EUREKA STREET

Vol. 8 No. 8 October 1998

$5.95

Peter Cochrane on Henry Reynolds' *history*

Voting matters — Francis Sullivan and Jack Waterford

Dewi Anggraeni and Dan Madigan on
Indonesia and Islam

The Little Desert Case — Libby Robin on
Australia's lively history of environmental politics

John Heaps, Ivan Deveson, Gabrielle Lord,
Edmund Campion, John Funder & Philip Kennedy
on the pontificate of
John Paul II — after twenty years

EUREKA STREET

Volume 8 Number 8
October 1998

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

Henry Reynolds concludes Fate of a Free People *with a quote from John Locke, whose advice to dispossessed peoples was to use the law and, if they failed, to try and try again till justice is eventually done, even if it takes generations. The cunning in Reynolds is radical intent backed by the leverage of the Enlightenment.*

—Peter Cochrane on the work of historian Henry Reynolds, p34.

Australia Council for the Arts

This project has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding advisory body.

Cover design by Siobhan Jackson Photograph of Pope John Paul II by Andrew Stark; photograph of Henry Reynolds by Leon Mead, courtesy Allen & Unwin; reproduction of Benjamin Dutterau's 'The Conciliation', 1840.

Cartoon p5 by Dean Moore. Photographs pp6, 12 by Andrew Stark. Photograph p14 by Greg Scullin. Photographs p16 by Penny Tweedie. Photographs/graphics pp28–31, courtesy Melbourne University Press. Graphics pp15, 18–24, 41–45 by Siobhan Jackson.

Correction for September 1998: p12 graphic was by Peter Fraser.

Eureka Street magazine
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Eureka Street magazine, ISSN 1036–1758, Australia Post Print Post approved pp349181/00314, is published ten times a year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond, Victoria 3121
Tel: 03 9427 7311 Fax: 03 9428 4450
e-mail: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au
http://www.openplanet.com.au/eureka
Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by Daniel Madigan, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond.
Printed by Doran Printing, 46 Industrial Drive, Braeside VIC 3195.

Unsolicited manuscripts, including poetry and fiction, will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Requests for permission to reprint material from the magazine should be addressed in writing to:
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COMMENT

MORAG FRASER

When will we ever *learn*?

WHY DID IT TAKE UNTIL halfway through the election period for education to register on the Richter scale of political calculation? Tax we got. GST we got. Footy and gold medals we got, plus Pat Rafter's grace, and President Clinton's dereliction.

But what about consideration of Australia's future as a country positioned, by its remarkable tradition of independent research and scholarship, to be an intellectual powerhouse at home and in the region at a time when the need for redevelopment is so great? Not a priority, said the polls. And we, like sheep ...

But not all of us, fortunately. There were voices from the outer cheering for something more than self-interest. In mid-September a group of qualified citizens told John Howard and Kim Beazley that Australia's present education policy was inadequate, inequitable and misdirected. Professor Peter Karmel, long an authority in Australian education, sounded the alarm on schooling.

Higher education got a run in the aftermath of Labor's education policy launch when Kim Beazley vowed, if elected, to become the Education Prime Minister. Given the record of both parties over two decades of shrinking investment and constant 'reform' in education, his work would be cut out for him. Labor was the party which, under Paul Keating, refused for the first time to fund the salary increases of university staff, causing an ongoing 10–12 per cent financial shortfall that Australian tertiary institutions, with their restricted revenue base, are in no position to make up. There is no guarantee that the refusal will be reversed.

Meanwhile, the Coalition's Education Minister, Dr Kemp, insists that the government is fostering quality in higher education by adding choice and decentralising the system. He repeats these claims in the taxpayer-funded 'News on Higher Education', despite evidence from universities that Government in fact centralises where it chooses. It carefully controls, for example, the ratio of graduate to undergraduate places (turning away undergraduates is not electorally popular); controls the distribution of post-graduate awards (in response to regional rather than academic considerations) and proposes a universal graduate exit test.

So only a determined optimist could be encouraged about the future of education in Australia. Fortunately there are people able to register protest and at the same time imagine, with force, a way forward.

Professor Peter Doherty and Sir Gustav Nossal gave public lectures in late August and September. Both are effervescent talkers, full of unsubornable passion for their subject and qualified hope for the future. They are also scathing about the prevailing climate—we live in a time when the term 'intellectual elite' has been co-opted into the political vocabulary of derogation. Both men are exemplary

leaders at a time when the country bemoans the lack of a leadership of integrity. They could have been speaking from another planet, so marked was the contrast between their words and the cramped rhetoric of our political debate.

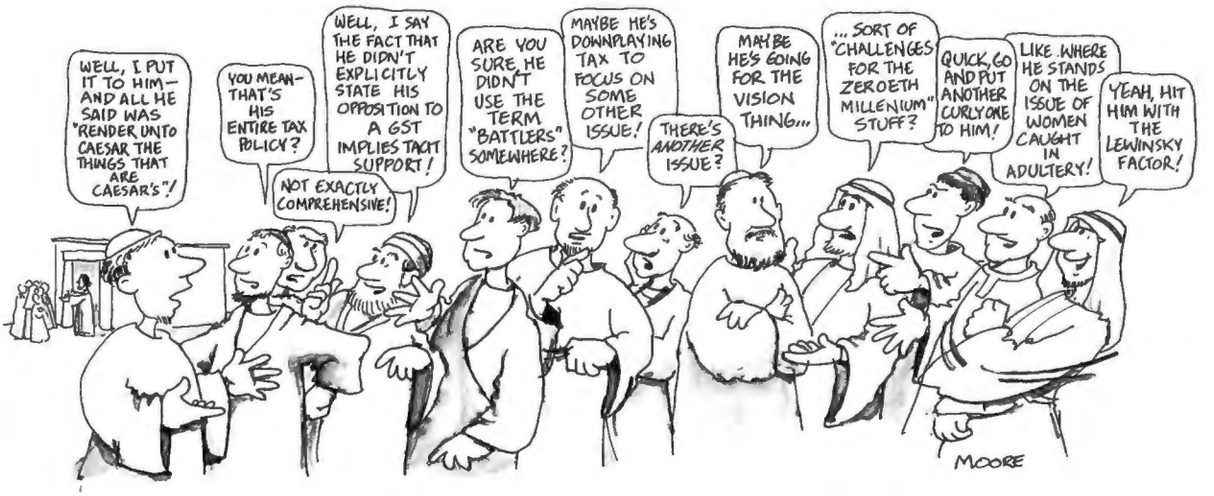
Sir Gustav gave the Daniel Mannix lecture, on the life and work of Sir Frank Macfarlane Burnet, his celebrated predecessor as head of The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute. One of his observations was refreshingly shocking: he remarked that the 1960 Nobel Prize winner's diffident and single-minded approach to his research had preserved him from two of the major pitfalls of academic and scientific life: competition and conformity.

Professor Doherty gave the Larry Adler address, subsequently broadcast on the ABC's *Science Show*. The lecture and its repeat bookended Channel Nine's 'Great Debate' between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Trust a wayward scientist to provide the control. Media minders had done their best to make Mr Howard and Mr Beazley conform and compete according to the image they think voters want, and say only what would sell. But Doherty says exactly what he believes, frequently, and although his 1996 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine might not guarantee him the sustained esteem of his colleagues ('You are only as good as your next experiment!') it has given him warrant to speak for Australia.

He argues spiritedly for national acknowledgment of an Australian trait: the resourceful inventiveness that has produced such notable research here, against the geographical odds. He also argues for appropriate public funding of the kind of pure research that has underpinned so much of Australia's disproportionate success. And the onetime vet from Queensland roundly repudiates the language of envy that has infected our national commitment to higher education.

So we have the models. What is needed now is the national will to implement them. ■

—Morag Fraser



COMMENT: 2

FRANCIS SULLIVAN

Not getting through

PUBLIC SURVEYS CONSISTENTLY rate unemployment and health as the most urgent community concerns. Both trigger the same anxieties for ordinary Australians—insecurity and the fear of impoverishment. Throughout the federal election campaign, not enough attention has been given to the plight of those who rely on the public safety net.

These days many people find themselves missing out. Too many studies show that unemployment is the entrée to a life of poverty and social division. Youth unemployment has soared to over 30 per cent in some regions. Nearly a million children live in households where no-one is in paid work. Half of the unemployed men over 45 struggle to find work for up to a year after losing their jobs.

The situation with under-employment is not much better. Casual work and lower wages leave many families dependent on an income package of work and welfare payments just to get by. This begs the questions the major parties must answer—how are middle and low-income people going to share in the prosperity of the community? What social benefits will be available to sustain the less well-off as the gap between the fortunate and the rest widens?

