimes disappear just as quickly. Cut-price suppliers will seek different market niches from those providing established brands. Problems of quality control and consumer protection will abound. Instant sales appeal will be emphasised (courses in tourism and 'hospitality services' will surely proliferate) at the expense of courses involving a more rigorous engagement with philosophical and scientific issues. An instrumental view of education dominates over a humanist perspective. Glitz replaces guts.

The industrial relations aspects of the proposed funding changes also warrant attention. Deregulation can be expected to accentuate the inherent tendencies in a capitalist market economy towards persistent capital-labour conflicts. As universities compete for the student dollar there will be stronger pressures to increase the intensity of employees' work and to reduce wage payments, mirroring the general tendencies so apparent in the 'globalising' capitalist economy today. The remnants of the collegial character of university life would be swept aside by these market relationships. It is not an attractive prospect. The West report sets processes in motion which would lead in that direction but it is irresponsible in remaining silent on these industrial relations and workplace issues.

The lack of any detailed consideration of the financial implications of the proposals is also quite striking. One back-of-the-envelope calculation in the report, presented 'for the purpose of illustration', suggests that it would be possible to provide 'access to post secondary education for nearly four and a half years of full time study if the average value of a tuition grant were $5800 per full time equivalent year of study' (p.30). Yet, one of the consultants' reports appended to the study notes that, 'in 1997 the single block grant to institutions to fund teaching and related research amounted to around $1200 per student' (appendix 13, page 24). Is the West Committee expecting that the cost of providing courses would be halved? That would mean doubling student-staff ratios (augmented perhaps by greater use of information technology) or doubling staff teaching loads. There is a strong hint that the latter is in the offing: 'staff should be free to specialise in teaching' (p.38) is the euphemism.

It is not difficult to anticipate that this heralds a general change in the nature of a University lecturer's job. The majority of staff would be employed as full-time teachers and would only be able to undertake significant research if they buy themselves (wholly or partly) out of teaching when they get external funding for research projects. The incentive for academic inquiry and career progression would still favour research, so a growing share of the teaching in practice would be done by casuals and part-timers operating in a secondary academic labour market. Thus, despite all the West Committee's rhetoric about the need to put more emphasis on good quality teaching, here is a model which increases the pressure on staff time, severs the necessary connection between teaching and research and leads to increased contracting-out of courses.

Simone Clarke (Arts/Modern Languages). Photograph by Bill Thomas.

The West Committee report is quite slim in size and substance. It is a mere 46 pages, appearing in a volume whose massive overall bulk is the result of the consultants' reports. One of those, running to more than 100 pages, is by a multinational investment bank, Global Alliance Limited, and is replete with corporate managerial jargon. The corporate authors state that 'our approach is unashamedly commercial', just in case the following references to consumer sovereignty, private for profit higher education, new business strategies and future scenario generation don't make that obvious enough.

ANOTHER ECONOMIC consultant's contribution to the report begins by declaring that it is 'not an academic exercise aimed at designing an optimal system from first principles but is instead an attempt to come to terms with what might be propitious policy developments given obvious politically defined boundaries' (appendix 13, page 1). In other words, the West committee's political conclusions are taken as already given. According to the same consultant, it 'would do a disservice to the West Review by not according appropriate and realistic weight to those continuing forces moving higher education towards further differentiation and away from broadly-based rules of operation and funding'. One may infer that the committee thought similarly about the need to respond within the perceived parameters of Vanstone, Kemp and Howard. With the sole exception of the opposition to up-front fees, its recommendations are thoroughly in tune with the political predispositions of those paying the piper to play the tune. Ironically though, it seems that the committee may have eventually got it wrong, given Minister Kemp's subsequent statement opposing educational vouchers. That leaves the situation open for further manœuvring. Indeed, without some significant

shift of position, it is hard to see how the different currents of conservative and neo-liberal policy preferences can be synthesised.

The main alternative—apparently unthinkable to the political right—is to fund the universities to do their job properly and to foster the professionalism and staff commitment on which the quality of the process depends. That emphasis on the restoration of the role of the public sector needs to be linked to tax reform, and to a reconsideration of broad sectoral expenditure share (military spending is over $10 billion and rising, whereas tertiary education is approximately $4 billion and falling). Ultimately it is a question of collective social priorities.

Higher education used to be 'a prize to be won' by demonstrated capacity for academic excellence in secondary school studies. According to the West Committee projections, it is on the way to being 'a universal right' as tertiary education comes to be available to a higher proportion of people moving on from secondary schools—but a right of access to precisely *what* remains unclear. Simultaneously, the West Committee argues, in effect, that higher education should be 'a product to be purchased'. So rights must be bought. Of course, markets do have a valuable role in the economy and society: they provide opportunities for consumers to express their preferences between hamburgers and ice-cream, for example. But education is not like hamburgers and ice-cream. We make it more like them at our peril. How establishing a free market in education would 'produce women and men who are fully, lovingly and confidently human' also remains anyone's guess.

The British novelist Frank Parkin wrote a book called *The Mind and Body Shop* over a decade ago. It described the amalgamation of a university's philosophy department, which was facing fiscal stress, with the local brothel. The mind-body problem thereby found an institutional resolution of sorts in a grotesquely pecuniary environment. In a deregulated system everything is possible.

Not for the first time it seems that the fantastic fiction of yesteryear may be becoming today's reality—unless we mobilise to make it otherwise. ■

Frank Stilwell is Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Sydney.

No fire without smoke

SUMMER IN THE ANTIPODES is the time of Good News, a tradition Archimedes wishes to uphold. But after Australia's recent asinine antics at the Kyoto Greenhouse conference, it might seem strange that this tale of merit is about energy, and even more curious that it is about coal, which has gained a heinous, though unjustified, reputation as a nasty polluter.

In the last Budget, the Federal Government closed its agency for channelling money into energy research (the Energy Research and Development Corporation). So it might come as a surprise to learn that Australia has over a quarter of a billion dollars pledged towards energy research, much coming from Australian industry. In terms of gross domestic product, this is an enormous amount, even when compared with the US, Europe and Japan.

In the past five years, six Australian research institutions have been established solely to investigate energy-related matters. Three of these are coöperative research centres (CRCs), one for new technologies for power generation from low-rank (brown) coal, one for black coal utilisation and one for renewable energy. What's more, their existence is justifiable, not only for the public good, but from an economic standpoint. Even if renewable energy technologies were developed and deployed at the fastest practical rate, most experts suggest they could account for no more than about one fifth of our energy needs well into the next century. Like it or not, we are going to be dependent on fossil fuels—and specifically coal—for many years to come.

Victoria and South Australia are sitting on brown coal reserves of about 60,000 million tonnes, enough to keep us going for 1000 years at the present consumption rate. More importantly, substantial deposits of low-rank coal exist in many of the most populous developing countries, such as China, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Turkey (as well as in the United States and Germany). For these developing nations, coal reserves represent the only logical way of powering expanding economies and raising the standard of living—unless they choose to go nuclear.

Using present technology, burning this coal represents a greenhouse emission nightmare. But there is a way to alleviate the situation—burn the coal cleaner. And that is exactly what Australia's coal researchers are working hard to achieve. The CRC for New Technologies for Power Generation for Low-Rank Coal, for instance, is developing and testing a series of advanced technologies with the potential for reducing greenhouse emissions from brown coal by more than 30 per cent. At the same time, they will increase the energy output efficiency from brown coal from about 29 per cent to about 44 per cent.

'Such technologies will provide substantial business opportunities for Australia in Asia,' says the CRC's executive director, Dr David Brockway. He also points out that Victorian brown coal, for instance, contains much lower levels of pollutants—such as sulphur (responsible for acid rain), nitrogen (a component of smog), heavy metals and trace elements—than black coal.

Australia also produces some of the world's most efficient and practical solar cells, and has expertise in deploying them. Pacific Solar Ltd in Sydney is a world leader in photovoltaic cell technology. And a Victorian company, Ceramic Fuel Cells Ltd, is developing a remarkably efficient fuel cell using a ceramic based on zircon. Both these technologies have the potential to reduce greenhouse emissions significantly, as well as providing nice little earners for the Australian economy.

The 'victory' at Kyoto about which the Australian Government is crowing seems to be akin to cheating in exams. In the end, exam cheats cheat only themselves, because they have not acquired knowledge they may need later in life. In the end, the concessions won by Australia at Kyoto will put our industry under no pressure to become as energy-efficient as its foreign competitors. The government has increased the likelihood that Australian industry will stay so wedded to the wasteful use of fossil fuels, that it will go the way of the dinosaurs when competition really gets tough.

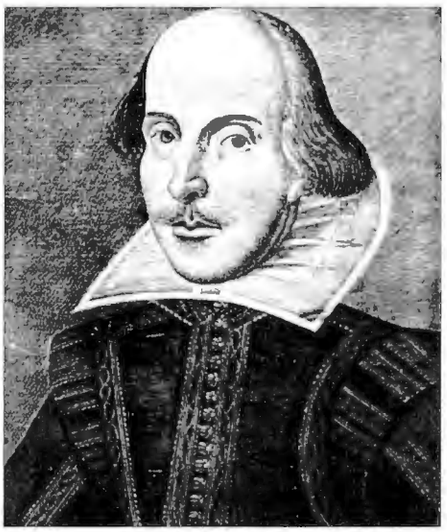
Given the opportunities our researchers are providing for us to sell energy efficient technology to the rest of the world, it all seems so short-sighted. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance scientific writer.

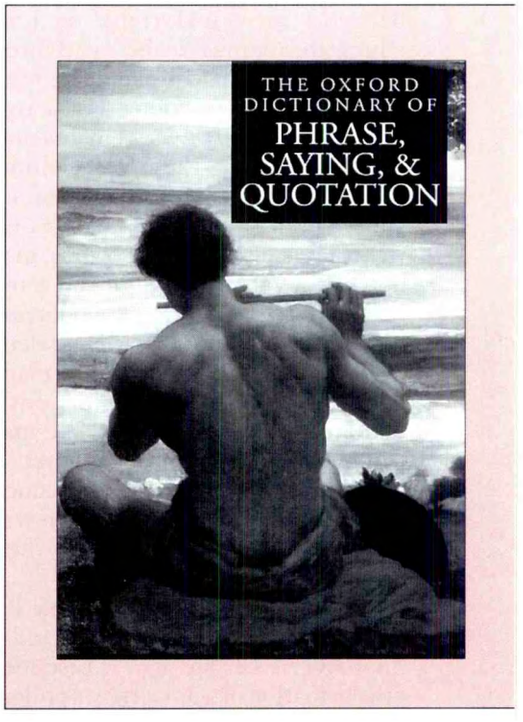
THE MOST ANNOYIN

difficult ; infuriating

pompous



1. In 1956, where were the Olympic equestrian events held?
2. What is the name of the sharp boundary between the earth's crust and its mantle?
3. Who was executed on 10 Thermidor 1794?
4. For which dancer did Diaghilev choreograph Debussy's *Prelude à l'après-midi d'un faune*?
5. What was the title of Pierre de Fredi, and for what is he famous?
6. Name the author of these lines:
   Nay; torture not the torturer—let him lie:
   What need of racks to teach a worm to writhe?
7. Who is the President of Switzerland?
8. What is the unit of currency in Lithuania?
9. What two rivers create the largest delta in the world?
10. Name: a) the director of the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research; b) the outgoing chairman of Rio Tinto, the new company formed by the recent merger of RTZ and CRA; c) the director of the Australia Institute.
11. Which modern composer taught courses in experimental music and mushroom identification (separately!) in New York in the late '50s?
12. What was built by Noah's descendants on the plain of Shinar?
13. Which king of Italy was responsible for the dismissal of Mussolini in 1943?



14. Name the author of the 2nd century Roman satire *The Golden Ass.*
15. In 1982, the Queensland Government discontinued the maintenance of a world-famous construction. What is it?
16. What was Baroness Falkender's job before being given a life peerage in 1974?
17. Who wrote *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*?
18. What is an erythrocyte?
19. Which three movies have won the five main Oscar categories of Best Film, Director, Actor, Actress and Screenplay?
20. In which country does the world's largest Islamic minority live?
21. What do Duke Ellington and a famous American politician share?
22. What is the lightest weight category in the World Boxing Council's (WBC's) system?
23. How many Australians have taken out Wimbledon singles titles since the end of World War II? Names, in chronological order, please!
24. To which Roman Emperor did the author of Revelations refer when he used the number 666?
25. Name the three main rivers of the Riverina.
26. Among the famous Mitford sisters were a) a novelist; b) a duchess; c) a Nazi sympathiser; d) a left-wing journalist. Name them.
27. What is *Myosotis sylvatica* better known as?
28. What are the Four Freedoms as defined by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941?

THE MOST ANNOYIN

G SUMMER QUIZ YET

29. In 1920, a Vietnamese kitchen worker at the London Ritz was deeply affected by the death, through hunger strike, of Sinn Fein member Terence MacSwiney. Who was he?
30. By what name was Greta Lovisa Gustafsson better known?
31. Who was the teacher of St Paul?
32. Name the composer of the four *Sun Music* pieces.
33. Where do we find these lines:

    The weariest and most loathèd worldly life
    That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
    Can lay on nature is a paradise
    To what we fear of death. ?
34. Whose first novel, *Williwaw*, was published in 1946?
35. Name three famous composers who taught at girls' schools.
36. Name the President of Singapore.
37. (i) Where are the Ashmore and Cartier Islands and (ii) to which country do they belong?
38. Which Australian periodical has the highest circulation per issue?
39. Upon which flamboyant Edwardian dandy was P.G. Wodehouse's character Psmith based?

40. What is the largest passenger vessel ever built?
41. What do the ancient Irish mother goddesses The Brigits have in common with the legend of St Patrick?
42. Give the Roman names for these Greek deities: (i) Ares (ii) Nike (iii) Persephone (iv) Hestia.
43. Name the authors of the following series of books: (i) The Whiteoak saga; (ii) the Discworld series; (iii) the Earth's Children quadrilogy; (iv) the 'Anne' books; (v) the Poldark series; (vi) the Narnia series.
44. Which leading golf player walked into a plane's propeller and subsequently became a sports commentator?
45. Which annual boat race was cancelled last year because of wet weather?

OK. Stop your whingeing about how difficult this quiz is. Here is a wonderful opportunity to broaden the mind with a spot of eclectic research while there's nothing worth watching on the box. And focus on the prize: we have two copies, courtesy Oxford University Press, of the splendid new *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying and Quotation* to be won by the authors of the two most correct entries. Send them in when you've found as many answers as you can—some of you clever-clogs may even get them all, who knows?

Post your (legible, please) answers to reach us by 28 February at *Eureka Street* Summer Quiz, PO Box 553 Richmond VIC 3121. The answers will be published in the March issue.

daft

Supercilious

Perverse

trivial

Absurd

fatuous

Rubbish

G SUMMER QUIZ YET

Opening Panguna's Box

*Veteran PNG commentator **James Griffin** has been reading the recently released Cabinet documents detailing Australia's involvement in Bougainville, and asks, when will we ever learn?*

WITH ADVANCING YEARS one of my more gratifying New Year revels is in the annual release, under the 30-year rule, of 1960s Cabinet papers from the Australian Archives (AA). Not that they necessarily tell us what we did not know, but the insights they provide into the deliberations, deceits and even dupery of policy-making can inspire a healthy scepticism about the capacities of our rulers and—to be fair to them—the constraints within which they operate. For example, who can now fail to be amazed that Menzies, Hasluck, Holt and Fraser (to name a few) really did believe that, when they sped glum conscripts to death and despair in Vietnam, they were stopping the downward (the direction is sexually luminous) thrust of Red China towards Australia, although China and Vietnam had been mutually hostile for centuries?

Among the year's topical disclosures are papers relating to the start-up of the Panguna Copper mine in Bougainville, which is generally regarded as the cause of its nine-year civil war. The rebels and their propagandists have made a meal of this. The Sydney-based Bougainville Freedom Movement's manifesto charges that Australia has been engaged in this 'secret genocidal war, using our taxes' so that the mine can be reopened. If so, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer's recent statement that the Howard government and 'the mining industry'—presumably Rio Tinto Ltd which has absorbed Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia (CRA) and its subsidiary Bougainville Copper Ltd (BCL)—are willing to forgo reopening the mine, constitutes a reversal of policy in the interests of peace.

According to *The Age* correspondent, the AA 'revelations ... are certain to aid the cause of the Bougainville separatists', presumably because they document the obdurate disregard with which the mine was imposed on central Bougainville against the express wishes of the villagers. In a Cabinet submission of 13 January 1967 the then Minister for Territories, Charles Barnes, reported that field staff in the district believed 'that it was possible that the landowners would attempt to use physical violence to force the company to withdraw'.

CRA's field workers arrived in April 1964 ... At this stage prospectors needed no permission from villagers to intrude into their land, and not even occupation fees were payable until June 1966, under the Mining Ordinance. Landholders were bewildered by the news that, should they be living on top of a valuable deposit, it would, under the British rule of 'eminent domain', belong to the Government, not them.

Catholic missionaries, he said, were encouraging them 'to oppose CRA development'. Indeed, Bishop Leo Lemay 'appears to enjoy embarrassing the administration and ignoring laws...' Barnes said he had informed the Apostolic Delegate (then in Sydney) that 'mission attitudes could lead to a potentially explosive situation'.

Obviously this would have discouraged CRA from proceeding with the Panguna development which, it had advised the Holt Government, was not 'particularly significant' as the deposit was 'very low grade' (0.48 per cent copper; 0.55 grams/tonne gold), 'marginal' and 'possibly uneconomic'. Barnes was sceptical about this and thought the company was 'attempting to drive a hard bargain'. In fact, Treasury felt that the unprecedented concessions offered to CRA in the form of a three-year tax holiday and expenditure write-offs were too liberal, said Barnes, and would make it difficult to resist similar pressures in Australia. The company knew how desperate Canberra was for PNG to have some major project and a degree of economic viability when independence would come.

It is ironic to read today an editorial in *The Australian* (January 2, 1998) deploring 'Holt's brushing aside of concerns about the full impact of the mine ... with the islanders effectively shut out of negotiations during the mine's development'. I cannot recall any major newspaper of the time suggesting that the mine should not go ahead, which was the landholders' contention, although reportage was not necessarily unsympathetic to better terms of compensation for them. *The Australian's* leading and generally enlightened correspondent at the time, the late Peter Hastings, was not above describing village demands as greedy cargoism and even suggesting that secessionism was a 'Popish Plot'. All agreed that the mineral wealth of Bougainville should be exploited as soon as possible for the benefit of the Territory as a whole.

The obtuseness of Canberra and the Administration in Port Moresby lay in their failure to consult the omens of Bougainville history. Bougainvilleans have a distinctive jet-black pigmentation which together with their insularity and a sense of affinity with the Solomons archipelago, rather than with mainland PNG, engendered a defensive

self-image. This was entrenched in pre-war days when they were often trusted in special roles such as police and 'boss-bois' on plantations because of their apparent difference from others.

The Christian missions, predominantly Catholic, came from the Solomons, had a monopoly of education until the 1960s and emphasised difference rather than future integration with the rest of the Territory. Their contribution to social welfare relieved the Australian Administration of responsibilities, so that, while Bougainvilleans were comparatively well-off, they also believed they were neglected by government.

The war was particularly harrowing: at one stage there were some 60,000 Japanese in the province. Promises of post-war development went unfulfilled. Bougainville had been a sleepy hollow of 'primitive affluence', the 'Cinderella province', or so it was perceived, until CRA entered in 1964. There was no state school in the province until 1961, and then it was meant primarily to serve the children of Administration personnel. When a director of Education was faced with complaints in the late '50s, he pointed out how well the people had been served by the missions, only to be told: *'Toktok bilong God tasol'* (They only talk about God). It seemed to people that only *their* minerals induced the Administration to serve their needs.

ALREADY IN THE SIXTIES, on Buka Island in the north, both State and Church had been affronted by the Hahalis Welfare Society, whose members refused to join the local government council system or pay taxes and scandalised particularly the clergy by creating a flagrantly sexual libertarian cult. Their complaint was that adherence to neither institution had brought economic development. In 1962 a mini-battle was fought on the beach at Buka; the State got its taxes, but Hahalis profited from a new trans-island road. This triumph was mooted elsewhere in the province; cargoism was rife among the Nasioi of Central Bougainville. The Catholic mission, appalled by its rejection, paid much more attention to economic projects. Bishop Lemay and his priests became more alert to the need to support their parishioners in any quest for social justice. In 1959 the United Nations Mission was asked in South Bougainville to detach Bougainville from PNG and integrate it with the Solomon Islands—as God and geography must have intended. In 1962, in the main town of Kieta, the UN Mission was asked by an assembly of more than 1000 to take the mandate away from Australia which had 'treated them like dogs and pigs' and give it to the USA.

CRA's prospectors were not the first to enter the Panguna area. Prospecting had begun in 1930 and continued with minor alluvial finds until the war but with no profit for the locals. Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane was an enthusiastic speculator there. As the renowned 'Sharkeye' Park said, 'There's a lotta gold in Bougainville but there's too much bloody Bougainville mixed up with it.' In fact it was not until the early '60s that the chemical processing of such low-grade porphyry deposits became feasible.

CRA's field workers arrived in April 1964, just after the first elections on a national roll seemed to confirm the Bougainvilleans were destined by Canberra to integration with the rest of PNG. At this stage prospectors needed no permission from villagers to intrude into their land, and not even occupation fees were payable until June 1966, under the Mining Ordinance. Landholders were bewildered by the news that, should they be living on top of a valuable deposit, it would, under the British rule of 'eminent domain', belong to the Government, not them.

Bishop Lemay and American priests were also taken aback, as this was contrary to US practice and, in any case, this was a mandate, not Australian sovereign territory. In the words of Ian Downs in *The Australian Trusteeship: Papua New Guinea 1945–75*, they 'shared an uncommon concern (at that time) for the preservation of Bougainville's natural environment' and 'expressed distrust of anything that reminded them of the gutted Appalachian valleys pouring their slag into the green lands of Ohio' (p343). The arrival of CRA was 'an evil event'.

Naturally, the mission feared the disruption of village life which would follow the influx of high technology and some 10,000 outside personnel. Consumerism and inequalities would transform the local egalitarian culture and reduce respect for Christian values and mission authority. A few leaders were taken to see 'development' in places like Mt Isa, but the consensus remained that the copper should stay in the ground until their grandchildren acquired the expertise to mine it themselves. Copper would not rot. By the end of 1964, I TAMBU (KEEP OUT) signs were everywhere. Police were brought in to remove them.

Bougainville's representative in Parliament pleaded for 40 per cent of the $1^1/_4$ per cent royalties accruing to the State to go to his province. Only after powerful advocacy did he manage to get the House to override the Administration and grant five per cent ... to the landholders. It was a pittance but the Assistant Administrator wrung his hands: 'Where would all these demands end?'

Once the lodes were estimated—eventually 900 million tonnes of ore—Canberra determined to press on. After the Australian Federal elections on December 1963, the intelligent and benign, if paternalistic, regime of Paul Hasluck ended, and the then Country Party insisted on being allocated the Territories portfolio. It covered the Northern Territory and Nauru (phosphates) as well as PNG.

The new minister, Charles Barnes, and his departmental Secretary, George Warwick Smith, an economist with Country Party connections, had no experience of PNG. (Their handling of the portfolio led to its being divided in 1968 into Interior and Territories. The AA 1967 papers show that Barnes opposed even the 1967 Aboriginal vote referendum.) Not that their disregard of indigenous opinion was unusual. CRA judiciously recruited three internationally reputable anthropologists to advise them on social issues, among them the doyen of Pacific ethnographers, Professor Douglas Oliver of Harvard, whose pre-war study of the Siwai in Southwest Bougainville is still regarded as masterly. No critic of capitalism, Oliver in the *CRA*

Gazette (16/8/68) boosted shareholder confidence by portraying the Nasioi as primitive and superstitious people who 'will probably get used to the Company's presence'. This was a standard attitude of many teachers in what were often called 'political science' departments, whether oriented to Marxism, liberalism or corporatism. In the process of social mobilisation and nation-building, self-conscious ethnicity would fade, secessionism wane, they thought. So what was a mere multi-national to think? Its business was not only profit—it quite genuinely thought of itself in PNG as a nation-builder.

BARNES, OF COURSE, was correct when he suspected CRA was playing hard to get in 1967. Very soon afterwards the formidable chairman of RTZ, Sir Val Duncan, was calling Bougainville 'the jewel in RTZ's crown'. Even so, by world standards at that time the mining agreement, granting 20 percent equity to the State, was the best of its kind. BCL had to raise $US400 million capital and pre-sell the copper-gold concentrate, marketing exercises of the first magnitude.

In 1966 Barnes decided on a whistle stop to Kieta to talk sense into the obstructionist landholders. He expatiated on the splendid development that would take place. When a headman asked plaintively if there were not even 'a silver shilling' for them in direct payment, he was told they would enjoy the multiplier effects and, of course, compensation for damage to lives and property. But minerals were for the good of all. Also, when occupancy fees were approved in June that year, they were set minimally to safeguard the future state of PNG from having to pay exorbitant rates in order to carry out public works. All this was rational, even noble, but Canberra failed to understand the clan-based mystical attachment to land, the intimidation and alienation from having no voice in their own future and the ethno-national sentiment growing among Bougainvilleans. Other Papua New Guineans, who wanted 'progress' in their own areas, were equally unsympathetic then to the paradox that greater development necessitated greater compensation. It was the people of the Panguna area who would have to stare for ever at the four square-kilometre crater and the sludge of overburden that spread to the sea.

Bougainville's representative in Parliament pleaded for 40 per cent of the 1¼ per cent royalties accruing to the State to go to his province. Only after powerful advocacy did he manage to get the House to override the Administration and grant five per cent (i.e. 0.0625 per cent of income) to the landholders. It was a pittance but the Assistant Administrator wrung his hands: 'Where would all these demands end?' It did nothing to assuage the lamentations in the villages that their land would be destroyed. In Guava, from which emerged the current rebel leader, Francis Ona, villagers stopped gardening before Easter 1967 to await the end of the world.

Bishop Lemay and his American priests articulated rather than, as Barnes liked to think, inspired village grievances. He protested to Apostolic Delegate Enrici. (See *Downs* for some correspondence, pp350-3). He told Barnes that Lemay claimed to have intervened at least four times to avoid bloodshed and that his priests were exhorting people to observe the law. Something of the ineptitude of Canberra can be seen in its employing 'the esoteric expertise of psychologists...to persuade the locals to accept official policy'. Downs (p349) quotes this gobbledegook:

> New Guinea humans, like the rest of us, react to the carrot—cargo comes from the skilled use of the mind and hands ... The basis of ... [the] approach is that any successful propaganda theme promises something to the individual or, on the negative side, offers a threat of what will happen if he does not follow a prescribed course.

As the renowned 'Sharkeye' Park said, 'There's a lotta gold in Bougainville but there's too much bloody Bougainville mixed up with it.'

In September 1968, educated Bougainvilleans in Port Moresby compounded their province's grievances and demanded a referendum on whether it should remain in PNG, join with the Solomons or secede independently. At the same time a final decision was being taken on whether to proceed with the mine. This required the acquisition of land for a town and port sites. The terms were unacceptable to villagers. The heavy hand of Territories directed the riot squad to intimidate them. This misfired when international media focused on helmeted and visored police with batons grappling with bare-breasted women (custodians of the land in a matrilineal society) over survey pegs. At last Prime Minister Gorton intervened and allowed CRA to deal directly with the landholders. A better deal (market value?) resulted and subsequent compensation negotiations proceeded without violence. Ultimately, however, the compensation proved inadequate, and the pattern had been well set: confrontation alone brought redress of grievances in Bougainville. This pattern persisted during 1973-6 even with power increasingly in the hands of Papua New Guineans. During this period the first secession attempt was made and was appeased only by the grant of substantial autonomy, until negligence on the part of Port Moresby, coupled with a lack of alertness by both the provincial government and the mining company, led to the 1988 revolt by, initially, a small group in the mining area.

It is much too facile to blame the destruction of Bougainville on the mining company. The basic decisions to mine lay with Canberra. Unfortunately Central Bougainville was an ineligible locale for PNG's first great industrial project. Reconciling Bougainvilleans to it required a finesse unavailable in either the colonial or independent governments. Foreign Minister Downer is to be commended for, however belatedly, assuring Bougainvilleans that Australia is not pursuing peace in order to restart the mine. If this ever happens, Bougainvilleans may well wonder whether antipathy to Rio Tinto Ltd based on the initial imposition of mining is justifiable in view not only of the company's expertise but its well-intentioned, if not always adroit, social policies.

As for the charge of exploitation, some 61.5 per cent of cash revenues in 1972–88 went to the PNG government, 4.3 to the provincial government and 1.4 in the form of royalties (K3 million) and occupation and compensation fees (K24m). One-third went to non-government shareholders.

If there is injustice here it lies with the PNG state's distribution to Bougainville, not with the mining company. That simply continued Canberra's approach to the island. ■

James Griffin is an historian and Professor Emeritus at the University of PNG.

__Steve Gome__ graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in November 1995. A year later, with some film and TV work behind him, he auditioned for the Salamanca Theatre Company's 1997 touring season. Six weeks later, he was in Tasmania on his first professional theatrical engagement. During the next five months of rehearsal and performance he observed and was observed in turn—on and off the stage.

The actor's island

Of all the colonies, Tasmania had the highest proportion of drunkards, paupers, lunatics, orphaned or abandoned children, invalids and prisoners. The workforce was inefficient and unskilled.

—Tasmanian Museum

I DREAMT LAST NIGHT THAT JEN AND RICK AND I were in a large portable with wooden floors and 3 exits. We were about to perform and there was a big boy in Grade 6, larger than me, who sat in the front. Without speaking, we made eye contact, wondering what we would do if he 'went off' during the show.

As we approach Launceston, the sun appears in patches, throwing the paddocks into relief. A few one-general-store-and-one-pub towns with picket fences and fuchsias drift by. Launceston is like Hobart—lots of through traffic in one-way streets, a central mall and impressive old buildings. I find a falafel at a Turkish kebab house, then hand over the driving to Rick. Passing through

Scottsdale we are struck by the very English names of the streets—Ada, Emma, Henry, Edith. An Asian teenager is bowling spinners with a tennis ball into a petrol station wall. We nearly clean up an old guy in a huge Chrysler as he makes a frantic getaway from the RSL.

The sign above the garage says, 'If unattended, try hotel >>'. And sure enough, the arrows point across the main street to a mechanic having a beer at a table on the pub's veranda. As we drive into town, old ladies behind the picket fences stop watering their roses and fuchsias, and follow us with their eyes. The yapping of irate dogs crescendos as we dawdle into the school ground.

The school is decked with primary children's prints of flowering gums, flanked by formal portraits of former principals. Corridors glisten with gold-leafed names. They are the names of the fallen, the state representatives, the house captains. Dutch names, Irish names, English names. Some family names recur throughout the panels and their eras. I see a dark girl with an Aboriginal flag on her windcheater skipping with a group of chattering high school girls and beyond them a young principal in blue shorts jostling in the goal square with the lads in the local team's colours.

We displace a handful of young basketballers from the hall/gymnasium where we are to perform. Hearing we are actors, they taunt us with bad-ass accents from last night's video. And they ask us if we are touring the play in other countries and if we have been to Queensland. As the bus rolls down the gravelly path towards the township, I glance back at the mural painted on the senior student's buildings at the rear of the hall. It is a cityscape, with students at a university, streets of people shopping and drinking coffee and a prominent KFC.

One of the cheeky Grade 5 boys tells Jen he can see her bra, and, as a parting shot, proclaims he has had *twenty-one* operations on his willy. Whether or not there is a grain of truth in his tale, he has picked his target well, and leaves amply rewarded by the shock and disbelief of Jen's reaction.

No, we're not related.
No, we don't all sleep together in the van.
No, Rick is not on *Home and Away*.

THE LAND IS LARGELY FLAT, DUSTY AND DRY. A few dirty sheep find refuge from the belting sun under a group of tall gums. On both sides of the road there are hills, the Ben Lomond range to the east, the Great Western Tiers to the west. They are dark, green-black.

Coming back into Hobart we know we are home when Mt. Wellington comes into sight. It is strange being in a city again, with people hanging out on the streets and cafes; hordes of schoolkids in various uniforms being absorbed into the suburbs. And we are not the three individuals who left Hobart together three days before. We have, in a light week, travelled over 800 km and performed to over 800 students (1 person per km?). We have spent almost all our waking hours together, on and off the stage, eaten together, shopped together. Constantly negotiating. We have worked hard physically and got up early. And we have travelled 3 hours from a foreign city and foreign beds to be back at Salamanca.