The parties realise that economic and technological change is leaving a significant proportion of the

population behind. But Australia's economy is too dependent on global effects for government to turn back the clock.

Through their respective tax packages, both major parties promised to eradicate the work disincentives for welfare beneficiaries, reduce poverty and relieve the tax burden for below-average-income households. Whereas the Government's attempt is too heavily skewed in favour of individuals earning more than $50,000 a year, the Opposition's targeted tax cuts seem limp without any concerted broadening of the tax base.

SOME HAVE ARGUED that a fairer approach would combine the Opposition's tax cuts with the Government's taxation of some goods and services. Either way, greater certainty of funding for the safety net is essential.

The Government admits that the level of unemployment has troughed at eight per cent, while the Opposition ambitiously sticks to a five per cent jobless target. Both positions still mask the actual level of unemployment. With economic growth slowing, the major parties must be flexible. The trickle-down theory has largely remained that—a theory; and restrictive work practices have stifled productivity. Employment solutions that attempt a mix of restrained youth wages and well-targeted, government-funded jobs must be seriously entertained.

At the same time it will be essential to combat social division through the maintenance of the social wage. Families with combined incomes of up to $45,000 not only benefit less than well-off families but their incomes have fallen in real terms over the last 15 years. Since full welfare payments have been indexed over that period, these families are caught in the middle. The 'politics of downward envy' is alive and well. Not only do these families struggle to remain employed, they also have less to meet their basic needs. Unless essential services, like health care, are regarded as social goods and made genuinely available to middle and low-income people, only some Australians will benefit from the nation's prosperity.

Medicare is central to the social wage. Throughout the Accord agreements, there was a trade off between restraint in real wages and access to free public hospital care and bulk-billing of GP services. Over time these benefits have been eroded by increased hospital waiting times and higher medical bills.

The Government's solution is to subsidise private health insurance heavily—to the tune of a further $5.5 billion. Instead of assisting the needy, the chronically ill and the elderly, it has given unnecessary rebates to the well-off. Seventy per cent of people with health insurance earn more than $70,000 a year. If these people are not required to use their insurance when going to hospital, the public system is still at risk of being overburdened.

The Opposition's alternative is to plough an extra $2 billion into public hospitals. This will buy some short-term relief, but the waiting lists will continue to grow. Uncertainty about the availability of public hospital beds has compelled over 700,000 low-income people to remain privately insured. The Labor policy fails to recognise that essential private hospital services are used as part of the social safety net.

As with unemployment, the major parties must compromise. The Government cannot direct a disproportionately high amount of public funding to health insurance without guarantees of increased services, price restraint and reduced public waiting lists. Equally the Opposition must recognise that reasonable public reimbursement of private medical fees can result in constrained patient billing and improved access to private services for low-income and elderly public patients.

A MORE PRAGMATIC OPTION is to tie government support of private health care to the delivery of a certain proportion of public services. In other words, private doctors and hospitals can receive increased public subsidies if they also increase the number of public patients treated in their sector. This will then enable the benefits of Medicare to be extended across the full capacity of the health service.

Without a robust health system the less well-off will suffer most. Already up to 50 per cent of people needing mental health care do not receive it. People with chronic conditions find public access too slow and private care too expensive. People with medically dependent disabilities struggle to meet increasing daily fees.

We cannot allow a deterioration in the health system to render people impoverished. If this means the well-off pay more into the universal health fund, then so be it. ■

Francis Sullivan is Executive Director of the Australian Catholic Health Care Association.

Capital Letter

Jack Waterford

Moving right along

THE ELECTION AFTER, perhaps, might be one that matters. One that genuinely mobilises some community opinion and involves fundamental choices about where Australians are going and what they want to be.

If this happens, however, it is more than likely to be a consequence of something the politicians have not controlled so far: the transition to a republic. Voters who have decided this time around that nothing very important is being resolved are well-entitled to their cynicism. They are certainly well-entitled to have concluded that there was little that was fundamental about tax reform, of either party's prescription, or about anything either of them have characterised as plans.

The differing policies on wider issues, such as health, or employment, or unemployment, or education or immigration, were at best cunningly devised, from the centre line, to inform voters about which goal posts they were facing, while reassuring those looking in the opposite direction that they had no developed intentions of moving far from the halfway line. The credibility problem of both parties has prevented their doing much more.

John Howard's at times pathetic refrain that he has a plan—and Kim Beazley's attempt to use the same word himself—reflects the fact that the research of both parties tells them that voters want politicians and parties with developed visions of the political process. Alas, however, the same research tells them that the voters have almost entirely lost faith in any capacity of the current crop of politicians to deliver, so that anything grandiose will be immediately discounted. Nor is the disillusion something confined to the fringes represented by the One Nation movement. Popular participation in politics has never been so low since federation, and uncertainty and insecurity about the future never so high. The brew, however, does not so much inspire the raspberry represented by voting for a Pauline Hanson, as an apathy and fatalism.

One positive consequence of the Hanson effect is that it might put a brake on stage two of a Liberal Party agenda with which Labor itself had flirted.

The cuts imposed by the first Howard budget followed recommendations from the National Commission of Audit, but its report, coming from deep within the soul of the economic rationalist movement, had a higher agenda—at that point only postponed. The commission had called for a radical debate on the role of government. This was to be focused not only on producing smaller government, confined to core functions. It wanted the question of what those core functions are to be completely open—and questions about how such goods and services which fell within the net might be provided, to be open to all of the modern marketing mechanisms. We seem to have decided that even jails can be provided from the private sector, so why not most of the functions of Treasury or Defence?

The minister who embarked on this with the greatest zeal was John Fahey, who has never received the credit he deserves for creating the economic conditions in which a Pauline Hanson can flourish. Second cab off the rank was Dr David Kemp, whose major piece of architecture—privatised jobs agencies—has been the most significant and complete policy and administrative failure of the Howard Government.

The wave of intervention which followed the Queensland election suggests that stage two of the Commission of Audit agenda is not high on the priority list.

It's a pity in a way, because if ever there were a time for a review of what Australians want and expect of government, it ought to be now, even with such embarrassing lead debaters. In an election campaign of extraordinary tedium, one of the lowest points was the incapacity of the two leaders to articulate any sort of vision of Australia a decade hence—or at least a vision that was not primarily economic in its terms coupled with a few clichés about fairness. But a debate which talked about the community fabric and the nation's physical and social infrastructure, and which sought to establish both some old and new concepts of citizenship, of public interest and common good, and which defined just what it is government can and should reasonably deliver would be well worth having.

The old phrases are no longer adequate—whether because of communications, the realities of a modern trading state, or even of a modern economy. The old models of public and private sectors are not adequate either: it is possible to deliver some goods and services more efficiently from the private sector. There is more accident and history than rhyme or reason about which of our utilities are regarded as essentially of the public sector.

We may need new models of work and duty, even in the private sector, to cope with a public sector which is increasingly less process-oriented. Old regulation models need rationalisation, and some of the tools of the modernists—about market testing, competition and choice—are worth playing with. But at the same time, voters are more than customers, co-operation is in many areas a more effective way of achieving outcomes than competition, and notions of community are more significant than ideas of rugged individualists making their way alone in a hostile world.

IT IS ONLY WHEN THERE HAS been such a debate that other issues are going to be resolved. Issues such as how government intervenes in local communities to promote outcomes such as employment growth or health; about how far pure economics and market forces can dictate the size and structure of communities and how much the march of that progress can and should be slowed or reversed by conscious use of community resources. And then about what resources government needs, and thus what our taxation rates might be. As it is, too much of the debate is being won by the core-functionalists by default.

In part this is because many of the players scarcely talk to each other, or scarcely use the same language when they do: whether they are politicians imbued with the modern 'realities' when they are addressing voters, or Aborigines talking to government, or the welfare sector talking to business or Treasury. Pauline Hanson may, finally, be a moral victor by waking some politicians, journalists and other self-confident spruikers for the new age to the fact that presiding over a reduced and more unequal flow of government goods and services is not necessarily popular. Even if her demented election performance produces its just deserts, it is unlikely that the electorate will forget. In the meantime, however, many of the horses are bolting.

With the rival slates up at this election, it is hard to be optimistic. Which is why something strictly symbolic—such as a republic, a centenary or a millennium—could be a circuit breaker. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

GRAHAM LITTLE

Leading with feeling

WHO IS THE GREATEST leader Australia has ever seen? Bill Woodfull, of course, taking Jardine round to the rooms after he'd complained some Aussie had insulted him, and inquiring of the players: 'Now which one of you bastards called this bastard a bastard?'