We go to Knopwoods for a wind-down beer and Rick says to drop round to his place if we get bored tomorrow. 'Something might be going on.' I go home to do my washing and eat my leftover avocado, bread rolls, zucchini, sprouts and carrot.

> The Crimean war in 1854 once again alerted the authorities to Hobart's defencelessness. With its customary speed, the government acted. It passed legislation under which the Hobart Volunteer Artillery Company was formed in 1859!
>
> —Historical plaque, Battery Point

In a small milk-bar and bakery, I buy a stuffed muttonbird for dinner and a peppermint slice as a handy snack. The slice is CWA strength. After lunch, we head straight for Bicheno, pop. 750. I go for a long walk up the granite boulders of Whalers' Lookout and along the foreshore from the Oyster Farm outlet to the sandbar leading to the island near the Youth Hostel. The granite is white, pink and brown, and the mica glistens merrily in the watery afternoon sun. Some of the granite is a motley, evenly-distributed, blend of feldspar, mica and quartz. Some has huge veins of quartz running like snail trails or bursting like giants' innards across the shoulders of rocky promontories and coves. Everywhere the sound of waves pounding on rock. Beneath my feet the result of this timeless conversation is evident. Many crevasses are filled with pellet-sized stones and shell fragments. But in some of these pockets lies the finest white sand imaginable.

Photo left: Mr Big, a Terrapin Theatre Company puppet, with young Tasmanian fans. Photo courtesy Steve Gome.

Blue-eyed blond kids clutter the main entrance to the school with an air of slightly hostile indifference. All these nordic-looking children remind me of a *Woman's Day* double spread on the Curry-Kenny offspring.

No, we don't really hurt each other in the play.
No, Jenny and Rick are not going out in real life.
No, Jenny is not always a bully like her character is.

1997 Salamanca Theatre Company touring ensemble on the set of Dream Up. *Jennifer Priest, Rick Mourant, Steve Gome (seated). Photograph courtesy Salamanca Theatre Company.*

Buried in an old cemetery adjacent to the caravan park in which we are staying, lies John Allen. Died aged 75. In the middle of last century. Apart from an 8–line poem proclaiming his return to God, the headstone reveals the Somerset-born Mr. Allen to have 'single-handedly fought a tribe of Aborigines' four days before his birthday, on the 15 December 1828, and to have been 'shipwrecked on ice near Cape Horn' in 1832. Bicheno is no doubt full of descendants of John Allen and his ilk.

'THANK-YOU VERY MUCH FOR WATCHING Salamanca Theatre Company's production of *Dream Up*. It was written by Barry Kay, a Tasmanian actor and writer, after reading the responses to a series of questionnaires which were sent out to six Tasmanian high schools last year. Students were asked who they shared their secrets with, where they thought they'd be in 30 years and if they could remember their dreams. We started rehearsing in January and worked on this show for four weeks, including the video sequences which were shot by video artist Matt Warren. And we rehearsed *Skip*, a primary show about bullying, over two weeks. After a week in Hobart doing previews, we've been travelling around the state performing ever since.'

In reality is conformity as bad as it sounds? The old phrases about loss of artistic talent and boredom due to conformity don't hold water anymore. If everybody thought the same there would be no war, bias, anger etc. Individuality is a hugely over-rated quality.
—Deloraine questionnaire

The scenery on the way back is never quite as captivating as on the outward leg. The Prossel river and its surrounding forests race by uneventfully. Even Black Charlie's Opening provokes only the feeblest of double entendres and related merriment. An audacious echidna scuttles across the highway just out of Sorrel as we scoot across the causeways, over the Tasman bridge and home at last.

We get a table at Knoppies and reflect upon our good fortune with the weather on our sortie through the Tasmanian Riviera. The sense of being an outsider, a ranger of the highways, returns. Today I am reminded of just how vulnerable Jen and I are as outsiders in this small community. Our novelty is a motivation behind some of the hospitality and socialising here, but making friendships that are unconnected with work is difficult.

Saturday 12 April: stumble upon the Concerned Voters League rally against Gay Law reform. 'Tas Alert' speaker Rodney Cooper spitting and shouting over the pierced and dyed crowd heckling from the lawns below Parliament House. Families and old couples with 'Say No to Sodomy' placards. George Brookes, for Westmoreland, screams 'you have nothing between your ears, you just think about the lower half of your body'. Chester Sommerville, head of the Concerned Voters League, calls for a referendum on the issue. He wears a cream suit and Nick Nolte moustache.

The snow has already begun to retreat from Mt. Wellington as we head back to Glenorchy. After the ritual scroggan/banana/drink stop we set up at Cosgrove with plenty of time to spare.

The entrance hall of this old primary school, which dates back to the 1860s, has a 1914–18 honour roll, a time capsule and some old district photos on its walls. The room in which we are to perform doubles as an art room—with paintings on a Christmas theme. There is a flying reindeer that looks like a starry wombat, an angel that looks like a butterfly and a Santa on a beach, in Y-fronts, holding a can of VB.

Three teachers of the youngest children, all relative newcomers, provide us with more amusement than assistance. They talk over each other and laugh while attempting to direct us around the gymnasium. The eldest, with light brown ringlets and silver-framed glasses (slightly askew) has a gravelly voice, full of life. The shoulder pads in her mauve jacket are not balanced either and she stands favouring one hip as if she's packing a Smith and Wesson. She laughs easily, with a pronounced rasp and her eyes remain a gentle blue.

The other teachers nominate her as the one who knows how to have a good time, one not averse to a good relaxing cigar.

At the point in *Skip* where the audience are asked, 'If someone was being picked on at your school would you dob?', these kids pour out tales of their own misfortune. One boy has been hit with a cricket stump, one kicked, others taunted repeatedly. They all volunteer their actual experience in response to our hypothetical. 'I did this', 'this is what happened', never 'I would do this'. I have not anticipated such an open, raw response to this question I have now asked dozens of times. I continue the play saddened by the hurt in their eyes.

They are surprisingly engaged, teeming with questions about the characters and performance. Then the personal anecdotes and fantasies start creeping in. 'I can juggle 16 balls,' says one bright-faced boy with cropped blond hair. 'I can bounce 100 balls on my head,' says another. 'I can juggle socks,' says a girl on the far side of the room, who pouts when I suggest she team up with a classmate of hers who claims to juggle boots. As the kids begin to file out in lines of navy blue and yellows from sunflower to brie, I ensnare the legs of three of the most talkative boys in the skipping rope, then gently tug until they fall into a raucous heap.

As I am talking to one of the teachers, a girl in Grade 1 rushes up, takes my hand and kisses it. The teacher and I look over, mid-conversation, as she smiles and pecks at my hand again. When I finish talking to the teacher and turn to address the red-bobbed, freckled little girl, she licks the webbing of my hand between the second and third fingers and retreats four steps, waiting for my response. She is very small, and her whole body is alert, ready to curl into a ball, shy away, laugh or scream, or run as fast as she can. But her eyes are wide open, curious and shining. I feel the slightest heat of a blush. For a moment I am her age watching *The Wizard of Oz* on a school excursion when the girl next to me leans over and plants a gentle kiss upon my cheek.

KING ISLAND IS VERY FLAT, A MISSHAPEN TEARDROP. Small dams abound, cattle and a few sheep, with thin veins of paperbark trees and stunted gums acting as windbreaks in irregular patterns. The airport kiosk is cluttered with local produce, including vials of muttonbird oil—ideal for water-proofing leather boots.

The majority of King Islanders are descendants of soldier-settlers from New South Wales and Victoria. Melbourne and Geelong are easier to get to than any Tasmanian population centre, so there is an affinity with the mainland in the hearts of the 2000-odd inhabitants of the island. The locals drink VB from pots and not Boags from ten-ouncers. *The Age* and *The Australian* sell out quickly, the main interest in the Tasmanian papers being the TV guide.

Dinner at the local (bistro section) is deep fried camembert followed by chicken breast stuffed with brie and crab meat covered in a tangy mango sauce. Then a truly sticky date pudding with King Island cream and caramel sauce. Collingwood have beaten Essendon. Over the heavy chords of the Choirboys, Meatloaf, Jimmy Barnes and AC/DC, boisterous taunting can be heard from the public bar. One of the local boys who seems never to remove his Collingwood jumper is celebrating tonight.

The smells of the island are evocative—kelp, blood and bone, bovine breath, roadkill and the pollen of the beach-side scrub. The kelp, which is washed ashore in matted strands, is gathered and sold to a Scottish multinational for use as a stabilising agent in pills, shampoo and paint. It has an oily, stale smell which takes time to become accustomed to. On this windy pancake of an island, the aroma of kelp transports me to the sulphur deposits of Port Augusta and the stench of an old goose egg broken on a creekbed one summer.

April 29: The big news tonight is not Port Arthur-related at all, despite the moving service which marked yesterday's anniversary. Rather it is the news that BHP will close the steelworks at Newcastle within two years, relocating value-added wire and rope production divisions from Geelong and Brisbane to fill the void. The local ABC news begins with the three-year deferment of the privatisation of Hobart Metro Buses, pending the outcome of a trial period.

I awake four times during the night because my feet are dragged over the end of the bed by the weight of descending bedclothes. Thrashing myself free I think of fish trawled in long nets.

Arrive at West Ulverstone Primary in the early morning drizzle and are smartly escorted through to the large hall at the rear of the school. There are the usual gymnastic frames and crash-mats, basketball back-boards and a canteen counter concealed behind sliding panels. What is unusual are the black wall-length curtains to the rear of the hall, to which a panorama of Anzac-inspired artwork has been pinned. WAR, SIRENS, DEATH, ANZAC, PEACE, the posters proclaim. The Grade 6 boys play some vigorous footy with Rick and me, weaving, dummying and finessing with enthusiasm and skill. A wayward pass knocks but doesn't quite dislodge the ANZAC display. Left to our own devices after the assembly has begun, Rick and I continue playing until an errant torpedo of mine brings the whole thing down. We decide not to admit liability.

No, we are not still going to school.
No, we are not touring overseas.
Yes, this is my job. Acting. And I also work at the MCG.

THE LUNCH IN BURNIE IS AN EXPERIENCE. Burnie is an ugly port-city, spewing grey smoke into its sky, piling mountains of exportable logs and woodchips on its piers, clinging to a strip of land wedged between Bass Strait and the low hills which run to meet it. Obese men and women cross the streets, grim determination on their faces, packages under their arms. Facial hair, especially tufty growths, is worn with pride.

I sit having lunch in a coffee shop-bakery at the Coles/Kmart complex. A very pregnant woman sits with a friend and her toddler, chewing the fat with a younger acquaintance who is blowing Alpine in all directions. Another enormous woman, possibly pregnant, wearing a loose Island Cooler windcheater and grey trakky daks meanders by, pushing a pram. Teenagers on BMX bikes hang out by the overpriced CDs a few doors down. Comprehensively bored.

> I tend to cut myself off from people when something sad happens and not talk about it till I crack and then I just have to talk about it. I don't like to talk about my private life with my school friends; they are two parts that don't mix. I hate having a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, it kind of cuts you off from other guys who are just friends. It's like I have a thick blanket around me and when it starts to part I pull it around myself tighter and tighter.
>
> —Deloraine questionnaire

The metallic voice of the principal announcing the changes to the daily routine reverberates from strategically-positioned clusters of speakers. He proves to be a teacher, a man of the old school—gruff, not easily articulate with strangers and downright uncomfortable with touchy-feely actor types. Hard enough to make, let alone hold, eye contact. His stance is slightly closed. But he tells me that the student who was most eagerly assisting our bump out 'had been a real dick 'ead in Year 7, but he's developing into a real nice individual'.

The girls go crazy for Rick; he signs about 15 wrists. And two Year 7 boys ask me if Jen is old enough to 'get on'. Someone puts a bin behind the bus and 70 people laugh as Rick backs into it.

LAUNCESTON IS NOT A BEAUTIFUL TOWN. A concrete scab. Flat, functional bridges and a creepy uniformity about the residential clusters in the surrounding hills. There are many historic buildings boasting intricate brickwork and a squat imperial grandeur. As in Hobart, it is impossible to ignore the presence of government in the CBD—all the largest city blocks house Commonwealth Offices—Medicare, the DSS and senators' chambers. Then there are Tasmanian statutory authorities and state politicians' quarters before you even reach the Town Hall. The police are also well-provided for, as are their counterparts in Telstra and Australia Post.

Ravenswood High sits on a small hill surrounded by strategically planted shrubs. It is squarish and made from an inhospitable concrete blend that gives the completed structure the appearance

of an intelligence agency headquarters. It reminds me of schools in Melbourne's Western suburbs. Short, sassy kids crammed into classrooms, some of the Year 8 girls persistently coquettish towards the younger male teachers. In the toilets where Rick and I get changed a couple of boys have recently been caught inhaling deodorant.

The show is helped along by two sign language interpreters. Steve and Kelly have been given a copy of the script in advance, enabling them to translate. Sometimes they spell out a word in its entirety, often they sign words which broadly apply to the action of the scene: Why? What? No way! Fantastic! Excellent! Signing a live performance at speed is draining—the interpreters have to tag in and out.

No, we didn't know each other before we started the play.
No, unfortunately he's not. And his girlfriend is a teacher.
Well, we have our moments. But we all still talk to each other, yes.

A gaggle of Year 7 boys watch Jenny as she packs away the scaffolding. Like freshly-hatched chicks chirping with glee, only their heads are visible through the glass pane of the door. They blush and push one another when she smiles at them. 'Nice arse' they cry in unison, as they duck and then disperse.

Our last performance, number 98, is *Dream Up*. Returning to Claremont to catch the half of the senior classes who missed out the first time seems ill-starred: we are performing in the afternoon of the last day of term. Twenty-five teachers and students are treated to a performance driven by a mighty thirst for Guinness. The debriefing at the office is mercifully short. Deb is meeting the union, Zoe's getting a haircut and Rachael has a grant application to complete. Jen headed off to meet her friend from Melbourne, leaving Rick and me to down a few beers at Knoppies. Back at his place we watch *The Simpsons* with Kate, Kirstine and their scruffy terrier Tex. Rick is asleep when the pizza arrived. So I eat his as well.

Half an hour before I head out to the airport, I am dropping off some old *Encore* magazines at Cinema Afterdark. Admiring the sandstone warehouses on Salamanca place, the silos and the view across the harbour. An acquaintance from a housewarming party some weeks earlier greets me as she locks her bike to a parking sign. The countdown to Melbourne has begun. I am embarrassed at not having maintained contact, but I make no apologies and our conversation is warm, if strained. As we embrace I smell paint in her hair. And it is time to go. ■

Photograph of Steve Gome, left, by Bill Thomas.

CHRISTINE WILLIAMS

Coombs' country

Herbert Cole (Nugget) Coombs' legacy of economic and public policy planning is familiar to most Australians. What is less well-known is his contribution to environmental theory and practice.

WHEN I MET HIM ON HIS 88TH BIRTHDAY he took charge of the interview, hardly pausing long enough for any question that might distract him from his train of thought. I was interested in his Chairmanship of the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) in the mid 1970s, at a time when, according to him, the organisation was going through 'quite a revolution in its purpose, objectives and key personnel'.

Nugget (Herbert Cole) Coombs, who died in 1997 at 91, was one of the most influential shapers of Australian society this century.

Born in the mining town of Kalamunda in Western Australia in 1906, Coombs went on to occupy the most senior, respected offices Australia had to offer. Coombs held the position of Governor of the Reserve Bank throughout most of the prosperous 1950s and 1960s and was an adviser to seven Prime Ministers from Curtin to Whitlam. At different times, but also with some overlapping tenure, he held the Chairs of the Australia Council, the Australian Council for Aboriginal Affairs, the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Australian National University.

He wrote 11 books, ranging across Aboriginal issues, education and economics. His last two, published in the 1990s, *Aboriginal Autonomy—Issues and Strategies* and *The Return of Scarcity*, dealt with the two areas of strongest concern to him at the end of his life—economic policy in relation to the environment and the recognition of Aboriginal rights.

By his late 80s Coombs alternated his place of residence between Darwin and Canberra, six months about, but kept a home in Sydney for holiday relaxation. He also kept up his membership of the University Club and Schools Club in Phillip Street and took rare trips into the city for meetings with visitors there.