Or, coming right up to date, Jeff Kennett, Mr Formula I, big on 'men's business', military-style command and media management? A man who knows about the army tells me Kennett is a natural NCO, a bit of a tearaway. One day he'll be halfway up the hill and look round and there'll be nobody behind him! (In wartime they might shoot him.)

John Howard is the last Prime Minister who'll be older than I am. (Keating was the first who was younger.) Only by a few months, but in a way it's a comfort to have him there, though he seems a bit less relaxed and comfortable than he thought he'd be. Not that any politician has it easy. Marjorie (Mo) Mowlam, of Northern Ireland fame, warns that we're down to the emotionally starved leading the emotionally distressed: 'Can the MPs who love the sound of their own voice, who cannot be kept off television and radio and who act in such a pompous way really be insecure? Well, in my experience they most certainly can.'

I don't know that we are ready in Australia for this kind of levity about leadership. It sounds suspiciously like 'women's business', and indeed Mowlam was contributing to *The Politics of Attachment*, an amalgam of psychology, ethics and politics published in Britain in 1996. The book is dedicated to understanding 'the fears and emotions' involved in coping with social change and it's a good introduction to the Blair revolution. Its theme is not unfamiliar—how governments can respond to widespread insecurity.

In settled times leaders can go with the flow. What's natural for them is natural for us. Pauline Hanson and John Howard are both inclined to look back to the past. Even Kennett, a man of future if ever there were one, dipped into the past to come up with a word of advice: treat Hansonism the way Sir Robert Menzies treated Communism. (Come again? Ban One Nation?) But in our unsettled times only new rallying calls are going to work.

Maybe rallying isn't the word, though there's plainly a hunger for it. The point is filling the emotional vacuum, breaking the cycle of insecurity

There's nothing more significant about One Nation's leader than her unshakeable certainty—a certainty towards which, we must say, ignorance makes a considerable contribution. When things fall apart the best are apt to lack conviction, as Yeats said. But it's important what we have convictions *about*—it still surprises me when politicians and business folk call it 'vision' turning a park into a race track. I suppose I must concede that a tax package can be reformist. But what words will we use for giving a country its confidence back, its belief in itself and, not incidentally, in its ideals and the direction it's heading?

'Emotional leadership' sounds a bit touchy-feely. Woodfull wouldn't have known what it meant. But we live in unsettled times when even how to handle our private emotions, not to say our prescription erections, gets discussed everyday in the papers. Howard and Beazley are faced with the expectations of a generation that thinks itself more 'emotionally literate' (another Blairish phrase) than their parents.

It's all too easy to counsel perfection from the stands: be empathetic but hard-headed, consultative and decisive, attend to men's business and women's business, both. Maybe leaders don't need such large vocabularies; our own man says 'arrogance' is just another word for 'leadership' and it's how he, and we, have got where we are. But it's not all dumbing down. It's rumoured that Cheryl Kernot is reading a book by the Australian consultant, Alistair Mant, whose father, Gilbert, covered the Bodyline tour for the Sydney Papers. The book's called *Intelligent Leadership*. ■

Graham Little is a Melbourne academic and writer. His book on the emotions in public will be published next summer by ABC Books.

Responsibility in place

From F. Grunhaus

I refer to *Responsibility in Time* in the *Opinion* segment (*Eureka Street*, July/August 1998). Ms Laster's depiction of the courts and parliament as bodies which willingly bear the burden of responsibility for the decisions of previous incumbents while actively seeking to redress the errors of the past reminds us that optimism is alive in the academy.

A more incisive view of the operation of these institutions would suggest that their decisions simply reflect the interests and agendas of those who hold power at a particular time. On this reading, *Mabo*, rather than demonstrating the capacity of the High Court to correct the 'mistakes' of its 'revered predecessors', is the maverick decision of a courageous Bench responding to widespread pressures for a re-adjustment of indigenous rights. A decision the calibre of which we are unlikely to see again if the current trend in judicial appointments persists.

Ms Laster's appeal to pious abstractions such as the 'timeless majesty of the law' and 'shared implicit belief in the benefits of an unbroken chain of democratic succession' obscures the true workings of the courts and parliament and encourages acquiescence in injustices perpetrated and prolonged by them. John Howard's eschewal of Sorry Day is not so much a refusal to participate in a grand tradition of institutional responsibility as a recreant mouthing of the urgings of his constituency. *Contra* Ms Laster's claim that he must apologise in order to preserve confidence in our institutions, Mr Howard's refusal to do so, in the wake of a seemingly endless betrayal of promises, may render it the most honest stand of his Prime Ministerial career.

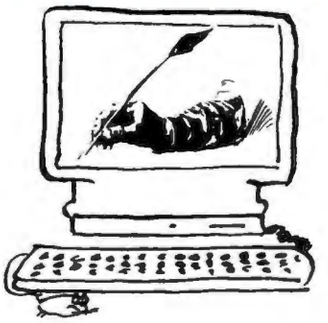
F. Grunhaus
Renown Park, SA

Discontent sown

From Dr Elizabeth G. Heij, Chief of Division, Tropical Agriculture, CSIRO

In response to Bill Hankin's article, 'Seeds of discontent' (*Eureka Street*, July/August 1998),

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 email, a contact phone number is essential. Address: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au



I would like to point out that Mr Hankin hasn't got his facts right and is misrepresenting the issue.

Despite regular and frank contact with him during which we supplied him with the facts of the matter, he seems persistent in building this matter up into something which it isn't. CSIRO acts at all times within the law, and can hardly be described as a 'biopirate'. His sweeping statements are loaded with emotionalism and ignore the wider context within which plant breeders rights takes place.

The principal problem with Mr Hankin's position of opposition to the patenting of DNA and the use of PBR, is that it seeks to exclude much of the world's plant materials from enhancements and improvements, thus denying the grower countries improved revenue and a better environment. Perhaps Mr Hankin's contribution to a debate on this matter would be better served if he were to indulge less in questionable speculation concerning the business of others and focused more on matters of fact and an understanding of the science involved in plant breeding.

Elizabeth G. Heij
St Lucia, QLD

Bill Hankin (President, Heritage Seed Curators Australia) replies

I have sought information from CSIRO St Lucia and I have been assisted by Grant McDuling. The information kindly provided by Grant over a number of phone calls and emails was very helpful. It clarified the situation. However it did not change the facts of this matter. My attempts to contact Ms Heij were unsuccessful.

Nobody is objecting to CSIRO importing or introducing farmers land race varieties from other countries into Australia. However, CSIRO St Lucia is claiming 'intellectual ownership' via the Plant Variety Rights scheme. Examination of these PBR Grants shows that there is neither breeding (invention) nor proof of breeding, as required under the PBR Act. This is indeed 'genetic squatting'. These PBR'd varieties come largely from poorer Third World countries.

I do not seek to exclude CSIRO from enhancing and improving the world's plant materials. I merely say that the improvement must constitute real breeding and be an 'invention', as required under Australian law. Also CSIRO is obliged to prove this breeding in equitable trials which include the original germplasm. The 'Indus' millet claimed by CSIRO was not trialled against the source germplasm from Pakistan. It was compared with varieties from Siberia and Japan.

Finally it is very important to acknowledge that CSIRO and some other organisations have done this 'mistrialling' largely as a result of advice from the PBR Office itself. Which raises the key question, 'What has gone wrong with the PBR Office that this situation has arisen?'

Congratulations!

The winner of *Eureka Street*'s 'Win a Discman' competition is **Mr Lu Colombo** of Abbotsford, Victoria. Mr Colombo (on the right) is pictured with *Eureka Street*'s publisher, Dan Madigan.