Coombs saw it coming out of the period of its origins as an upper middle-class Establishment organisation, with the Chief Justice, Sir Garfield Barwick, holding the positions of President and then Vice-President from 1965 to 1973, Prince Philip as President from 1971 to 1976, followed by Sir Mark Oliphant, and with the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr as its patron. To Coombs' mind the ACF was clearly identified with the conservative side of politics. Its membership was split along the lines of the divide which rent Australian intellectual life in the aftermath of the dismissal of the Whitlam Government by the Governor-General in 1975.

'There was a kind of revolt against having the Governor-General as patron and it was decided not to continue the position when his term ran out. The President was an active member of the executive and presided over all the Council meetings so they had to do something about that.'

The ACF Director, Geoff Mosley, invited Coombs to take over the Presidency but he refused because he was so busy. Finally Coombs relented, and held the position for two years from 1977.

'Most of all they wanted a good Chairman to run the Council meetings, someone who would find common ground. I think they thought of me in that way. I had a record of fairness.'

But Coombs says that he attached a firm condition of independence to his acceptance of the position.

'I had been approached to give evidence in relation to a land claim by the Walbiri people covering a wildlife sanctuary in the Tannamai desert, part of the Walbiri country. I'd done a lot of work on this already—I knew the people and what they were already doing about conserving the land and wildlife from their point of view.'

Coombs clearly defines his philosophy as being in accord with the Aborigines' feel for the land.

'It's a very touchy area because it's desert and the attitude of most conservationists then was that Aborigines were dangerous there, not simply that they would not coöperate but that they would be causing difficulties now that they had rifles, that they would kill the wildlife. The ACF was divided over this issue too.

'So when I got an invitation to give evidence to the Land Claim Board from the Chairman, Justice Toohey, I decided some of my experiences there were relevant and I went to the ACF and said, 'Now I don't want to find when I get up there to give evidence that the ACF is speaking against me'. It was really a condition of my acceptance of the Presidency, even for one year. My evidence was opposed by the Northern Territory

Conservation Commission, the Friends of the Earth and the Wilderness Society on the grounds that Aborigines were too ignorant to know the problems and that they were hunter-gatherers.'

The consummate politician, you might say, but such a label belies the passion behind Coombs' political manœuvring.

'I had worked among the Walbiri people and one thing stuck in my mind: there was a hair-tailed wallaby, a species extinct or on the margin, and one family group had been going further south where the wallabies were still functioning, preparing a habitat for them up in the Tannamai desert, and carrying the creatures back there. Privately, not telling the authorities. That was their attitude. They knew more about this hair-tailed wallaby than any scientist or others whose business it was to know.

'I also knew that they had been willing for years to enter into a kind of negotiated agreement with the Tannamai Sanctuary management about these issues of conservation. They wanted to coöperate and wanted a hand in the management, not just to have to accept it. They were prepared to negotiate.'

So Coombs was an intermediary, and despite his exemplary public service background, he had no brief for the public servants involved. As if acting on the quotation by Lao Tsu cited in a section titled 'The Bureaucrat' in Coombs' book, *Trial Balance*—'If the sage would guide the people he must serve with humility'—Coombs took a line of pragmatic humility. (The book is described as a record of his working life; published by Macmillan, Melbourne 1981.)

'Look, that's desert country,' Coombs said, paraphrasing his evidence for my benefit. 'There aren't any public servants, except those who go out and do this or that. You cannot administer rules except if you have the support of the Aboriginal communities, so it's either you negotiate with them or you threaten to shoot them or put them in jail—which won't work—or give it away.'

COOMBS SAID THAT GIVING THIS EVIDENCE was one of the first times that environmental protection and Aborigines were very closely linked in his mind and in his actions.

The divide among environmentalists—between those who trust Aborigines in the protection of the land and those who mistrust them—has widened since we spoke. From Cape York to Western Australia the arguments continue, gaining heat post Mabo and Wik.

On the issues of land rights and environmental conservation, Coombs would not put one before the other, but saw them bound together.

'I was trained as an economist, a public servant and a banker, but always I have seen economics as involved with

conservation. Economics is defined as the science of using scarce resources to the best of human advantage. Well, I feel this is exactly what conservation is about; using resources to the best advantage, and it's not the best advantage to wipe them out, or see them disappear in the long-term. That is if you really mean that the next generation is as important as this one.'

Nugget Coombs' pride in the role of public service for the greater good was evident.

'I've never felt that my various involvements were in conflict with one another. In fact I've felt that my previous public involvement in these kinds of issues was useful. For example, when I gave evidence to the Royal Commission on drilling for oil on the Great Barrier Reef I was asked to speak from an economic point of view. There's no real difference in my mind. What I would say to you as an economist is the same as I would say to you as an ecologist if I were an ecologist.'

Coombs could see that the short-term advantage of development invariably outweighs the consideration of long-term effects on conservation. But it shouldn't:

'It's not rational. We're inclined to put our personal immediate needs ahead of others' needs. Although some people put the needs of their children, or their families, ahead or at least even with their own, generally speaking I think people are not wise enough to do this. I can't see any way of measuring which justifies the judgement that the immediate present is more important than the future.'

Coombs explained that after the dismissal of the Whitlam government he resigned from all government positions he held and concentrated on research work at ANU's Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, the first academic institution in Australia devoted to the combination of resources and environmental studies. This inevitably led him to consider differences between European and Aboriginal land management.

'I organised a study of the impact of mining on Aboriginal communities, which I considered urgent because although diamond mining in the Kimberley was in its infancy, the whole of the top half of Western Australia was covered in exploration licences.'

Coombs says he continued with his theoretical work about the quality of work and how it was made a basis for economic policy, collaborating with volunteer academics and Aboriginal groups, producing a report about five years later, titled *Land of Promises*.

'I was trained as an economist, a public servant and a banker, but always I have seen economics as involved with conservation. Economics is defined as the science of using scarce resources to the best of human advantage. Well, I feel this is exactly what conservation is about; using resources to the best advantage, and it's not the best advantage to wipe them out, or see them disappear in the long-term.'

By this time Coombs' focus had moved to northern Australia and Aboriginal issues. He helped a little in preparations for the Mabo case and thought that 'Aborigines have conceded too much, but it depends on how it's interpreted by the High Court'.

He was interested in the ways Aboriginal socialisation practices had changed over the past twenty-five years and how Europeans' way of thinking influences them and their way of thinking influences Europeans.

The most testing question I had to put to Coombs concerned practical land management. I was critical of environmental impact studies and the ease with which they can become merely cosmetic. Coombs, I knew, believed in community administration, so what was the perfect management combination for land conservation?

'That's too hard a question to answer. But I believe you have to put the administration of Aboriginal affairs into Aboriginal hands, using their structures, their systems, their decision-making ...'

In the case of Aboriginal lands, that was clear, but what about national parks?

'Well, I haven't got much hope for that.'

Did he believe national parks only existed while a society could afford them?

'I think in the end Malthus will be proven right. We don't control population; it will control itself by famine, pestilence and war. I think that while we are not convinced that change is really necessary, we are not prepared to make changes. In some way it will solve itself, we think, but we don't worry about it.

'But I think there are signs that the problem is immediate in what's happening to the environment, in its deterioration, in the capacity of the Australian environment to sustain the population. At present we only sustain the population by selling our property to other people and using the proceeds to buy imports.'

It is a bleak view perhaps, though not without offering the possibility of reprieve, but only through a revolutionary change in our way of thinking.

Coombs believed that traditional Aboriginal society produced a relatively stable population through the recognition of natural forces and 'lack of greed and no conviction in growth. Aborigines don't believe in growth; they don't think it exists. They think it's only an illusion that we have.'

The Keynesian humanitarian economist chuckled in agreement. ■

Christine Williams is a freelance writer.

Noted

In the November 1997 edition of *Art in America* (p94), artist Barbara Kruger's rendition of *ars longa, vita brevis*:

'I try and deal with the complexities of power and social life, but as far as the visual presentation goes, I try to avoid a high degree of difficulty ...'

Nice to know.

Andrew Hamilton

The world's collateral damage

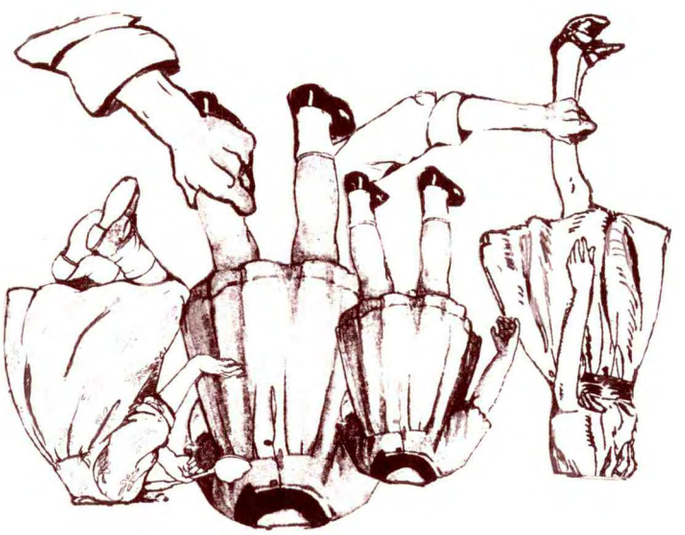
Orphans of the Empire. The shocking story of child migration to Australia, A. Gill, Millennium Books, 1997, ISBN 1 86429 062 5, RRP $39.95. **Jumping to Heaven. Stories about refugee children, Kent Town**, K. Goode, Wakefield Press, 1997, ISBN 1 86254 427 1, RRP $16.95.

The suffering of children is always poignant. When it is avoidable, it is shocking. Avoidable suffering deliberately inflicted on children is outrageous. Stories of such suffering demand our response.

In their different ways, Gill and Goode explore the modulations of children's suffering and the moral claims that it makes on us. The moral energy and opacity of Gill's book, in particular, derive from his wrestling with the nature of the suffering of immigrant children, and from the deeper, unspoken question—Dostoevsky's question: what kind of a world and what kind of a God would allow children to suffer?

Orphans of the Empire is an expansive work which describes and tries to evaluate the sending, receiving, treatment and experience of child immigrants in Australia. While Gill focuses on the situation of those who came to Australia as children and were confined in institutions, he also illuminates the way in which all orphans and neglected children were treated. He attends to the variety of contexts that determined the ways in which children were treated: the practices of schools and orphanages, the place of such institutions in society, the practices of formation of those who worked in church institutions, and the tension between charitable work and the institutional interests of the bodies which sponsored it.

At the most important level the moral thrust of Gill's work is unambiguous. He indicts the unnecessary suffering that was deliberately inflicted on immigrant children. For any Australian, the stories of bashings and of sexual abuse are simply a source of shame. For a Catholic, it is humiliating to know that many children would have been welcomed with more humanity in state institutions than in Catholic ones. Gill is right to be outraged and to assert that, however extensive and representative they may have been, the events described to him should not have happened. The tribal alliances that allowed them to remain unremedied and the kind of religious formation that contributed to their perpetuation are also indefensible.



Gill's account becomes less transparent where he seeks to sheet home responsibility. He is properly inclined to take the side of the victims and to assign responsibility for their oppression. He is sympathetic to those who wish to publicise old wrongs and to name those responsible, even when they are old and dead. I believe that he is also right in this. The common good demands that the story be told, even at the cost of pain to the innocent.

The difficulty inherent in assigning responsibility, however, emerges clearly in Gill's work because he writes honestly and refuses to tidy up loose ends. As a result, each chapter records contradictory judgments of the same events. A man who is described by some as a moral monster is seen by others, who also lived under him, as fair and inspiring. An orphanage which for one is the source of later unhappiness, is for another the fount of later courage and enterprise. The book contains radically different stories which cannot be harmonised by dismissing as unreliable either the favourable or the unfavourable.

Why were the same conditions experienced in such different ways?

Perhaps the key is whether people saw their suffering as avoidable or unavoidable. For many of the protagonists of the book, much of the suffering, even the corporal punishment inflicted by others, was unavoidable. It was therefore acceptable provided that standards of moderation and fairness were observed. Others saw their suffering as avoidable, and therefore as brutal. They would not distinguish, as the first group would, between the predictable discipline of the institution and the aberrant exception. Thus, there were two radically different judgments about the moral world in which they lived.

We may ask also, however, why the infliction of such great suffering, which was physically avoidable, was thought for so long and so persistently to be morally necessary. The answer is surely to be sought in the quality of the imagination. The rules of thumb by which adults ordered their moral universe did not enter the inner world of those for whom they took responsibility. The nostrums said, *It is right to take Aboriginal children away from their*

families because native customs are degenerate. Children of the poor soon get over separation from their families. Spare the rod and spoil the child. The service of the church makes one different. And so on.

The imagination, however, is shaped by formation. Gill's book raises pertinent and disturbing questions about the coarsening effects both of Australian culture and of specifically religious formation. If the experience of those caring for the young has been that they are valued for their work rather than for their persons, and that they are expendable in the service of the church, it is not remarkable that they will see the collective good of the institution and of the church which administers it as transcending the personal sufferings of the individual inmates. They will certainly not question the disciplinary patterns which they inherited.

THE MOST SOBERING CONCLUSION of Gill's book, however, lies in the repeated assertion by those whom he interviewed that the cause of their deepest suffering was the absence of love and affection. Institutions were cold places in which fortunate students found affection in one of the staff—usually someone marginal and even suspect to the administration.

At one level, this coldness, inevitable in a large institution, should be alleviated by the fostering of children and their housing in small family groups. But at a deeper level, it points to the deeper question about children's suffering. For only a fraction of the sexual and physical abuse of children or of their affective starvation is inflicted in institutions. Most children suffer in the home, and what they suffer, they commonly repeat when they have responsibility for children. How then can we accept a world and of a God which tolerates such suffering?

This is a difficult question to face, and one of the ways of blunting its force is to name small instances of unnecessary suffering and to assign responsibility for them. To do so is necessary, but it may encourage the unwarranted expectation that the suffering of children must have a happy ending, and that any variation of this story is someone's avoidable fault. We place a template over the stories of children, and make them meet our expectations.

This template can be seen in Goode's book of refugee stories. They are very moving and delineate sharply the suffering of refugee children: that of being caught between family and peers, between old and new lands, the suffering of loneliness, of traumatic memory. Each story represents a struggle, and each struggle comes to some resolution. These children are lucky. One has a teacher who has time for her at a critical time; another is good at basketball; another meets a racist shopkeeper, but is brave enough to confront him and lucky enough to find him honest. Most have supportive and loving fathers or mothers. These are well-balanced kids. They have a future.

But there are many other refugee kids whose fate is less tractable: the unaccompanied minors who have learned to survive by manipulation, those who are psychologically maimed for life, those who are always trapped between Australia and their home; those who grow up without roots or feeling. Their suffering is poignant. It should have been avoidable, but it was usually inflicted by inadvertence. They are the world's collateral damage.

Goode's stories and Gill's testimony offer wise and noble evidence that it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness. But much darkness always lies beyond the candle's reach. ■

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BOOKS: 2

RACE MATHEWS

Where credit is due

People Before Profit: The Credit Union Movement in Australia, Gary Lewis, Wakefield Press, 1996. ISBN 1 86254 391 7, RRP $A29.95
Father Jimmy: Life and Times of Jimmy Tompkins, Jim Lotz and Michael R Welton, Breton Books, 1997. ISBN 1 895415 23 3, RRP $C24.95.
The Antigonish Movement: Moses Coady and Adult Education Today, Anne Alexander, Thompson Educational Publishing Inc. ISBN 1 55077 080 2, RRP $C24.95.
From Mondragon to America: Experiments in Community Economic Development, Fr Greg MacLeod, University of Cape Breton Press, 1997. ISBN 0 920336 53 1, RRP $C24.95.

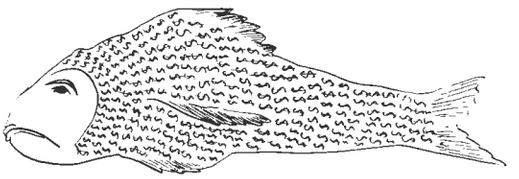
AUSTRALIA'S CREDIT UNIONS have been lucky to attract an historian of the calibre of Dr Gary Lewis. They are also lucky that the release of Dr Lewis' account of their movement—*People Before Profit: The Credit Union Movement in Australia*—has been followed in short order by two studies of the Antigonish Movement in Nova Scotia and one of the Mondragon Co-operative Corporation of Spain. The three movements have in common with one another that they owe their inspiration to Catholic social doctrine as set out by in the great social doctrine encyclicals *De Rerum Novarum* (1981) and *Quadragessimo Anno* (1931). That coincidence has brought them to attention simultaneously enables us if we so choose to initiate an overdue debate on what relevance the social teachings of the Catholic Church might have to Australia's current worsening economic and social dilemmas. It will be a pity if the opportunity is wasted.