The beam in our eye

The bombing of US embassies has reactivated international anxieties about Islam. ***Dan Madigan*** *questions the stereotypes.*

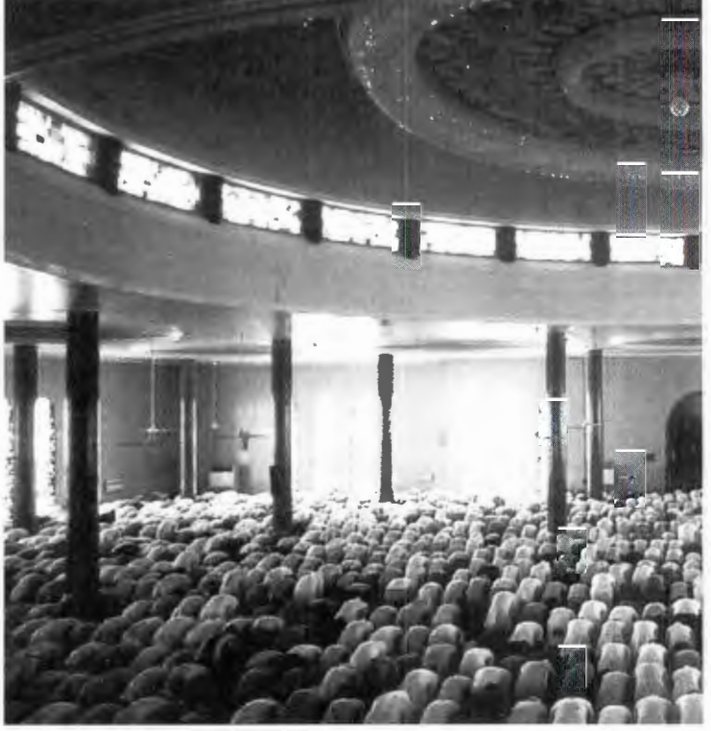


Photo: Interior of the Grand Mosque in Doha, Qatar: The World's Religions, *2nd edn, Ninian Smart, Cambridge University Press, 1998*

'I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT ART,' people say, asserting their credentials to dismiss a particular work, 'but I know what I like.' One of the hazards of telling people you study Islam is that they almost invariably take the opportunity to tell you they 'don't know much about it, but ...' They feel there is more than enough vivid and disturbing evidence from the press and TV for them to be quite justified in looking down from the moral heights on the 'ignorant', 'bigoted', 'violent', 'fundamentalist' Muslims, who bomb embassies, who oppress women, who believe that war can be holy, who impose barbaric penalties, who refuse to enter the modern world with the rest of us and think critically about their sacred texts. Having got all that off their chests, they sit back and wait for a defence of the indefensible—as though my field of study makes me somehow complicit in the whole nasty business.

This view of the world may be so frightening that it keeps you out of planes and renders whole swathes of the planet perilously off-limits, but it has the advantage of being fundamentally simple. You know where you stand: there is the enlightened, modern, pluralist West faced with the benighted, backward, fanatical 'Muslim world'. In the last decade people have begun to talk quite casually about Islam being the new foe now that the Soviet Union has disintegrated. We prefer our geopolitics simple: ourselves the good guys in the white hats; our enemies once coloured red, now green.

There are two straightforward observations regularly excluded from this analysis of the world. The first is that not all the terrorists, bombers, bigots and fundamentalists on our TVs are Muslims. However, we rarely define those others by their religion. We do not call the genocidal Bosnian Serbs 'Orthodox', but that is what they are. And their sense of religious identity plays no little role in their murderous ideology. We do not dwell on the fact that it was 'Christian' militiamen who slaughtered hundreds of Palestinians in the refugee camps of Lebanon. How often do we hear the murderous Rwandan militias defined as 'Catholic' rather than as Hutu or Tutsi? The FBI looked for a Muslim bomber after the Oklahoma City blast, but eventually found out it was a member of the hyper-patriotic militia movement in the American heartland. The parties in Sri Lanka's vicious and intractable civil war rarely carry their religious labels of Hindu (Tamil) and Buddhist (Sinhalese). And the discredited televangelists, the murderous dictators, the disgraced cardinals, the mafiosi—do they have no religion?

Coming as they did on the heels of one another, the bombings in Omagh, Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam should have served as a painful reminder that Muslims do not have a monopoly on terrorism. However, the differing reactions to them by the US are quite instructive. World public opinion can usually be relied upon to applaud violent retaliation against Muslims, yet the very idea of some official retaliatory measures being taken in Ireland would, rightly, never arise. The community of nations will sit on its hands for months and plead its inability to take action against genocide in Bosnia because of concerns about national sovereignty and international law, yet a punitive, scattershot adventure against Osama bin Laden or a pharmaceutical plant garners expressions of support from Westminster to Canberra. (In fairness to the United States, perhaps it should be pointed out that they also thumbed their noses at the International Court of Justice when convicted of breaching international law by mining 'Christian' Nicaragua's harbours.)

WE ALSO REGULARLY IGNORE evidence that the causes of so many conflicts are not, in fact, religious even when they carry a religious label. Though we speak of 'Catholics' and 'Protestants' in Northern Ireland, we recognise, in the back of our minds at least, that the conflict has little to do with Reformation disagreements over justification or papal authority. We know it has to do with the politics of colonial occupation and the economics of prejudice. But do we recognise

that attacks on Christians in Indonesia have their roots in economics and ethnicity? Or that accusations of blasphemy in Pakistan are usually a strategy for grabbing land or removing political competitors?

This reductionist approach to the world filters out the substantial evidence that the 'Muslim world' is not a bloc but is as divided as the 'Western world'—each nation, class or party pursuing its own strategic interest. Although there were Muslims and Christians on both sides of the Gulf War (for example, Tariq Aziz, now deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, is a Chaldean Catholic), it is very often falsely remembered nowadays as a war of Islam against the West. It should probably be interpreted as a civil war among the Arabs over oil, which then embroiled so much of the world because of our over-dependence on that commodity. Saddam Hussein's religious posturing was precisely that and had as little to do with the cause of hostilities as did George Bush's rhetoric about principle.

We forget the savagery of the ten-year Iran–Iraq war that claimed so many young lives, and in which the same Saddam was the coddled client of the US, built up and armed to the teeth in order to defeat Khomeini, the West's enemy of the moment. We forget that, with only a handful of exceptions, the victims of Muslim savagery in Algeria are themselves Muslims. Even the Arabs, who form only a small percentage of the world's Muslims, are not united on any substantial policy precisely because their interests and their commitment to principles vary so substantially.

That now toothless enemy, the Soviet Union, was the reason for the US policy of flooding Afghanistan with arms, of funding and training the local warlords who have now been responsible for the years of vicious civil strife that followed the Russian withdrawal. Historical memories are short and it seems always to come as a surprise to the US when a Saddam Hussein or an Osama bin Laden is as violent and ruthless as they once wanted him to be.

This imagining of a monolithic Islam runs the very real risk of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more the Muslims sense themselves confined and condemned willy-nilly to a homogeneous class of enemy aliens, the more likely they are to take on that identity and to respond with the enmity the West expects of them. Many Muslim organisations around the world work hard to resist this, but theirs is an uphill battle.

THE PEOPLE WHO 'don't know much about Islam, but ...' are quite right in their description and assessment of the behaviour of some Muslims. Their error lies in mistaking it for Muslim behaviour, or the behaviour of all Muslims, and in presuming that non-Muslims are somehow entitled to claim moral superiority. It's part of their religion, we are told. It is true that the Qur'ân and the Traditions do condone violence in some cases, but have we forgotten how the Hebrew Bible invokes the will of God to justify the dispossession and slaughter of the peoples who stood in the way of Israelite ambitions? Even though we may dress them up in Gregorian chant, the psalms can chill the blood with the strength of their curses and the violence of their hatred. Have we forgotten so easily the shameful episode of the Crusades, or the bloody internecine history of 'Christian' Europe in the last 500 years?

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By the same token, it is just as galling to hear Muslims adopt that high moral tone about 'the West' or 'Christians'. (For 'Christian' in most cases read 'American'.) It is just not sufficient to claim that the terrorists or the bigots are not 'real Muslims', that the dictators or the bombers are not 'real Christians', that the paedophiles and misogynists are not 'real priests'. The sad fact is that they are—all too real. The ideal Christian or Jew or Buddhist or Muslim does not exist. There are only real ones. Some of us are generous and open, others are intolerant and malicious; some turn to violence out of arrogance or frustration, while others work patiently and forcefully for justice; we all of us search our scriptures and traditions to buttress our finest instincts, but also unfortunately to sanction the meanest.

At present we seem to be engaged in a dialogue of the deaf—yelling at one another, calling from peak to lofty peak of the high moral ground we have staked out for ourselves. No real encounter will take place until we are humble and realistic enough to meet on the moral low ground we all so richly deserve to occupy. ■

Dan Madigan SJ teaches Islamic Studies in the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne, and is *Eureka Street*'s publisher. *See also 'Indonesia: Islam rising', p21.*

John Paul II and me

On 16 October, Pope John Paul II celebrates 20 years as Bishop of Rome. We asked six Australians to reflect on his impact on their world.

POPE JOHN PAUL II and I are both aged Catholic men. We are both bishops. It was during his pontificate that I was ordained bishop (1981). We both are concerned about the condition of the World and the Church. We both want to contribute to making things better.

Arriving at Randwick, Sydney, during his 1995 Australian visit. Photo by Andrew Stark.

It is in how to make things better that we two loyal, orthodox Catholics differ. Our brief meetings say something about this. I have had the privilege of meeting Pope John Paul II on five occasions. Like others I felt honoured to be greeted personally by the Pope. For all of these meetings and for 17 years as bishop, no personal relationship has been established, no serious conversation entered into and no views have been exchanged. When the Australian bishops met the Pope in the crypt of St. Mary's Cathedral, he spoke to us. We listened.

Pope John Paul II seems to be attempting to hold Church unity by decree and law and by uniformity in practice. I believe that the unity Jesus calls us to can be achieved only by honest, open relationships, the exchange of beliefs and ideas in trust and by the acceptance of co-responsibility and subsidiarity. Unity in and through diversity is a Christian ideal.

Roman centralisation and the power of the Roman Curia continue to grow, to the frustration of many bishops and the people they serve.

I honour and respect Pope John Paul II. He is a courageous, committed man of faith. I think that the Church has suffered from over-centralisation, caution and fear. From the hundreds of messages (not one negative) I have received after publishing *A Love that Dares to Question* (see Andrew Hamilton's 'Heaps of Documents', *Eureka Street*, September 1998) it is obvious that people need respect, empowerment, trust and love.

—**John Heaps** is retired Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney.

I WAS RAISED by my hard-working, prejudiced grandmother, in the working-class suburb of Coburg, in Victoria.

As a small boy I was taught some of her prejudice and was led to believe that the Catholics who walked past our home on their way to mass at St Fidelis were different—not to be trusted. To her credit my grandmother sent me off to Sunday School at the Salvation Army, and I continue to work with and respect that organisation.

For the first 20 years of my 39-year marriage I built an admiration for my wife's devotion and faith in her Catholic religion, and so it was, just three years into Pope John Paul's papacy, that I converted. Recently I was honoured with a papal knighthood in the Order of the Holy Sepulchre.

In his 20 years as the leader of the Church, I have grown to deeply admire Pope Paul's strength, his stamina, his intellect and his charisma. Those 20 years have paralleled a period of leadership for me, in business, government and in the community, where I have learned how hard it is to 'put your head up' on difficult issues—how hard it is to maintain effectiveness—how easy it can be to capitulate to popular opinion.

I share my wife's love and admiration for 'Papa' as he continues to visit the people of the world, to speak to many, in their native tongue—he 'globalised' the church before business fully recognised the global economy. He is a true internationalist, at a time when more Australians need to be 'internationalised'.

Along the way I have developed a need for, and a benefit from role models. At a time when so many leaders tend to let us down, Pope John Paul II is a beacon of integrity. Without integrity, man, of course, has nothing! On this, 'John Paul and me' are in agreement.

—**The Rt Hon Cr Ivan Deveson AO** is Lord Mayor of Melbourne.

With the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, May 1982.

I HAVE TWO MEMORIES concerning this pope. The first was of him roaring '*Silence!*' to the women of South America. I'm not sure what made me feel most ashamed—his pedagogic outburst, or the sight of a crowd of human beings looking to another human being for the answers.

In David Jones' bookstore some time ago, I noticed his latest publication on the shelves beside one of Sogyal Rinpoche's (a Buddhist teacher) books. I spent some time looking through both of them. Again, I felt embarrassed for the pope. Because his chapter on Buddhism (judgment and condemnation of one of the world's most important spiritual paths and the 'dangers' of its doctrines from an assumed 'superior' position) contained inexcusable *errors of fact*. Whoever briefed him on Buddhism—or is it all his own work?—seemed incapable of getting even the basic elements right, the muddled confusion of the Buddhist notion of 'non-resistance' with 'fatalism', the complete failure to apprehend either the nature of (or the practise of) compassion—the basis of this path, not to mention the logical difficulty of one belief system being found 'false' by another such, made his writings appear naively partisan to me. Sogyal Rinpoche's book, in contrast, honoured and respected all spiritual paths and the writer had especially created a Christ-centred meditation for readers so that Christians might feel embraced.

As I looked through the two books I found myself wondering if the area of compassion is perhaps this man's 'blind spot'? He certainly treats his frail and failing body in a very unloving way with his constant travelling and workload.

The heart is the highest court and as a person matures, all matters must eventually be brought before it. Unless—as is so often the case with us humans—the heart has been replaced with attachment to dogma.

—**Gabrielle Lord**'s latest novel is *Sharp End*, published by Sceptre.

NINE MONTHS AFTER Billy Graham came to Australia for the first time, the statistics for illegitimate births went down. So did the statistics for drunken behaviour and general crime. The Pope's visits have not had the same impact. Not that the Pope drew smaller crowds than Billy; quite the reverse, in fact. But, as anyone knows who has been to one, a Graham crusade has a different thrust from a papal mass. The point of the crusade is moral conversion, while the pope's mass is about affirming our attachment to Catholic Christianity. It is about identity rather than morality.

The most challenging thing any pope has said to Australians was John Paul's address at Alice Springs in 1986. Back then—how long ago it seems—he lined up on the side of Aboriginal land rights. It was a clear, passionate, unequivocal commitment. Yet there is no evidence that it changed anyone's behaviour, any more than the anti-Nazi encyclical changed a single German's behaviour in 1937.

Religious professionals aside, we go to papal masses, not for the wordy discourses, which say what one could expect a pope to say. We go there because we are Catholics sharing a story with him, which is the story of how Jesus Christ came into our lives. Who the man in white is and what he says

Kissing the ground at the airport in Vilnius, Lithuania, 1993.

is unimportant—relative to his main function as an icon of the Catholic experience.

—**Edmund Campion** teaches at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, Strathfield.

WHAT MAKES 'The Emperor's New Clothes' work as a fable is the piping voice of the little boy: the same message in adult tones risks sounding carping and hypercritical. That said, I had high and, in retrospect, probably unrealistic hopes for Pope John Paul II. As a vigorous and charismatic man he had the chance to steer the Church back to Vatican II, after a period of reaction culminating in *Humanae vitae*. Twenty years on, the problems an outsider has with an entrenched bureaucracy are clearer—think of Jimmy Carter in Washington. What is also clear is that communist Poland was not an ideal leadership milieu, given the obsession with authority and intolerance of difference that characterised both 'left' and 'right'.

Where he has been outstanding is in his commitment to travel, to visit people all over the world, on their turf. On the other hand, the intransigence that the Pope and Curia have shown on key human rights issues—women priests, married clergy, contraception, homosexuality—is obviously fear-driven; tempering sympathy for those prisoner to such fears are the effects of such institutional ultramontanism on participation and collegiality. The extraordinary spate of like-minded episcopal appointments over the past decade appears similarly fear-driven, and difficult to construe as confidence in a divinely guided, self-renewing Church.

The Pope's health is poor, and he appears often in pain: I hope that his remaining years are free of pain, and that he finds consolation in certitude—pale shadow of the serenity that comes with acknowledging doubt. What we need for his successor is a single eight-year term, much more likely to provide leadership in the crucial context than retirement at death after years of infirmity. *Dum spiro spero*—and I'm not holding my breath.

—**John Funder AO** is Director of the Baker Institute and Chairman of Vic Health.

FOR THE ENTIRE pontificate of John Paul II, I have been involved in tertiary education. I was a student during its first half. Throughout the second I have taught theology and philosophy. The initial decade was enjoyable, the last ten years a real struggle.

Why? The answer lies in New York during its summer of 1988. There and then I realised that John Paul was systematically using his considerable skills, and even greater power, to force his particular theology on a universal church. That theology, according to my training, is deeply flawed because it champions a dogmatising, clericalist, male-led and monarchical organisation of Christians. It directly occludes the egalitarian solidarity of Jesus' gospel.

In short, this Pope's primary success is simultaneously his greatest failing. More adroitly than any bishop of Rome since the 13th century, he has made his own theology legally paramount in the church and has presided over the suppression of creative theology among Catholics, and set their church back intellectually at least 100 years.

Even so, the net effect of his reign has been positive for me, liberating indeed—and I am not being facetious. The stances he has taken have freed me from unthinking devotion to a papal cult. His refusal to discuss the ordination of women has prompted my exploration of that issue academically. His support for right-wing religious institutes and political groups has moved me to the left. His punishment of theologians has helped me to enquire and speak more forthrightly.

Above all, he has led me to a very traditional insight: not even a strong and celebrated papacy is ever coterminous with a multifaceted Catholicism.