The Antigonish Movement resulted from the endemic poverty of fishing, farming and mining communities in Nova Scotia in the early years of the century, and most of all in the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties. Thanks largely to the work of two remarkable priests, Father 'Jimmy' Tompkins and Father Moses Coady, the University of St Francis Xavier at Antigonish was persuaded to establish an Extension Program which used adult education and the establishment of credit unions and other

Rochdale-style coöperatives as a means of enabling impoverished communities to lift themselves by their bootstraps, initiate local and regional economic development for themselves and so become in Coady's words 'masters of their own destiny'. 'We start with the simple material things that are vital to human living, and move on up the scale to the more cultural and refining activities that make life whole and complete', wrote Coady, 'Through credit unions, co-operative stores, lobster factories and sawmills, we are laying the foundation for an appreciation of grand opera'. At its height, the Antigonish Movement was endorsed by successive popes and attracted worldwide attention.

Father Jimmy: The Life and Times of Jimmy Tompkins by Jim Lotz and Michael R Welton goes some way towards taking the place of George Boyle's excellent earlier biography of Tompkins, *Father Tompkins of Nova Scotia*, sadly now long out of print. Anne Alexander writes about the Antigonish Movement from the perspective of a senior adult educator. The strength of her *The Antigonish Movement: Moses Coady and Adult Education Today* is the balance it achieves between the adult education focus of the movement and its involvement in establishing coöperatives. Her emphasis—as the title suggests—is less on Tompkins than on Coady, and she also gives credit to the contribution of other members of the team, including in particular the women who so largely accounted for many of its accomplishments. Alexander's objective scrutiny of the movement gives way in the final pages of her book to an impassioned plea to adult educators in Canada for a return to the values of empowerment and emancipation which motivated Tompkins and Coady, and puts forward some suggestions that apply with equal force to Australia.

That there is ample precedent for the adoption of ideas from Antigonish in Australia is amply documented in *People Before Profit*. Lewis describes how a young Australian, Kevin Yates, visited Antigonish while undergoing training as a wireless air gunner in 1942 and 1943. What he saw there in part inspired him to become a Director and Education Officer of the Co-operative Institute of New South Wales, and a driving force behind the establishment of the state's first credit unions. Another Australian visitor to Antigonish, Fr Jack Gallagher, started the Antigonish Movement in NSW in 1951, with a view to applying that model of credit union-driven development of coöperatives tailored to meet a wide variety of social needs. However, it was only in the middle nineteen-fifties that credit unionism finally took off within the Catholic parishes, largely as a means of enabling households to access consumer loans at interest rates below those of the hire purchase industry. As a largely narrative history which required Lewis to complete in two years what would more appropriately have been a four-year project, *People Before Profit* unhappily is unable to deal more than superficially with the ensuing conflict between those elements within the credit union movement who wanted it to develop along Antigonish lines and those who insisted that it should 'stick to its knitting' as a provider of affordable personal loans. What matters is that the questions have been raised and can now be revisited.



That things might not have turned out as they did—that an incomparably more far-reaching outcome might have been achieved—is made evident by Father Greg MacLeod of the Tompkins Institute at the University College of Cape Breton in Nova Scotia in his *From Mondragon to America: Experiments in Community Economic Development*. MacLeod demonstrates—among a multiplicity of rich insights—how, in the case of Spain, from a standing start at roughly the same point in the middle nineteen-fifties as the Australian credit union movement, the use of adult education and a credit union movement, the use of adult education and a credit union to drive the development of a wide range of manufacturing, retail, service and support coöperative has given rise to an international business group with annual sales in excess of $US6 billion. The Mondragon Co-operative Corporation—wholly owned by its 29,000 worker members—now includes Spain's largest chain of supermarkets, hyper-markets and shopping malls, largest manufacturer of machine tools and tenth largest bank. It is the third largest supplier of automotive parts in the European Union and was designated by General Motors in 1992 as 'European Corporation of the Year'. Of no less significance, MacLeod describes the second Mondragon which is now developing in Valencia, and accordingly has laid to rest arguments that Mondragon is so much a unique product of Basque history and culture as to be inapplicable in any other setting. MacLeod also discusses from firsthand experience the application of development techniques derived from Mondragon in settings as widely separated from Spain as Canada and Mexico.

The failure of the Australian coöperative movement to take the Antigonish and Mondragon routes aside, Lewis' book gives rise to wider questions. Was it, for example, purely by accident that the emergence of the credit unions so closely coincided with the 1954-1955 Split in the Labor Party? Were the credit unions in some sense the creation of Catholics displaced from their allegiance to the Labor Party by the Split but unable or unwilling to identify themselves with the DLP or the National Civic Council? Is it possible to identify leaders of the credit union movement who in other circumstances would have achieved high office in the party or the trade union movement? Is there a likelihood that if the Split had been avoided, a development more along Antigonish and Mondragon lines might have eventuated? Is there then a great irony in that the actions of the largely Catholic elements in the party, who so largely brought about the Split, at the same time destroyed for a generation the hope of giving effect to the social teachings to which, in so many instances, earlier stages of their lives had been dedicated? And is it now possible for the division between Catholic and social democratic reformism which the Split so needlessly created to be healed at last? ■

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GILLIAN FULCHER

Carey's Conundrum

The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith
Peter Carey
University of Queensland Press
ISBN 0 7022 2750 1, RRP $16.95

THE POLITICS OF GENDER AND RACE are now so well recognised that these subtexts in novels rarely escape their reviewers' notice. But narratives about disability are another matter. Peter Carey's *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*, for example. Its central figure is someone of very short stature, of distressing appearance, unable to walk, of incomprehensible speech, with aspirations to act. Throughout the novel Carey uses language which could offend people with disabilities. Neither Australian nor British reviewers of *The Unusual Life*, which was published in 1994, appeared to ponder these matters. It was not, said the *London Review of Books*, a novel about disability. Maybe not, but disability is the vehicle for something else.

In his homeland, Carey's writing is lauded and dismissed. *The Unusual Life* was no exception. Moreover, it got lost in the extensive discussion of two other books which broke the boundaries between literary discussion and Australian public life: Helen Garner's *The First Stone* and Helen Darville's *The Hand that Signed the Paper* .

Yet Carey's book is potentially as provocative as either. A more consummate creation than *Oscar and Lucinda* which won him the Booker prize, *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* is an audacious and deeply intriguing book. So why was it not read as such? Perhaps because disability touches fewer lives than do gender and race, its debates are less well known. Moreover, Carey took an underground route to his comment.

On the surface, the book charts Tristan's odyssey from Efica to Voorstand, and its fabled city of Saarlim. Book 1 concerns Tristan's life in Efica where his mother, Felicity Smith, manages an alternative theatre and circus. Book 2 recounts his travels in Voorstand, famous for its Sirkus. The identity of Tristan's father is a mystery, for his mother has two lovers: the beautiful circus artist, Bill Millefleur, and Vincent, a politician and the chief executive of Efica's largest pharmaceutical manufacturer. Efica is an outpost of imperial Voorstand. The text and the frequent footnotes refer to the folklore, history, literature and language of these countries. Carey used a researcher, whom he acknowledges for 'research into arcane matters'.

His use of language is masterly. Puns and metaphors abound. Is arcane a metaphor for a crumbling civilization, and do the hard consonants of Voorstand's language, as opposed to Efica's, imply brutality? All of this makes for a most engaging if uncomfortable tale.

But a closer reading reveals Carey as social critic. While themes of colonialism, migration, and identity are clear beneath the narrative, disability enters more subtly. The literary devices Carey uses to point to these meanings are mainly parody and farce. The hilarious footnotes are a clue: they mimic the academy, and the academy is implicated in Carey's critique. This is a profane book with a profound message.

The novel begins with Tristan recalling his birth. I gasped at Tristan's description of himself, when his mother, acting a Witch in *Hamlet*, takes her newborn on stage and shows him for the first time:

> 'Thou shalt get Kings, though thou be none,' she said, and thrust me out into the world.
>
> ENTER TRISTAN SMITH—a gruesome little thing, slippery and sweating from his long enclosure in that rubber cloak, so truly horrible to look at that the audience can see the Witches must struggle to control their feelings of revulsion. He is small, not small like a baby, smaller, more like one of those wrinkled furless dogs they show on television talk shows. . .

Not only is this image shocking, but Carey introduces Tristan in a dark scene, in one of the best known of European plays, in a literature which connects tragedy with impairment, a logic the disability movement opposes. And of Vincent's reaction we read this:

> Vincent saw him. His son [so he thought at the time]. He saw the ghastly rib cage, saw his shrunken twisted legs, bowed under him ... Vincent put his hand up to his open mouth. Tristan's forehead mirrored his, wrinkling like a piece of cloth ... I did not come back on stage, but for Vincent the aesthete, who felt he had invented me, it was a kind of hell. He was left alone with his thoughts and theories in the dark—a two-hour production with no interval.

But Vincent is neither good nor bad, for Tristan also describes how:

> he sat in the dark believing he could never love me if I was not perfect. He was such a good man in so many ways, human, generous, humble around artists, passionate about justice and equality, but really—what a weasel. He sat in his seat as the drums beat louder, waiting for the darkness to descend.

So Vincent is both loving and rejecting. Tristan calls himself a dwarf, his 'lipless mouth drools', his speech is unintelligible to most people, and he moves around on his knees. Here is an archetype. My eyes widened: WHAT was Carey up to? By page 69, his intent began to emerge.

WHEN TRISTAN REJECTS his acting teacher (who, interestingly, anticipating later themes, is more concerned with her on-stage appearance than with the substance of acting), his stressed but loving maman screams that he is a child with Special Needs and that if he doesn't stay with Madame Chen she will send him to a Special School. Tristan recalls the incident as 'that truly dreadful night which gave birth to the fearful notion of Special Needs'.

The term Special Needs comes from officialdom, from negotiations between Governments, people with disabilities, and academics; it permeates Government policy in both Australia and Britain. Was Carey casting stones at shibboleths? How familiar was he with contentious debates about disability? Extraordinarily so, it seems.

In this dramatic moment between Tristan and Felicity, a postcard arrives from Bill Millefleur, suggesting Felicity let Tristan act a character, namely the Hairy Man. Tristan sees the postcard as 'a ray from God on high', as rescuing him from the Special School; however, the footnotes tell us that in the animistic culture of the Native People of Voorstand, the Hairy Man is the 'bogey-man', and in Christian theology, he is Satan, and that both these meanings exist in Efican culture. So the rescue also means relegation as a feared outsider. This is Carey not as pessimist, but as ironic observer. Here too, Carey encapsulates a lengthy debate on disability and its cultural contradictions in a few sentences. There are many such instances.

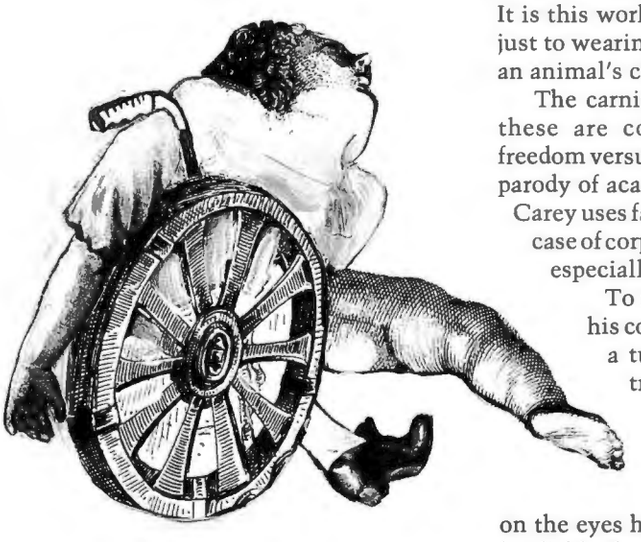
Another shibboleth tumbles on page 172 in Felicity's answer to Tristan's assertion that he will learn to talk better so that audiences can understand him. 'Maybe there are some things you won't be able to do ... The problem with diction is physical, darling, you know that.' 'I'll ... learn,' he insists. There is a prevailing idea that learning can banish any incapacity and this idea, too, is part of Government educational policies. The consistency of Carey's stoning seemed astonishing. These transgressions demanded closer examination, for Carey is far too intelligent a writer, far too sensitive to language and to social trends, to warrant a judgment of being mindlessly offensive. Had reviewers raised these aspects?

A British reviewer reports Carey as saying that his work begins with abstract logic, and that, when blocked, he asks whether an interesting story can be written about it. *The Unusual Life* is evocative, imaginative, gargantuan, and full of movement: its central characters gambol, they travel to the fabled city of Saarlim, and as circus artists they perform somersaults, both literally and in their imagination, But what logic underlies this intriguing tale? The images are a clue.

There are three prevailing images in *The Unusual Life*: the academy, the carnival and the corporate world. The academy is parodied in the frequent footnotes—they underlie the text both literally and politically; they imply the academy is the harbinger not of truth, knowledge or evidence but of nonsense. Readers familiar with debates in the academy and the disability movement will glimpse sociology as an especial culprit, but it's also clear that Carey draws on sociology: for instance, on the Syracuse sociologist, Bob Bogdan's *Freak Show*.

The dominant image, however, is that of the carnival: with its licence to roam, its promise of the spectacular and the amazing, and its harbouring of the unusual, the carnival is a metaphor for freedom. The third image, that of corporate culture, emerges only clearly in Book 2. The juxtaposition of these three images provides the book's subtlety, perhaps its political raison d'être, which is broader than imperialism and dislocated identity.

In the Feu Follet (literally, will-o'-the wisp) theatre, where Felicity dreams of creating an Efican culture in opposition to Voorstand's imperialist culture, the freedoms of the carnival are present. Here, where the actors live in the theatre building, Tristan lives a freaky kind of life, spending many hours hiding under the seats, storing bits of food, reading tomes on acting, and rehearsing his ambitions. He finds a sense



of belonging and pride, and also hubris towards the audience whom, in the tradition of circus slang, he calls 'rubes', an arcane term meaning mugs.

Here, in the margins, he finds an enduring love, a fatherly love, though not from Bill Millefleur, who has left, nor from Vincent, who cannot fully oblige either emotionally or practically, for he is a married man and a public figure. It is Wally Paccione—the humble production manager of the Feu Follet, whom Felicity, in a moment of anger, once called an emotional cripple—whose love for Tristan endures. Carey's contradictions are wonderfully seductive.

But the Feu Follet is no simple retreat, nor is this alternative theatre a solution to life's complexities. It is, however, a place apart, where the lonely and/or different find companionship and a sense of belonging. This gainsays the view from officialdom and the disability movement that integration should happen in 'the community', a view the playwright Alan Bennett, for instance, parodies.

Tristan's life in Efica points to central themes. When Wally and his lover, Roxanne, take Tristan to the visiting Voorstand Sirkus, another child calls Tristan a mutant. Humiliated, Tristan accepts the Mickey Mouse face mask Roxanne offers him. This mask is papier-mâché, easily destroyable, and quite unlike the full-body, high-tech suit, simulating Bruder Mouse, in which he later hides in Voorstand. The nearer Tristan gets to Voorstand, the more troublesome his appearance. It is in Voorstand, in Saarlim, that the corporate image clearly emerges: a world of appearances, procedures, correctness and overarching performance. It is this world which reduces Tristan not just to wearing a mask but to hiding inside an animal's costume.

The carnival and the corporate world: these are countervailing metaphors—freedom versus contrived order. As with his parody of academic style in the footnotes, Carey uses farce to arrest the reader. In the case of corporate idiocies, there are three especially important scenes.

To reach Voorstand, Tristan and his companions must pass through a tunnel. They arrive at its entrance, with a guide called Ah-Zeez: tired, hungry, and needing somewhere to 'have a shit'. They are met by an older woman 'not so easy on the eyes herself' (Tristan's words), outlandishly dressed in a parody of corporate attire. Ignoring their distress, she proceeds to lecture the travellers, using 'a stack of tattered index cards' and massacred English, on the history of the tunnel dug by Burro Plasse (not for nothing is the digger's first name Spanish for donkey) and of his encounters with the Hairy Man. She ends by giving them postcards of Burro Plasse and instructions on what to do with them:

> 'One, I'd like you to take the trouble to mail to me, the other is a souvenir. Ah-Zeez here will take you through the tunnel, but you can't ask him to lick the stamps. So I'm asking you. When you get to where you're going, send me the card. I like to

know my customers got there safe and sound. I'm going to give you your cards and a flashlight each.'