—**Philip Kennedy** OP lectures in theology at Oxford University.




The Month's Traffic

Maps of the heart

In February 1973, in Brisbane, my grandfather drew me a map of the centre of Omagh, County Tyrone. Market Street, Kevlin Street, Georges Street, Church Street. He numbered houses, named residents. My grandfather grew up in 15 Church Street. His father was the vet in Omagh—a Catholic with an English name, married to a Catholic with a Scottish name.

My great-grandfather came to Australia in 1916 because his only living child had migrated. But he stayed only a fortnight. He was appalled at the way livestock was traded here—a horse trotting around a ring, men at a distance calling out bids. In Tyrone, owner and purchaser and vet and animal stood together. They touched, they passed remarks, they shook hands over a deal concluded. My great-grandfather went back to Omagh. I went there, and I took the map, and I walked up the narrows of Market Street, and everything was as my grandfather had drawn it. But his own home had been demolished. It was a weed-strewn car park.

He had given me one other point of contact. A little along Church Street was the Sacred Heart 'chapel'. My grandfather referred to it as the 'cathedral'. There should be a photo there, he said, in the sacristy, of the opening of the Cathedral in 1898. 'I'm in it. I was an altar boy.'

The photo, and my grandfather, were there. The sacristan, Joe Given, took the picture from the wall and we pored over it. 'I've the negative somewhere,' he said, 'I'll make you a copy. No, no,' he held up his hands, 'no payment. I just want one thing. Would you show this to your grandfather and ask him to name anyone he can remember? They're all dead now, the rest.' My grandfather claimed he was able to name everyone, from Cardinal Logue to the Dominican who preached. But the visiting dignitaries were recognisable. It was the names of the boys of Omagh, my grandfather's companions, that Joe Given most wanted to know. There were ten of them, all sitting in the front on the low step, their feet in the stone-strewn roadway. My grandfather listed them all for him, the dead and the missing citizens of Omagh.

I walked down to the Christian Brothers school where my grandfather had been a pupil. I wanted archival evidence of him, but the Brother who came to attend to me, Brother McFarland, said that wasn't his area. He asked me why I was in Ireland. I was doing a thesis on Irish literature, I said. He began to talk about the Troubles and Tyrone and its writers. He went out, to his room, and returned with a green-covered booklet, *The Planter and the Gael*. It read, 'a programme of poems by John Hewitt and John Montague, presented by the Arts Council in November 1970 in a number of towns in Northern Ireland. Each poet explores his experience of Ulster, the background in which he grew up and the tradition which has shaped his work. John Montague defines the culture of the Gael, John Hewitt that of the Planter. The two bodies of work complement each other.' 'Take it,' said Brother McFarland to me, 'I want you to take it. It's yours.'

I've been crying for my grandfather's town. For the two tiny children six weeks short of a name. For all the others who, for once, at long last, in all the media reports I've seen, are realising Wolfe Tone's dream and are being referred to by 'the common name of Irishmen in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter'. In the Royal Arms Hotel, Omagh, in November 1970, barely a year into the Troubles, John Montague read his 'Old Mythologies':

And now, at last, all proud deeds done,
Mouths dust-stopped, dark they embrace
Suitably disposed, as urns, underground.
Cattle munching soft spring grass
—Epicures of shamrock and the four-leaved
clover—
Hear a whimper of ancient weapons,
As a whole dormitory of heroes turn over,
Regretting their butchers' days.
This valley cradles their archaic madness
As once, on an impossible epic morning,
It upheld their savage stride:
To bagpiped battle marching,
Wolfhounds, lean as models,
At their urgent heels.

John Hewitt read 'The Colony':

... hoping by patient words I may convince
my people and this people we are changed
from the raw levies which usurped the land,
if not to kin, to co-inhabitants,
as goat and ox may graze in the same field
and each gain something from proximity;
for we have rights drawn from the soil and sky;
the use, the pace, the patient years of labour,
the rain against the lips, the changing light,
the heavy clay-sucked stride, have altered us;
we would be strangers in the Capitol;
this is our country also, no-where else;
and we shall not be outcast on the world.

—Gerard Windsor

Parrotting pollies

By the time you read this, you may well have been inundated with politicians wanting to: a) kiss your baby, b) give you tax cuts for having a baby, or c) denounce you for bringing up a baby on your own. In reality, the election campaign started months ago. But in some quarters the argument has not so much been a case of who you should vote for, but more a case of how.

At a time when politicians are making used car salesmen look like pillars of the community, it's not surprising that the voting system itself is coming in for some scrutiny. But what is perhaps unexpected is that changes are being volunteered by politicians themselves—although not for the purest of reasons.

The new Tasmanian parliament, elected at the end of August, has shrunk, with just 25 members in the lower house, an overnight reduction of ten. Labor and Liberal combined to shift the goalposts and keep out those pesky Greens. The mutual assumption was, better to lose an election than find yourself in unstable coalition with a minor party.

More than a few Coalition heavies, having suffered under a frisky and uncooperative Senate these past 30 months, were distinctly envious, with mutterings in some quarters that a bit of tinkering with the federal upper house wouldn't go amiss. The federal joint standing committee that

reviews electoral matters after every election is expected to look at suggestions that may include reducing the number of senators or zoning them—both ways of keeping out minor parties.

But if that kind of nobbling is off the realistic short-term political agenda, the Canberra establishment has managed to squeeze in one piece of revenge against the mavericks who insist on upsetting the smooth running of the two-party-preferred system. Federal pollies have snuck through the *Electoral and Referendum Amendment Act 1998*. Its most noteworthy provisions are a response to just one man—Albert Langer, former (very former) student radical, now on a solo mission to give the political mainstream a severe case of the irrits.

Langer was jailed on 14 February 1996 for contempt of the Victorian Supreme Court after defying an injunction restraining him from encouraging 1, 2, 3, 3, 3 voting. He served three weeks, rewarded with renewed national notoriety. If the taste of porridge still haunts him he can at least take comfort from the fact that the Australian Electoral Commission now calls this form of optional preferential voting 'Langer-style voting'.

Up until recently, it was legal to vote in that fashion (thanks to an obscure clause in the electoral law designed to save people who misnumbered their ballots from wasting their initial preferences) but illegal to advocate doing so during election periods. This year's amendments have turned the situation on its head. There are no longer penalties for advocating Langer-style votes. Albert can spruik his voting method anywhere and anytime with impunity. But the actual casting of such a vote is now deemed informal. The hammer has swung and the nut can regard itself as well and truly cracked.

So much for pollies trying to narrow the field. Across the Tasman the voters took the initiative in 1993 to broaden it, voting to scrap first-past-the-post voting and replace it with the Mixed-Member Proportional system or MMP. The introduction of this hybrid system—with some MPs being elected for geographical constituencies and others for parties that reach a 5 per cent threshold—reflected a spasm of popular anger. Politicians had devastated the New Zealand welfare state and politicians should be brought to account.

Has it worked? Yes, in the sense that it undermined the absolute authority of a majority government. As Winston Peters, then deputy prime minister, told a meeting in Melbourne last year: 'MMP will inevitably produce coalitions and coalition governments because of the extreme unlikelihood of any party winning an election outright. That is the essence of why people chose MMP in New Zealand. They wanted more co-operation—more sharing of power.'

Has this sharing of power delivered any improvements? Not a chance. In August the New Zealand coalition government had a near-death experience, Peters was sacked as deputy PM and his New Zealand First party splintered—all this taking place while the economy was sprinting to beat its Australian competitor for the honour of going into recession first.

New Zealanders should have noted the warning signals at the time. Just as they were dumping Westminster-style winner-takes-all autocracy, Italian voters were contemplating introducing first-past-the-post voting to rid themselves of kaleidoscopic multi-party governments.

Ticks, crosses, numbers both optional and singular, transferable and preferential—it doesn't seem to make a great deal of difference. Whoever wins and in whatever combination, the relentless maw of economic necessity is likely to swallow all politicians' promises, whether core or non-core or just made up because you've got such a beautiful baby.

—David Glanz

If it weren't for the war ...

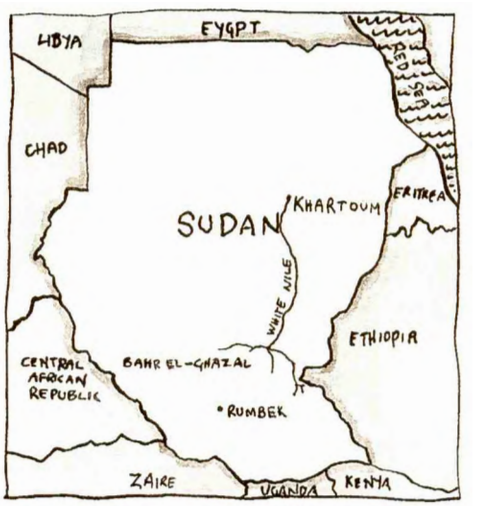
Sudan is more than just a strategic target in the undeclared war between the US and Islam, as Andrew Dodd discovered on a recent visit.

'WE ARE NOT HERE to kill your children,' said the aid worker, as the translator repeated in the Dinka language. One of the women in the feeding centre had heard the feeding formula could hurt her child. The Oxfam health worker wanted to allay any fears. 'As long as you boil the water first, everyone will be okay.'

The supplementary feeding centre at Agangrial in south Sudan is a magnet for the starving. Each Monday, crowds of emaciated and lethargic people queue for food. The numbers have been growing and the cases becoming more serious. Before witnessing this I had doubted this famine was real. The patchy wet season had not long arrived and the surrounding countryside was green and lush. This region of Bahr El Ghazal is only seven degrees north of the equator, and palm trees and tall grass thrive in the sticky humidity. But the palm fruits had all gone: there was simply nothing to eat. This is Sudan in the hunger gap—the frustrating period when next season's crops are slowly growing, tended by people desperately weak from starvation.

Normally, the Dinka and the Nuer and the other tribes of the White Nile make do. They have ingenious ways of surviving. But this year they have hit a crisis—the effect of two years of drought and 15 years of civil war.

Six months ago, the World Food Program believed 350,000 people were at risk of starvation. Now the figure is 2.6 million. UNICEF estimates that in the south over



50 per cent of children are malnourished. Most at risk are the displaced who have fled the fighting between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the troops loyal to the government in Khartoum. These internal refugees (known as returnees) flee to areas where food is already short, putting increased pressure on dwindling resources.

'To understand this famine,' I was told, 'you've got to get a handle on the war'—and that's not an easy thing to do. Is it a war about independence for the south or a fight for resources such as oil and uranium? Is it a religious battle between the Muslims of the north and the Christians and Animists of the south? The conflict has claimed 1.2 million lives and traumatised the entire country.

Wherever you go, there's someone with direct experience and a story to tell. When we left the feeding centre we came across a spindly and refined old man walking home

along the path. Joseph Ater was wearing a pink nightie which he'd found in a second-hand shop in Nairobi. It was fetching, even with the drooping chest and the hem line which had been let down three or four times. A strange sight as he chatted about his various campaigns—leading men to their deaths in one of Africa's bloodiest wars. Joseph was unperturbed. 'In Rome you do as the Romans,' he said. That may be true but you'd reckon anyone with ten wives would have seen enough of nighties.

Joseph had been a rebel soldier in the bush during the first phase of Sudan's civil war—the period after Sudan gained independence from the British in 1956. When peace came in 1972 he was 'absorbed' as an officer into the government army. But when the then president Gaafar al Nimeiri declared sharia law in 1983, the war between the north and south erupted again. Joseph was stranded, fighting his former rebel compatriots. I found it strange that it took Joseph 12 years to defect—and then only after retiring and moving with some of his family to the south. 'Yes, but I was under observation, people were watching me.'

The next day we were back on the roads, dodging the pot holes, marvelling at the lack of infrastructure. Apart from two bridges, there was a solitary telegraph pole, which by itself wasn't much use. We came upon an SPLA unit fixing their truck on the roadside. With his pork-pie hat and low-slung pistol, Daniel Deng was their cool-looking commander. He told us how he led the operation to liberate Rumbek town in May last year. 'Surprise is the basic element of war,' he said. 'All in all it only took 20 minutes to forcefully evict them.' The story goes that the government soldiers thought the advancing troops were a convoy of aid workers. The result was a massacre. 'You can see the remains at the airstrip,' said Commander Deng. 'You could get some skulls.'

Rumbek is now home to many thousands of returnees, fleeing from fighting in another regional centre called Wau, about 150 kilometres to the north-west. They are now living in makeshift huts on the outskirts of town.

The Panyonyon family (see photo above) had left Wau in the middle of the night and walked for two months to reach Rumbek. Along the way a son and daughter died of hunger. The family were camping in the field behind the old hospital. Initially they stayed with relatives but had to leave when the food ran out. Next to their hut they'd planted okra, ground nuts and sorghum, but the seeds were late and the crop looked too small for all those mouths.

'Look at us, you can see with your own eyes we are hungry,' said Yar, one of the wives. 'We are now eating leaves.' Most of the returnee families are surviving on wild foods, like the small *akour* plant which grows in the grass around the town. The leaves are gritty and bitter and look like nettles.

Meanwhile in Lokichokkio, just inside the Kenyan border, the planes keep up the relentless flights into Sudan. The shanty town of Lokichokkio has sprung up around the compound of Operation Lifeline Sudan—the umbrella for the UN relief effort. At the end of the airstrip, charter and cargo planes bank up next to massive C130s laden with food and supplies destined for the south.

The World Food Programme (WFP) has dropped over 30,000 tonnes of food on the south since January. This includes cereals, oil, pulses and salt. But they can't keep up with demand. About 12,000 tonnes is now needed every month. After bringing in new planes, the WFP still only has capacity for half that.

Claude Jibidar heads the WFP operation in Sudan. For five years he has been trying to deliver food to a war zone. 'Of course it is frustrating. It has been frustrating for the last four years—all the energy in trying to address the problems, to help people settle, help people cultivate, help people become self-sufficient, so far have been in vain. I say so far because I believe and I hope that this time we shall all have another approach.'

But don't hold your breath. For years peace talks have yielded no consensus. The grouping of neighbouring states, known as the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), has convened repeatedly to thrash out the Sudan question. In September 1994, the talks broke down when Khartoum refused to accept the terms: a secular state and self-determination for the south.

Khartoum was reluctant to return to the table, accusing three of the IGAD members—Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia—of backing the SPLA. It took three years for the talks to resume. When they did, in Nairobi last year, the declaration of principles was finally agreed, but when President Bashir returned to Khartoum he announced that the agreement was non-binding. On hearing this, the SPLA's leader, John Garang, backed away as well. At the time, the Africa News Service reported, 'The same old story is being repeated; one of the two sides always seems to find a point of disagreement.'

Last month, another IGAD meeting in Addis Ababa wound up in disarray. Steps towards a referendum for self-determination in the south were halted because the parties couldn't agree what constitutes the south. In May another meeting foundered on the issue of sharia law, declaring, 'On the question of state and religion, the sub-committee regrets that the parties have been unable to reach a common ground ...'

Even the current announcement of a cease-fire doesn't offer much hope. When the SPLA declared it would stop fighting for three months so relief supplies could reach the province of Bahr El Ghazal, the government responded with a cease-fire of its own. However, an SPLA official, Bagan Amum, made clear that this was not a turning point for peace: 'This is a humanitarian truce limited to areas afflicted by the famine and has nothing to do with issues of war and peace.'

Past experience suggests that the armies use cease-fires as a strategic device, buying time to regroup and reposition war-weary troops.

Could international pressure be applied? Even before the Clinton administration bombed Khartoum, that was doubtful. Standing on the airstrip at Lokichokkio watching another load of food fly out, I asked a United States aid monitor whether the US was stepping up its diplomacy. She shrugged, 'There's a limit to how much leverage the US can have—the south will listen but the north is backed by Iraq.' To make her point she explained how the US had imposed economic sanctions on Sudan in November last year. The result? 'Millions of dollars flowed into the north from the Arab world. Our intelligence people suggested we shouldn't try that again,' she said.

The United States funds 45 per cent of the WFP's relief effort in the south (and one per cent of the food drops in the north). In the last ten years they have poured $1 billion into Sudan. 'A billion dollars could do so much in development terms if it wasn't for this conflict,' the aid monitor said.

This is also an issue for Australia. Sudan has been one of the largest recipients of humanitarian relief over the last ten years. Already this year the government's aid agency, AusAID, has allocated $3 million for humanitarian assistance and $2 million for food aid.

Claude Jibidar of the WFP (photo, below left) says the real challenge is for the world to decide what it wants to do—spend the money to feed people or start working harder to find a solution to the problem. 'If everybody agrees that just food assistance is enough, then I suppose the relief effort will last forever. It is up to all of us, including the Sudanese, to sit down and find a solution to this problem.'