Finally, she utters one of the corporate world's Amens: 'Thank you for using Burro Plasse's tunnel' (for there are other tunnels in this competitive world). I laughed in that deliciously uncontrolled way one does at the ridiculous. But this is also a deeply serious scene: here are corporate obsessions unmindful of human needs.

The dinner party in Bill Millefleur's high-security flat in Saarlim is equally revealing. What matters here? Not the presence of the host, for he is mostly absent, not the conversation, for people lie on the table. What matters are the protocols for accepting the invitation, for arriving, for one's appearance, and the opportunity to negotiate a contract. Dinner, that potentially most engaging concourse, has been overtaken by a curious etiquette; it has dissolved into a series of political manœuvres and appearances; it has the hollowness of a corporate boardroom.

The image of order is what prevails at this dinner party until Tristan disrupts it, but outside is disarray. There are beggars and thieves on the streets of the fabled city, and the air is fetid. Voorstand's humanitarian ideals about animals have become enshrined in caricatures in the Sirkus. The Bruder Mouse suit in which Tristan hides is hollow, but its status in Saarlim is supra-human. And in this world which craves order, conformity and security, violent death awaits the Sirkus performers. The corporate endeavour is revealed as futile, hollow and dangerous.

The third scene occurs in Peggy Kram's flat where she (a guest at the earlier dinner party) and 'Bruder Mouse' have spent some days together in a curious kind of intimacy given Tristan is encased in his suit. An official interlocutor arrives. Peggy, who has never seen Tristan, despite their sexual encounters, and whose imagination we can only wonder at, tries to maintain that her lover really is Bruder Mouse. Tristan interrupts with the words 'foreign corporations'. Baarder, the interlocutor, pounces:

'Entities,' ... says Baarder. 'We call them entities in Voorstand'. He turned to Mrs Kram. 'Are you paying attention to this, Peg? Only an Ootlander could call an "entity" a corporation.'

In a climactic scene, the parody is almost slapstick. 'Incorrect words' reveal the truth—her sin of having an Outsider for a lover—but the notion of a mechanical, surreal incarnation of a cartoon character as an acceptable—and real—lover is hilarious, as is the obsession with the correct name for a corporation. Here are corporate commitments to hollow ideals and to procedures without substance, a preoccupation with language codes which are a substitute for looking at life. And this latter crucial public issue is a clue to Carey's intent.

There is a logic in these three images. The carnival opposes the academy and the corporate world. The academy and the corporate world are no longer separate. Both in Australia and Britain, the academy embraces corporate culture. In disability, as in other politics, academics in both countries, sometimes unthinkingly, have helped their governments construct a new language and new procedures for the public face of disability. The result has been a set of policies which draw on a corporate theory of how life works (a fallacy). So where do the connections between these three images take us?

The Unusual Life reveals that corporate obsessions with correct words and procedures are not the important things in life: love, honesty, and endurance are what matter. The language in *The Unusual Life* is as serious and intentionally provocative as Orwell's in *Animal Farm*. Carey has done a backflip. Where Orwell used the language of equality to expose its weaknesses and corruptibility, Carey flouts the 1990s version of publicly acceptable language, beliefs and prohibitions surrounding disability in order to expose the errors of a world constructed in the corporate image. The narrative reveals the logic and social dangers of this enterprise: the Sirkus, where performance is reified, is a metaphorical reflection of the dangers of corporate culture; and the journey Tristan undertakes is to an anarchic world, the endpoint of corporate logic.

By writing the central character as disabled, the broader world is starkly shown as increasingly oppressive of those whom Tristan, as archetype, represents. But as archetype he also represents the increasing scrutiny we are all under (a theme in *The Tax Inspector*). This world exacerbates earlier oppressions of conformity, appearance, image, and performance. In this revelation, *The Unusual Life* is fundamentally non-disabilist, but if read superficially, it can be dismissed as offensive. Its complex narrative contains arguments which occur both in and outside the academy about how we should understand and portray disability. The voice and experience of Tristan, in all its conflicting humanness, is always present, as are the words and actions of those who, in life's paradoxes, sometimes oppress and sometimes nurture him. Listening to the voice of oppressed people, once a policy priority, is no simple remedy. Carey's prefaces to Books 1 and 2 deride the politics of voice: the preface to Book 2 begins with a verse which the footnotes describe as an 'Efican folk song circa 301 EC (Source: Doggerel and Jetsam: unheard voices in the Voorstand Imperium, Inchsmith Press, London)'.

The world of Efica and Voorstand is complex and contradictory. So Felicity dreams of revolutionary theatre but sleeps with a corporate head, to whom she is bound by 'the shared belief that what you said could matter, might change the course of history itself'. This too, is the view of their corporate counterparts in Voorstand, Foucault and the CEO?

In using disability to expose corporate oppressions, and in mocking the language and principles which emanate from government, the academy and people with disabilities, *The Unusual Life* becomes a book that offends what Frank Moorhouse calls Official Culture. That officialdom bothers Carey was apparent in *The Tax Inspector*. Perhaps it is the perception, rather than ignorance, of these politics which underlies the silence on the most subtle of the political meanings which inhabit *The Unusual Life*? And, as Moorhouse notes, literary prizes go to books believed to be officially acceptable; these books then dominate public discussion.

Whatever the reason for the silence surrounding *The Unusual Life*, it is inexcusable, for this is a tract in the Orwellian tradition, a passionate work where imagination soars and invites the reader to rethink the world.

The Unusual Life is thus an uncompromising view of western culture, in its current corporate form, and it implicates the academy. Carey is on no-one's side. He exposes the complexities of life. But he is against simplistic solutions. The scenes in Saarlim City evoke the nightmares of *1984*.

Vaclav Havel suggests the writer's task is to warn. In *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*, Carey has done just this. ■

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FICTION

The Service of Clouds
Delia Falconer
Picador, 1997
ISBN 0 330 360272
RRP $16.95

THIS BOOK has already had its major reviews, and they have been glowing. Falconer has even been compared to Ondaatje, author of *The English Patient*. Were it not for these previously published excellent opinions, I would probably be inclined to quell my doubts and write generously about what is undeniably a very impressive first novel.

Its strengths have been well catalogued. Set in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales in the early 1900s, it is full of a sense of poetry and place. This is a novel of air. Repeatedly, we have images of people tethered and floating free, of death in the midst of life, of clouds and vapours and photography and souls and spirits.

The central love story, fittingly, is of a love that dies precisely because there is no earthiness—no sex. The narrator then moves on to a love affair with a gardener. Unfortunately he is fatally ill with TB, so air wins over earth again.

All this is impressive, and perhaps it is churlish to go on to pick faults. I must admit to some frustration with a novel so full of poetry, yet so bereft of ideas. This is very much writing of sensibility, as are so many first (and second and third) Australian novels these days. I sometimes wonder whether I am the only reader who longs for argument and ideas and for more connectedness.

However, it is unfair to visit these frustrations on Falconer. She must be allowed her own style and aims. To some extent, though, the book fails to entirely succeed on its own terms.

Some of the poetry works brilliantly. You keep coming across careful metaphors and striking images: 'Each waiter's face was as blank and gormless as a new laid egg' for example.

But sometimes it doesn't work, it all becomes too self-conscious, and the metaphors simply lack purchase and sense, leaving one with the feeling that they are there for the sake of having them.

The minor characters are best drawn. The central ones, particularly the two men, all sound like the same person, and they all talk as though they take their lines from a poetry anthology. The dialogue, in fact, is a major weakness in this book.

I don't think the lovers ever crack a joke together. It is as though everyone is walking around on tiptoe, heads literally in the clouds, their speech too high-flown for the every day. It is in the sections where we hear her central characters speak that Falconer comes closest to tumbling from poetry to poesy, and the whole delicious, self-conscious ethereal structure teeters on the brink of the ridiculous.

For the most part, though, Falconer pulls it off. The comparison to Ondaatje is understandable, if an overstatement. Ondaatje understands the power of plain speaking, and his writing is the more poetic for being taut and economical. But then, reviewers do first novelists no favours by making such overblown comparisons. Falconer's book is a considerable achievement. I hope it does not expire under the burden of too much gushing. ■

Margaret Simons is a novelist and journalist.

InBriefIn

MUSIC

20th Century Piano Trios
Trio Melbourne
Bizarre or baRock
Elizabeth Anderson

Telemann: Sonate Metodische
Hans-Dieter Michatz, Linda Kent
Unanimity
Tony Gould, Bob Sedergreen

AUSTRALIA IS BLESSED with many brilliant musicians, many of whom rightly feel that our good fortune is their ill luck: such a saturated market makes it hard to survive as a performer. Melbourne's Move recording label has done much over the years to ensure that some of them stay home. These four recordings are diverse in style, but linked by their reliance on superb keyboard players: two harpsichordists, Elizabeth Anderson and Linda Kent, and three pianists, Roger Heagney, Tony Gould and Bob Sedergreen.

Roger Heagney's contribution to modern music is huge and spans many years of playing, composing and teaching. He gave Geelong—and me—our first unforgettable taste of Messaien in the late '60s when he played *Prière du Christ ascendant vers son Père*. With Trio Melbourne he is teamed with two extraordinary young players, Rachel Atkinson on cello and Isin Çakmakçioglu on violin. The CD title could be more imaginative—*20th Century Piano Trios* no doubt says what's there, but you have to hear it to realise how ravishing the music is. And innovative: the Julian Yu, Ilhan Baran and Peter Sculthorpe pieces are premiered on this recording. The Sculthorpe piece, *Night Song*, in particular is glorious. Adapted from an early work 'The Stars Turn' for soprano and piano, it gives an opportunity for the violin to sing and soar, the piano and cello gravely following the winding lyric, each note dancing in its proper place. Trio Melbourne are players who listen to each other and know each other's moves, and so the ensemble is seamless and capable of astonishing intensity, as much in the Sculthorpe pianissimos as in the Copland and Shostakovich fireworks.

There are plenty of fireworks in *Bizarre or baRock*, Elizabeth Anderson's latest. Anderson is a strong player of the harpsichord, an instrument often associated with delicacy and even a certain prissiness if not treated with the creative disrespect it deserves. Ragtime, baroque, New Age, blues, jazz, even a toss at rock via Ligeti and Lennon/McCartney—there's something for everyone here. I like her omnivorousness and willingness to test the outer boundaries of the instrument.

Linda Kent on the other hand is gentle to her instrument: she coaxes while Anderson plies the whip. Her fluid playing of the Telemann underpins Hans-Dieter Michatz' flute extravaganzas. Kent is one of the most inspired accompanists I have ever heard. Michatz' playing is vivid, uncompromising and masterly.

Tony Gould and Bob Sedergreen are magpies for all styles—you hear teasing flashes of Gershwin, Grofé, De Falla, Ravel and even Leon Russell, amongst the Carmichael, Berlin, Corea et al that are the official frameworks of the pieces they do. They drive the Steinway and the Bösendorfer through slaloms of high-energy improvisation, and then give moments of ironic calm when a few high notes drop into echoing silences. *Unanimity* is an enjoyable fusion of diversities—something for the One Nation people to worry about perhaps. ■

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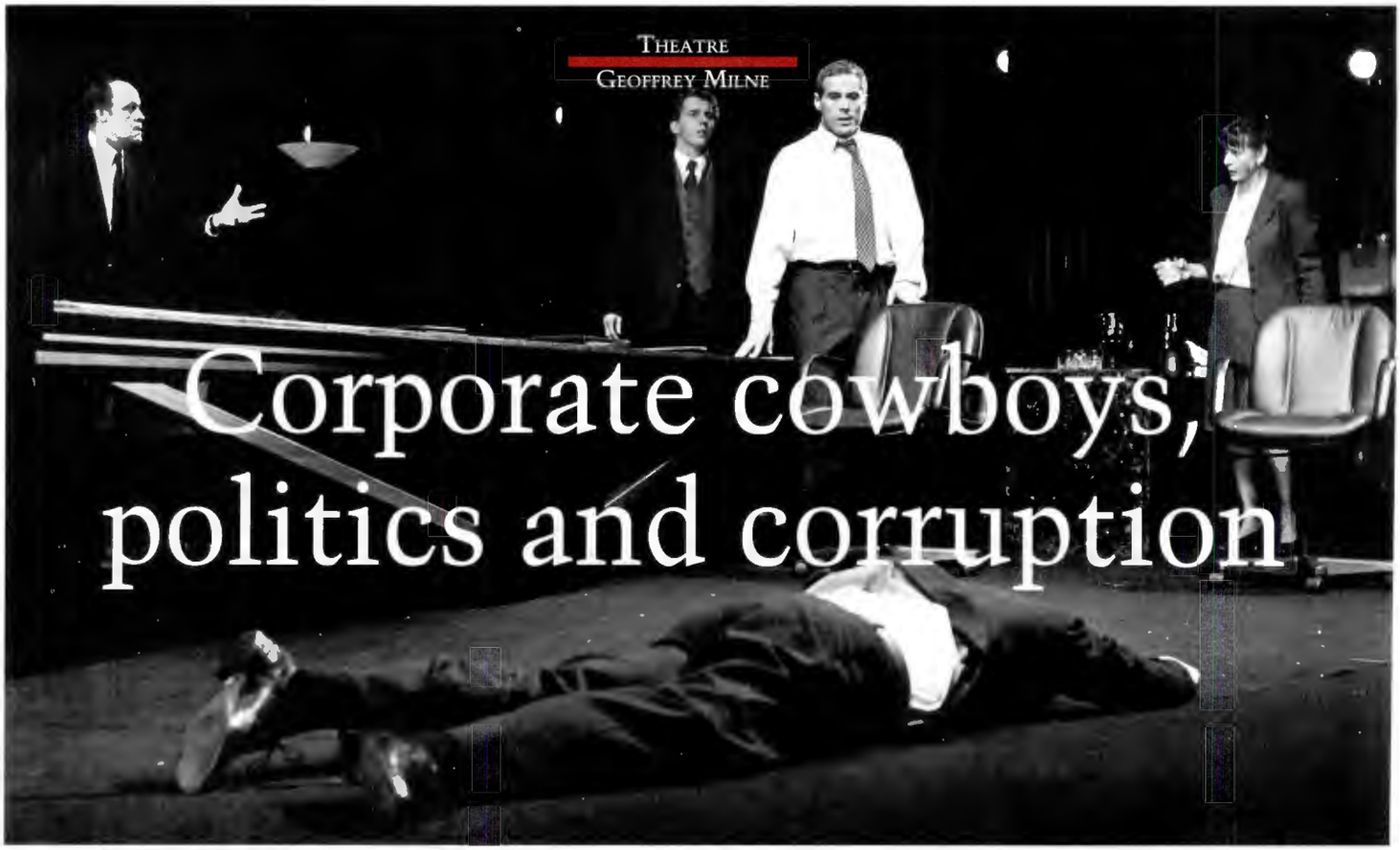

Corporate cowboys, politics and corruption

AT THIS SUMMER HOLIDAY time of year, Australian theatre audiences tend to pack up all their cares and woes (and their critical faculties) and take refuge in the escapist world of musical comedy.

Thus Sydney audiences will continue to flock to the *My Fair Lady* revival at the Capitol and to the tenth anniversary revival of *Les Misérables* at the Theatre Royal, while their Melbourne peers will delight in the tuneful vacuity of *Crazy for You* at the State Theatre and lap up yet another revival of *Phantom of the Opera* at the Princess. Those preferring their theatrical pleasures alfresco can pack their picnic hampers for the annual Glenn Elston Shakespeare, which this year features *The Taming of the Shrew* in Melbourne and then Adelaide, plus *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* in the Botanic Gardens of Sydney and Perth.

But if you consider the 1997 repertoire on the Australian stage, audiences are perhaps entitled to think they're due for light relief from an extraordinary barrage of political drama seen through the year. Play after play has directly tackled corruption and power politics in government at all levels.

There's nothing especially new in this. Louis Nowra is one contemporary playwright who has waded into the political arena with a vengeance in recent years. His *The Temple*, premiered in 1993, was a ferocious portrait of the seemingly irresistible rise to power and influence of a ruthless entrepreneur with more than a passing resemblance to certain notorious real-life figures; while in *The Incorruptible*, in 1995, Nowra turned his attention to a conservative Christian cane-farmer from the deep north who is thrust into the top political office and kept there by systematic corruption. Not to be outdone, the better-known political playwright, Stephen Sewell, has also returned to political drama after several years in the comparative wilderness of family drama.But we seem to have seen more plays in 1997 about political and corporate cowboys, great and small, than about anything or anyone else.

One of the most interesting of the bunch was Katherine Thomson's *Navigating*, commissioned by the Melbourne Theatre Company. *Navigating* focuses on the townspeople of Dunbar, a dying industrial coastal town which stands to gain a new lease of life if it wins a contract with an American firm to build a privately operated prison. Bea Samson, a middle-aged accountant with the local council, stumbles upon evidence of a chain of corrupt dealings over the development between the council—especially Bea's sleazy boss Ian, who is having an affair with her sister—and the town's leading businessman, Peter Greed. Out of a simple desire to tell the truth, Bea blows the whistle, only to be ostracised and terrorised by the entire town. It's a flawed and slightly overwrought play (not aided by a poor production by Richard Wherrett) but it has some powerful moments and certainly Thomson understands the malaises of contemporary Australian society better than most of the playwrights we're seeing at present.

Allison's Rub, by the veteran actor Terry Norris for La Mama and the Melbourne International Comedy Festival, was a more whimsical comedy about small-scale power politics and the battle of ordinary people against ruthless developers, but its satirical barb was just as truly aimed.

Yet another piece dealing with local politics was *Little City*, written by Irine Vela and others for the Melbourne Workers' Theatre and the community choir Canto Coro. This ambitious music theatre piece begins with the death of a young boy in a street accident caused by the failure to maintain community safety standards; unable to get redress or compensation, the community barricades itself into its local town hall in a doomed and tragic attempt to create its own self-contained and just little city.

Treachery and corruption in the corporate boardroom have also attracted attention. Tony McNamara's *The John Wayne Principle* (for the STC in 1996/97

and Playbox last year) portrays what happens when a young hippy is obliged to run his father's mega-business (following the latter's botched suicide attempt) in order to benefit from the will. The routine betrayals and back-stabbings throughout the company and the family (not to mention its endemic unethical business dealings) are revealed in a very funny if cynical comedy, but the final accord between the young man and his sister is quite chilling.

Veteran alternative playwright John Romeril's *Love Suicides*—while obviously much less a 'political' drama than much of his earlier output—is also interesting in this context. Essentially a contemporary reworking of Chikamatsu Monzaemon's love suicide plays of the early 18th century, Romeril's version replaces the humble clerk and courtesan of the original with a failed Perth tycoon on the eve of imprisonment for his business crimes, and a young Japanese tourist destined for an arranged and unwanted marriage. The two have one glorious night together on the town and then end it all in King's Park (instead of fleeing to tax and extradition-free islands as some fictitious characters seem to do). The tycoon had planned to suicide anyway, rather than face jail, but his end here takes on fresh meaning from the old Japanese play.

Chikamatsu's world view embraced the notion of reincarnation, so perhaps Romeril is suggesting that crooked entrepreneurs don't disappear, even when found out; they will simply reappear in another guise.

Plays about politicians last year included Michael Gurr's dual Premier's Literary Awards winner, *Jerusalem* (which premiered in 1996 for Playbox and transferred last year to Sydney for the STC), and a new play by Kevin Summers called *The Empty Say*, seen at La Mama in May. The former deals with the complex events in the life of parliamentary Labor Party backbencher Cameron Rickman and his family, analysing their attempts to do good—'to build Jerusalem'—in various ways; in particular. Summers' play is about a Labor Party leader from the old school (Bill Hayden perhaps?) who is toppled from the leadership by his best mate to enable a more up-to-date New Labor movement to take the country into another version of Jerusalem. In the classic style of Australian political drama, this play explores the private man and his family as much as the public man and his party, as well as the emptiness of so much public (and private) political rhetoric.

There were also some political dramas within dramas last year, especially in Melbourne. Emigré Newcastle company Zeal Theatre ran into trouble when its new play, *The Essentials*, (another indictment of the way essential services—the ambulance service in particular—have been run down in Victoria under a thinly-disguised Kennett State Government) was banned by the local council responsible for the administration of the Gasworks Theatre in Port Melbourne. The Victorian Trades Hall Council gave it a run at the Trades Hall in Carlton, a venue refurbished for theatre productions for the Melbourne International Comedy Festival in April.

CONTROVERSY ALSO SURROUNDED the Melbourne University Student Union Theatre Department's attempt to stage Stephen Sewell's *Sodomy and Cigarettes*. This play was commissioned with a grant from Arts Victoria's New Commissions programme in 1996, but failed to appear in the advertised season that year, much to the delight of conspiracy theorists who leapt to the conclusion that it was pulled off for fear of being caught biting the hand that fed. The explanation that it was simply not ready for production seemed more plausible when an excellent production duly appeared last year.

Looking more like a 1990s Nowra political burlesque than Sewell's Marxist dramas of the 1980s, *Sodomy* is about the rise and rise of a larger-than-life 1930s American civic figure called Jeff Knut who has friends in high business places, a penchant for major projects and a predilection for 'neutralising' opponents.

Above: Janet Andrewartha and Jackie Weaver in Navigating *(photograph by Melanie Gray). Above left: the timelessness of the political corpse—Simon Phillips' production of* Julius Cæsar *(photograph by Jeff Busby).*

Even Shakespeare was legged up onto the hustings again last year. A Melbourne group called Kissing Carrion staged *Henry VI Part 3* as a carefully-chosen metaphor of contemporary power politics for the Fringe Festival in September; and the upsurge in popularity of *Macbeth* (at least three separate productions of that play Australia-wide last year) reminds us of its powerful statements about corrupt government, not least in the ascension of Malcolm and his jobs-for-the-boys speech at the end.

Most prominent of the 1997 Shakespeares in this context, however, was yet another Simon Phillips production of *Julius Cæsar*, this time for the QTC. First seen at the Playhouse in Adelaide for the STCSA in 1991, and remounted for the MTC in 1996, this 110-minute, no-interval version in corporate modern dress provides many dark parallels with contemporary political events, including the Whitlam dismissal and the Keating takeover from Hawke. A power-dressed Robyn Nevin in a blood-red suit as Mark Antony (Carmen Lawrence? Pauline Hanson?) added sexual-political ambiguity.

And finally, stand-up comedy this past year has got stuck into politics and political figures after a period of refuge in the standard domain of sex, drugs and other auto-biographical matters. A very promising young stand-up, Will Anderson, hopped into Victorian state politics and business, the reconciliation debate and the ubiquitous member for Oxley in his Comedy Festival piece *Diet Life*, while the recently slumbrous Rod Quantock's *Sunrise Boulevard* (for the Comedy Festival and later at the Trades Hall) gave a detailed and hilariously pointed explication of how local and state power, politics and major events really work in Victoria, complete with diagrams on a blackboard. And, as the Demtel man says on television, there was 'more; much more' in the same comic vein.

After all that, you've earned your few weeks of cricket and the beach. But be warned: I suspect that when you think it's safe to return to the theatre, a fresh batch of political drama awaits you. This is not a trend that's going to go away in a hurry.

As the several authors formerly known as Bertolt Brecht said in a poem: 'In the dark times, will there also be singing? Yes, there will also be singing, *about* the dark times.' ■

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FLASH IN THE PAN

Davy Jones' schlocker

Titanic, dir. James Cameron (general release).When I was a little girl, my father told me of my grandfather's work on the Titanic. Harry Hughes was a boilermaker at Harland & Wolff's in Belfast during 1911 and 1912, supporting the family back in England. During its building (said Dad), the ship was daubed with such slogans as 'God himself couldn't sink this ship'. My father's God was mysterious and could be terrible; it seemed logical then that the vessel of such blasphemy must sink on her maiden voyage.

Those same words are put in the mouth of one of the characters in the opening scene of the film: Ismay, I think, the Cunard minion who sneaked into one of the lifeboats with the women when Titanic foundered.

The makers of this *Titanic* have spent nearly $300 million, a sum perhaps comparable to the pre-Great War value of the £3 million Cunard spent on *their* Titanic. And you can see where the money has gone—the special effects beat anything I've seen so far. The film is a good three hours long and should be seen on big screen, because it will lose much of its impact when it goes to video: despite *Titanic*'s being nominated for eight Oscars, the support story is thin. That isn't to say the performances aren't good, because they are—Kate Winslet couldn't act badly if she tried, and Leonardo de Caprio is highly suitable as the young artist-adventurer. But the real stories of the Titanic passengers are far more interesting than the fictions that are served up by screenwriters, particularly when those screenwriters are stone-deaf to the speech rhythms and styles of behaviour of 1912.

The film will be popular however, and deservedly so, because there are some amazing moments that make you feel as though you're on board the ship—the story of the huge thing's destruction is in itself gripping. So it's a pity that the level of the drama has to be that of a Danielle Steele novel. And *why* do directors of period movies never let their female leads wear a hat? It was an essential for all outdoors existence and one of the most important signals of affluence and respectability. Remember Gwyneth Paltrow's Emma, driving a gig bareheaded in canary-yellow décolleté, sporting a Riviera tan and showing enough collarbone to make a xylophone? So the teenaged Rose (Winslet) spends most of her time hatless, wearing strong makeup and sophisticated colours, such as burgundy with black lace that only a matron would have worn.

That's precisely where *Titanic* founders (sorry!): the researchers have done their work and come up with some wonderful visual pastiche, but the feel is gone, forgotten—the *Zeitgeist* just isn't there. *A Night to Remember* had fewer bells and whistles, but there were people acting in it who really could remember.

—Juliette Hughes

Competition

First-class passengers on the Titanic may have had a 'high standard of toilet luxury and comfort *at* sea', but *in* the sea? Well—not even 'Vinolia Otto' could save them. Or could it?

If you can convince us in 50 words or thereabouts that this soap contributed to the saving of even a single soul after the ship hit the iceberg, we will send to the writer of the entry we like best a copy of *The Oxford History of World Cinema*.

Send your entry to *Eureka Street* Soap, PO Box 553, Richmond, VIC 3121, to reach us by March 1, and we'll publish your froth and bubble in the April issue while you relax and read about every film you have ever seen.

Spice racket

Spiceworld: the movie, dir. Bob Spiers (Hoyts). *Spiceworld: the movie* may not, admittedly, be pitched to the demographic from which *Eureka Street* draws its readership, but there are lessons for everyone to be drawn from this cheerful romp.

The first is the art of product placement. The Spice Girls draw part of their modest income from endorsing Pepsi and part from Polaroid, a type of camera which would be better named Paranoid. Coincidentally, both these brands have cameos in the script, as does Nike and God knows what else. The problem is that it is hard to know where product placement ends and product placement begins. For instance, Elton John and Clive James each appear for about as long as does a Pepsi can, but one had thought both John and James were sufficiently capable of endorsing themselves as products.

Roger Moore has a role as the distant chief controlling the careers of the Spice Girls. He appears occasionally caressing the head of a piglet, a performance which apparently necessitates a warning at the end of the film that 'the animals used in this film were in no way mistreated'. If only the same concern had been given to the humans watching it.

Comparison is often made between the Spice Girls and the Beatles, which is ludicrous because surveys have shown there are 20 per cent more Spice Girls than there were Beatles. Nevertheless, a second lesson to be drawn from *Spiceworld: the movie* is the importance of product placement. The Spice Girls are a carefully designed and created product and much of the humour of this film is generated by giving the audience pleasurable market tests. So we see Posh Spice (the one with long hair and thick lips) going on military manoeuvres in a cocktail dress made from army camouflage

material. And we see Ginger Spice (the one with long hair and thick lips) changing wardrobes with the other Spice Girls (the ones with long hair and thick lips), so they can dress up as each other.

And we see many other things so banal, pointless and self-serving that one is tempted to question the remarks of one of the girls that they wanted to 'mark a change in British movies of the past'. It just goes to show that you can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can fool yourself around the clock.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Dilly dalai

Seven Years in Tibet, dir. Jean-Jacques Annaud (independent cinemas). This is a disappointing 'man finding his soul' film about a journey through the Himalayas to Lhasa, the home of the Dalai Lama. The film promises an insight into a rarely glimpsed culture; unfortunately the Tibetan angle is the latest piece of bandwagon morality from Hollywood.

Brad Pitt is Heinrich Harrer, an egotistical Austrian who sets out to conquer Nanga Parbat mountain. His party fails in its attempt, and, via a POW camp, he makes his way to Tibet with Peter Aufschnaiter (David Thewlis). The film finally gains its focus —when they reach Tibet—in the relationship between Harrer and the young Dalai Lama, echoing the bond from *The Last Emperor*.

Seven Years sets out to accomplish much more than it achieves, desperately trying to become an 'important motion picture of our times'. Harrer's transformation is supposed to be uplifting, but instead it is filled with clichés and throwaway symbolism. The Chinese–Tibetan conflict is shown with minimal passion: despite his 'transformation', Harrer cares only for himself as his adopted country loses its freedom.

The characters never develop past their introductory outlines, notwithstanding a running time of over two hours. The many plot lines that the movie starts to follow add no depth to the characters, making empathy difficult.

Great amounts of money have been spent in order to recreate Tibet in the foothills of the Andes. The landscape is beautifully photographed, but a weak script and unusually lacklustre performance by Pitt fail to ignite interest in the story.

—Thomas Mann

Lèse-majesté

Her Majesty Mrs Brown, dir. John Madden (independent cinemas). This is no grand romance revealed. The 19th century censors, political and familial, have made sure of that by culling any suggestion of the indiscretions of passion (save conjugal ones) from the account of the connection between Queen Victoria, and her Highland ghillie, John Brown. (Good of a Scots commoner to have such a proper common name.) And wisely, director and scriptwriter (Jeremy Brock), have not indulged themselves by embroidering the stark historical record. They make absence, not excess, the dynamic of the film.

Madden is good at puritan repression (remember his *Ethan Frome*) and in *Mrs Brown* his understanding of the obdurate machinery of imperial British rule is both delicate and informed. This is as much a film about psychological colonisation as it is about affection: all three central characters, Victoria (Judi Dench), her servant Brown (Billy Connolly) and her Prime Minister Disreli (Antony Sher), are constrained by power even as they exercise it.

The performances are glittering. Connolly is the biggest surprise—his Brown is a canny balance of pride and vulnerability, and his jagged physicality makes Hollywood muscle look like a rubber cushion. Judi Dench's Victoria is both intransigent and feminine, quite equal—even addicted—to the gavottes of deference that go on around her, yet credible as she lays the table in a highland cottage and takes a loving dram with Brown and his kin. Perhaps too credible. Dench's Victoria, in love with a servant who calls her 'woman', yanks her stirrups as he will, and tells her no lies but the last one—that he wants her to resume her royal duties—is a little too twentieth century, too post-Freudian-verbal in the context of a film that works mostly in the rhythms of protocol—by indirection, gesture and the cobra flick of irony.

But it is Antony Sher who is the pivot of the film. His Disraeli is a masterly conjuring act—craft in every glance and tonal modulation. Even the padding that points his chin is apt. It is painful to watch him, the powerful outsider Jew, wildly out of place on a drenched Scots mountain, go to work on the loyalties and intelligence of the powerful dispossessd Scot. They almost understand one another. But it is Disraeli, or Disraeli's England, that wins.

—Morag Fraser

Die Blechtrommel–The Tin Drum, (1979). It is impossible to watch Volker Schlöndorff's adaptation of Günter Grass' 1959 novel *The Tin Drum* without being disturbed by the power of the 11-year-old David Bennent's performance as Oskar Matzerath, the child-man. All children have the dæmon of art's essential deep mimicry until adolescent self-consciousness suppresses it—look at what happens to their paintings once they stop themselves looking with the terrible eye of innocence at what is really there and start trying to ape what others see instead. Schlöndorff could not have made this film without Bennent's very childhood as its keystone. Grass had refused many approaches to film *Die Blechtrommel*; all of the would-be adaptors wished to portray Oskar as a dwarf, not as a child. Grass (once Willy Brandt's speechmaker) approved Schlöndorff's ideas and was deeply involved in the making of the film.

The film is set in what was Danzig Free State and is now Gdansk, Grass' own birthplace. It opens on a note of desperate farce: Oskar Matzerath narrates the story of how in 1899 his grandmother Anna (Tina Engel) saves his arsonist grandfather from the police at their first meeting, by spreading her voluminous skirts over him as she roasts potatoes in a field. While the two Keystone-ish cops question her, she eats unflurriedly, lies to them confidently, and only gasps quietly as the fugitive takes full advantage of his position. It sets a precedent: throughout the film, Oskar is frequently seen enclosed: under tables, grandstands, skirts, down the cellar, in the cupboard—history seen from below gives a relentlessly human perspective. In fact he resents his expulsion from the womb so much that he is quietened only when his mother, Anna's daughter Agnes (Angela Winkler), says that she will buy him a tin drum when he is three.

The third birthday party is fateful: Agnes' affair with her cousin Jan is being carried out openly in front of the family (Jan may well be Oskar's father). The party is full of adult foolishness and Oskar's detachment reminds of the beginning of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as Stephen grows from baby tuckoo to the defenceless observer of a grandiose and pointless family row over Parnell. Oskar wanders around with his new drum as the family gets drunker and sillier, and when the frightful overgrown boy scout Greff (Heinz Bennent, David Bennent's father) measures him against the wall and prophesies that he will grow 'big like me', he decides to give up growing. He throws himself down the cellar steps and from then on remains the size of a child. David Bennent is frightening at times and this is one of them; he has piercing round eyes that stare angrily around him with growing comprehension but never acceptance. One of the wonders of this film is the credibility of his change from newborn baby to twenty-year-old man, all in the same small body. Oskar finds that he can shatter glass with his shriek of protest, and from then on he drums away the madness building around him as ordinary folk like his parents and neighbours are caught up in mindless enthusiasm for Nazism's pomps. People protest about his drumming at peril of their windows, spectacles and glass bottles, as when he shrieks down the specimen jars at the doctor's surgery—reptiles, organs and, horrifyingly, a fœtus, tumbling down onto broken glass on the floor in an extravagance of pink and yellow ruin.

Igor Luther's cinematography is painterly: the lowering skies over the potato field, with colours à la Millet; figures around a family card game suddenly taking on the dark warmth of a Rembrandt; the dead face of the benevolent Jewish toy seller lit like a Caravaggio apostle's; and the shock as what one thought was a model town of toy houses turns out to be the real skyline of Danzig as the *sieg heils* ring out like bells gone all wrong as Hitler motorcades the streets to the rapture of Grass' ordinary Germans, who have had to deal ever since with the shame of such welcome given to such evil. Schlöndorff's direction gives us a fierce eye, through Bennent's hostile stare, on such chaotic folly. Arendt is right: the Nazi evil was horribly bound up with seeming blandness—the ordinariness of pomposities, bureaucracies and small-mindedness. Oskar, born with preternatural ability to reflect and to judge, can only reject what he sees.

Yet here is the conundrum: you can fulfil a genuine and valuable artistic vision only by using the talents of a brilliant child who is portrayed in situations that might be injurious to that child, but whose very infancy is crucial to the power of the incongruity between his age and the actions in which he must engage. The two dreary attempts to make movies out of Nabokov's *Lolita* failed partly because the nymphet was played—*had* to be played—by a girl who was far older than the Lolita of the book—clever, nasty, worrying book that it is.

Perhaps it is unfair to compare *The Tin Drum* with *Lolita*. There is a claustrophobic feel to Nabokov at his worst: *Lolita* contains some bravura prose without ever completely justifying itself—a problem for the film-maker, then, to steer the story away from boredom (for with whom can you sympathise?) without giving the audience a thorough dose of loathing rather than pity and terror. The nature of *The Tin Drum* makes the film-maker's task easier, though 'easy' is an inappropriate term here. But the task is made possible by the generosity of Grass' concerns: the whole picaresque and hearty sweep of them, the epic versus the anti-romance. But still very difficult.

It is not surprising, then, that the film of *The Tin Drum* would excite controversy. Only last year, it was banned as obscene in Oklahoma, after pressure by Oklahomans for Children and Families (OCAF), a right-wing Christian fundamentalist organisation. (One can only wonder how it took 18 years to come to their attention, especially since *The Tin Drum* won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film in 1979.) It was evident at the time of filming, however, that Schlöndorff had gone to considerable trouble to protect Bennent and presumably himself from any possible accusations of exploitation. Bennent's parents and legal representatives were at the set during the scenes that have caused the trouble. Schlöndorff said in an interview during the filming: 'David is a medium. He has grasped the novel so well, we have read it to him so often, he has so frequently questioned it, that he becomes part of every situation.' (Quoted from the Oklahoma Department of Libraries website.)

Schlöndorff and Grass never lose sight of the real obscenity which, as always, is the appalling ability ordinary humans have to dehumanise other humans, as when the Matzeraths' *gemütlich* Christmas dinner is accompanied by a comfortable discussion about the necessity for starving the Russians. Yet somehow the film manages to celebrate humaneness, and will make you laugh as well as wince.

—Juliette Hughes

Care-ful

The Rainmaker, dir. Francis Ford Coppola (general distribution). Good films can be born of bad books. Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* was very profitable reading for Coppola back in the '70s. Unfortunately the director's more recent holiday reading has proven rather less inspirational.

The Rainmaker is the sixth John Grisham novel to be filmed, and in all half dozen I am yet to find a character with the depth of even a toddler's pool. Like the previous five flicks from the Grisham collection, *Rainmaker* is set in and around the legal profession. This time it's Memphis, a town with too many lawyers, and most of them crooked. Enter young honest hero, law graduate Rudy Baylor (Matt Damon) who,down among the ambulance chasers and first-class law sharks, makes up for his lack of experience by caring.

Rudy cares for Dot Black (Mary Kay Place), whose son Donny Ray (Johnny Whitworth) is dying of leukemia; he cares for Kelly (Claire Danes), who is beaten by her husband; he cares for Miss Birdie, his landlady. This boy would have taken in a sick puppy had there been one extra minute of screen time in it

Kindly, Rudy agrees to go into partnership with the clumsy, but streetwise Deck (Danny DeVito), who has sat (and failed) his bar exam six times. They rent cheap rooms (you know—the light, airy, ones with old wooden furniture) and start working on 'the case of a lifetime'.

Handsome photography and fine performances give this film more class than it deserves. Full to bursting with posturing about justice and corporate corruption, *Rainmaker* has no convincing characters.

—Siobhan Jackson

Cold comfort

The Ice Storm, dir. Ang Lee (Village/Greater Union). *The Ice Storm* is another period drama from the director of *Sense and Sensibility*. The period happens to be the 1970's, but part of the skill of this film is to make the recent past as remote, hostile and difficult to understand as the elaborate social nuances of the early nineteenth century. To some extent this is achieved in the superb production design. You start to believe that if you sleep on a water bed the size of a swimming pool, talk on a chunky plastic phone or wear clothes that are designed to look as if they don't fit, then you actually relate to people differently. Such awkward appearances are well matched to a story about uncertain social mores and moral collapse.

Ben Hood (Kevin Kline) and his wife Elena (Joan Allen) are trying to get the family together for Thanksgiving, a task which involves getting their son Paul (Tobey Maguire) back from college and getting their fourteen-year-old daughter, Wendy (Christina Ricci), to sit at the table with them. Outside, the cold of the Connecticut winter offers the prospect of a cosy indoor gathering. But Hood is having an affair with his neighbour, Janie Carver (Sigourney Weaver) and Elena is suspicious. Elena wants to go back into therapy with her husband; she is jealous of her daughter's youth. Her world is on the verge of disintegration. Janie's world is equally precariously balanced. She is unable to communicate any kind of moral values to her sons, Mikey and Sandy, and is at a loss when she finds Wendy fooling around with one of them. Hard to know what to say to young people when you've accepted an invitation to a 'key party', one in which you leave your car keys in a bowl and go home with whoever's keys you draw in a lucky dip at the end of the night. It's a scenario which trips into tragedy, played out against a stark and beautiful landscape, and becomes a telling portrayal of human emptiness.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Reading the news

WHATEVER ELSE YOU might come away with after seeing the Four Corners series *The Uncertain Eye* (ABC Mondays 8.30pm), it will be the conviction that powerful *men* have considerable control of the most powerful communication tool on earth, and would like that control to be total. The movie newsreel's evolution into television news and infotainment during a century of change for which broadcasting is significantly responsible, is the burden of the series, and it makes for thoughtful watching.

The first episode showed the divergent views of the moving camera's two pioneers: Thomas Alva Edison and his cynical relegation of it to profit-making sleaze; and the Lumière brothers with their attachment to the medium's importance as an unbiased recorder of history. In the shortest of times the two approaches had converged: moving pictures were providing information, but practicalities demanded that sea battles and volcanoes and such-like had to be faked in order to provide the kind of footage that punters wanted. It was prophetic then, when Pancho Villa restaged battle charges for the cameras, increasing his popular support, making him probably the first electronic media politician.

Almost a century later Gulf War reporters found the Pentagon firmly in control of war news—only the serendipity of CNN's presence in Baghdad gave anything else away—the lessons of the free hand given in Vietnam had been learnt, and the grudge had been held long. Now revenge was sweet: the armies of the fourth estate were to give the watching world propaganda for history, patriotism instead of impartiality. The ethics of the great war correspondents of the past were to be honoured only in their breach.

But this is also the century of the unmanageable message; where the essential fuel for what Fox Mulder of *The X-Files* calls 'the military-industrial-entertainment complex' is the money spent by the consumers it tries (with some success) to manipulate. Cameras of the world media organisations at history-making events such as the collapse of East Germany and, even for a brief time, at Tienanmen Square protected many activists from murder by the authorities. Totalitarian regimes fear and hate free-flowing information: for them the medium should be not so much the massage as the rack to straighten out dissent.

With cable's 24-hour coverage, news ceased to be a bulletin delivered from the unquestioned magisterium of the dark-suited announcer; it had become a constant flow of images presented through the camera's eye to ours. That magisterium has largely passed to the current affairs programs, the prime-time commercial ones with their mixture of outrage and pabulum, dictated by advertisers, the public broadcasters with their Serious-Sam image, watched by few, needed by all.

If you ever doubted the authenticity of *Frontline*'s dissection of what really happens behind the current affairs desk, *The Uncertain Eye* should reassure you, if *reassure* is the right word. The casualties of commercial current affairs are many, with what seems an unusual proportion of good women going under. Jana Wendt and Jill Singer have plenty to say on the subject of editorial control, and their comments are laid against the spiel of the shirt-sleeved ones, the executive producers who, to a man, deny the need for real journalism on commercial television. Peter Manning, of Channel Seven, is particularly imaginative: he intimates that even without the conflict over Singer's investigation into Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett's family share dealings, 'some changes were going to be made anyway'.

It all sits oddly with the fact that, since the avowed aim is ratings above all else, *Today Tonight*'s coverage of the share affair rated better than ever before—perhaps people only watch pabulum at prime time because that's all they're offered. In the case of Jana Wendt's departure from the much-touted-as-quality *Witness*, there is an air of truculence as the producer seems to be saying she didn't know her place: her job was basically it seems to do the stories she was told to do in the way she was told to do them. Again, very odd, when you see Wendt's firm reiteration of the freedom and control she says she was promised as an inducement to front *Witness*. There is the afterburn stink of boy-power having done it again. 1997 was not a good year for Channel Seven's treatment of top women journalists. Or perhaps *both* Wendt and Singer are mistaken, and know very little about what is important in television journalism.

Paul Barry, who followed Wendt into the presenter's spot on *Witness*, has a hard job to prove that he is not simply one of the boys, with a more complaisant attitude to dictation over the program's content. Or perhaps it's not seen as so shocking when a man challenges another, powerful, man. Perhaps they feel safer letting him have his head more than Wendt. With all this, Seven's management has a long way to go before it produces a program approaching the gravitas of Nine's *Sunday*, placed as it is in a slot that is safe from the pressure of advertisers' agendas.

IT LEAVES YOU WITH THE WORRYING THOUGHT that perhaps Australia isn't ready yet for a female Ed Murrow, doyen of early-fifties' American public affairs television. I don't actually think that today the commercial channels would allow *any* of their journalists to go after a Joseph McCarthy, as Murrow did so superbly. Or perhaps they'd let Ray Martin. After all, our own Prime Minister felt warm and safe with Ray, who was, you remember, also entrusted with the vital task of midwiving James Packer's debut on his father's channel.

In a world where 'courageous' has become for politicians and journalists, a synonym for 'suicidally stupid', we still need our commentators to be safeguarded from interference. *The Uncertain Eye* reveals that Bob Hawke pressured David Hill to have Geraldine Doogue removed from commentary on the Gulf War.

The woman, after all, has an unfortunate habit of honesty, which she has used in a coming edition of *Compass* (beginning February 1, 10.15pm) to take a hard look at the power structures of that other boys' club, the Australian Catholic Church.

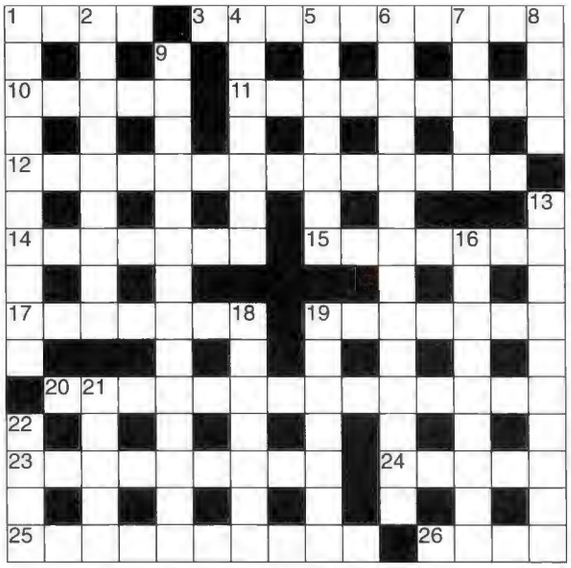
Doogue takes an optimistic perspective however; after exploring the terrible distortions of authority that occurred over the last decade with the child abuse scandals, she points to parishes and informal meetings where power is shared, where priests really do serve their people.

No doubt some powerful people won't like her views, but my bet is she'll outlast them in that uncertain public eye, the same way she's outlasted Mr Hawke. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer and critic.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 60, January–February 1998

Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS

1. In speaking, discover a relation—by blood? (4)
3. Telepathy, possibly, an exercise facing east—the new me in light footwear! (10)
10. It goes back round the parson at the fountain. (5)
11. Anno domini 1998, as the Romans would write. (9)
12. Strangely similar linen Ma is saving up in 11-across for a future time that will be rosy! Such is her belief! (14)
14. Not to be long-winded, I tell you plainly that the insect is on the cheese. (7)
15. Specialist, with precipitation, rushes to get on the carriage. (7)
17. Dr Dracula and friends? (7)
19. Crush me gently, darling! (7)
20. Pavement artist can't get going. Produces works and drawings between two streets, and back up another. (5, 3, 6)
23. A bit of the mountain range where we find the Christmas bird? (9)
24. Opera heroine on standard note. (5)
25. *Eureka Street* must have appeared about a dozen times this year—at regular intervals. (5, 5)
26. Bad blood you'd have, we'd hear, after the start of fever. (4)

DOWN

1. A healthy person is self-moving, they say, and has what it takes to get around. (10)
2. Perfect partner for one of Wilde's heroes? There could be a wide file on her! (5, 4)
4. Sounds like warm weather for reading a Digest! (7)
5. Artist returns with watered silk. Put it in the cupboard. (7)
6. Piecing together the scene of the crime, again study Football code acting without a motive. (14)
7. Flashy types go to safe retreats? (5)
8. Late Christmas cards? Time is up to send them. (4)
9. There's no show without Punch! Such a one could bring animation to the ALP, for instance. (4, 2, 3, 5)
13. The umbrella is beneath the rack. Get it! (10)
16. A 23-across can be found up there before 6th January. A fruitful resource! (1, 4, 4)
18. Anyhow, don't stay endlessly. Be prepared for action. (5, 2)
19. She unfortunately dated SS man during the war—very upsetting! (7)
21. Short trees could be clipped, to good effect. (5)

Solution to Crossword no. 59, December 1997

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

Frank Stilwell

on the West Committee's higher education report

Peter Mares on Asia's currency chaos

Christine Williams on Nugget Coombs' environment

Michael McGirr rests the cricket in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth

Race Mathews on the fortunes of Australian Credit Unions

Frank Brennan on the churches and the politics of native title in '98

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