—Andrew Dodd

Burning a book

WHEN I WAS LEAVING London, Lavinia Byrne came to my farewell party. Most of my English friends who met her that night lavished admiration and praise on her. Lavinia Byrne is one of the most popular broadcasters on the BBC's World Service and Radio 4. She is regularly heard on three of the BBC's highest rating programmes, 'Thought for the Day', 'Prayer for the Day' and 'The Daily Service'.

The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), however, is now judging whether Byrne is a heretic. Reports of this inquisition started with a curious notice on the Catholic News Service (CNS). It was reported that Bishop John F. Kinney of Collegeville, Minnesota, received a letter of inquiry from the CDF in March about a book, *Woman at the Altar*, distributed in the USA by The Liturgical Press which has its headquarters in his diocese. The CNS reported, 'Bishop Kinney acquired a copy of the book, read it, and shared the letter (from the CDF) with Benedictine Father Michael Naughton, Liturgical Press director. Bishop Kinney said the Vatican congregation requested that the book "not be disseminated further".'

What the CNS did not say is that the author of the book is Lavinia Byrne IBVM, that the CDF has launched an investigation into her orthodoxy and that it ordered remaining copies of the book to be destroyed.

Lavinia Byrne

Early in 1993, the editorial director of the British publishing house, Mowbrays, approached Byrne, who was then the Associate Secretary for the Community of Women and Men in the Church for the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland. She was asked to write a book about the ordination of women. This question was a matter of public and open debate in the UK at the time, as the Church of England had just voted to proceed with ordination. She submitted the manuscript on 31 October 1993. '*Woman at the Altar* was a book of that moment. There is no way in which I or any other theologian could write it nowadays.'

Byrne had already edited three collections of women's writings: *The Hidden Tradition* (on women's spirituality); *The Hidden Journey* (on missionary women and their contribution to evangelisation); *The Hidden Voice* (on the politicisation of women, particularly their work as educators and to secure the vote). She received an honorary doctorate from the University of Birmingham (her hometown) in recognition of the importance of her research, writing and broadcasting in the area of women, religion and spirituality.

In May 1994, the Pope issued *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone). By this time *Woman at the Altar* had already been typeset and had gone to press. Byrne, however, asked Mowbrays to halt the print run and publish the Apostolic Letter at the end of the book. Mowbrays acceded to Byrne's request and in the process incurred significant financial liabilities. The Pope's teaching, therefore, featured as the 'last word' in this debate.

The CDF approached the Provincial Superior of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the UK about *Woman at the Altar* in 1995. In July of that year Byrne was instructed by her Provincial to cease speaking or writing about the ordination of women, an order she has obediently followed.

Clearly, this is not enough for the CDF and so an anonymous council of theologians is now deciding whether Byrne is a heretic because of what she wrote before the Pope issued his definitive teaching. The CDF is so concerned about the book that they have judged that the best way to deal with the ideas it contained is to try and destroy them. Mowbrays is a secular press and so the CDF has no claim on who or what it publishes. The Benedictines, however, own the Liturgical Press, and so the CDF has issued its instructions to its director through the local Bishop.

On 'Thought for the Day' on 1 August, Lavinia Byrne told her listeners how traumatic part of this experience has been:

> 1300 copies of a book I wrote in 1993 have just been destroyed by its North American publishers. If I say that this book was about the ordination of women which is presently a no-no topic of discussion in the Catholic church then you will understand why the monks who own this publishing house did what they did.
>
> Now you can go to a rape therapist or a grief counsellor, but there aren't too many book-burning counsellors around. My spirits got lower and lower. My faith plummeted and I had all the classic symptoms of trauma. What saved me eventually was not the kindness of friends and well-wishers, nor the support of members of my community—essential though those were—what eventually pulled me back from the brink was a grimly funny detail in the newspaper report of this story. The monks allegedly made an eco-friendly decision. They didn't pulp the book or wantonly burn it in some refuse dump. No, they put it into the monastery incinerator so that they were lit and fuelled by it. When I read that I laughed aloud and some of the shame and pain began to evaporate. I discovered that faith on its

own is a poor thing. Tend it with a little humour, and hope and charity get up and running again too.

—Richard Leonard SJ

Mellow out

In late August the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith condemned the writings of the late Anthony de Mello, an Indian Jesuit spiritual writer who died suddenly in 1987, aged only 56. Over the years of his ministry, and through his popular books, he has helped perhaps hundreds of thousands of people to find a taste for prayer and the confidence to explore the life of the spirit.

De Mello made no claim to being a systematic theologian. He was a teacher. He sought deliberately to provoke and to challenge, to help people break free of constrained and constricting views of God and humanity. In a long explanatory note accompanying this Vatican 'warning', his collections of stories, parables and aphorisms are mined for damning evidence. Each phrase is given the most negative possible interpretation and they are cobbled together to create a system of thought found to be 'not compatible with the Christian faith'. Yet it would be surprising to find a fully rounded summa of the Christian faith in a book called *One Minute Nonsense*. You don't buy *The Prayer of the Frog* if you are looking for the *Catechism*.

He is accused of 'an exaggerated apophaticism'—that is, of over-emphasising the longstanding Christian belief that it is beyond the capabilities of human language fully to express the reality of the divine. A good dose of apophaticism might be just the thing these days when believers of many a stripe feel so confident that they can somehow sum God up in their scriptures and creeds.

He is accused of treating Jesus as merely one teacher among many. But Christianity has never claimed that it is Jesus' teaching that makes him uniquely significant—St Paul seems to have known little or nothing of what Jesus taught. For Christians, Jesus' significance lies in who he is and therefore in what he is believed to have accomplished by his dying and rising. It is no heresy to recognise truth found beyond the confines of the Church, and one of de Mello's great services has been to open Christian eyes to the wisdom of other traditions.

One cannot help but sense that what precipitated this condemnation is de Mello's habit of tweaking religious authorities and challenging gurus—his insistence that the God of the gospels will always elude our images and categories, and escape from the structures we build to domesticate the divine. All the evidence of recent months suggests that, even more than 'an exaggerated apophaticism', it is the issue of authority that preoccupies the *fin-de-siècle* Roman mind.

In giving only grudging acknowledgment to de Mello's important contributions, in setting him up as a systematic theologian only then to knock him down, in only raising their voice more than a decade after his death, the Congregation risks undermining the very respect for authority that they are trying to shore up.

—Dan Madigan SJ

Eire's other Mary

Irish journalists have a problem with President Mary McAleese. It may be because they are less comfortable with her elegance and composure than with the tragedy, crime and political scandal of which their country has no sad shortage at the moment. So they use terms like 'queenly condescension' and 'suffocating smugness'. Earlier this year they criticised her motives—though not the action itself—when she took communion at a Church of Ireland service in Dublin. They speculated on what Ulster nationalist baggage she may have been trailing when she absented herself from some horse-Protestant shindig at the Royal Dublin Society. And when she dressed in a trouser-suit for a State occasion, they almost choked on their adjectives; would Paddy Hillery, the last male President, have dared to turn up to such an occasion in a sporranned kilt, one of them asked, with the kind of logic that would appeal to a 12-year-old.

In a way, it is not surprising that some journalists are less than pleasant to McAleese. Whereas her predecessor, Mary Robinson, with her impeccable record in progressive causes, was the darling of the liberal set, Mary Mark 2 is less easy to pigeonhole. She supported Joyce scholar David Norris in his successful campaign to have legislation on homosexual conduct declared unconstitutional. She is a long-time advocate of women priests and of a greater role for the laity in church affairs. The Irish hierarchy nervously describe her as a 'friendly critic'.

On the other hand, she has written and spoken on the conservative and pro-life side of issues such as contraception, abortion and in-vitro fertilisation, and made a strong case for denominational education. In 1984, she acted as advisor to the Catholic bishops during their presentation to the New Ireland Forum. When questions on morality were put by a member of the forum, the answers were given, not by one of their Lordships, but by McAleese. Ironically, the questioner was Mary Robinson and she expressed herself less than satisfied with the answers she received.

The future President's uneasy relationship with the media continued during an election campaign which brought out the worst in the political party backers and harassed reporters trying to find angles which would spice up the blandness.

The problem was that the candidates were too nice. Adi Roche was an anti-nuclear secular saint and far too nice; Mary Banotti was politically experienced and a niece of Michael Collins but also too nice; Dana was a singer of uplifting songs and much too nice; and Mary McAleese was intimidatingly clever and too nice. Although Derek Nally was also nice, he was at least a man and would make a great President, they said. He trailed behind all the others with a mere 5 per cent of the vote.

Add to all the above the fact that as a Northerner, Mary McAleese was not even entitled to vote in the election (the same applied to Dana). Carefully planted leaks suggested that she had a soft spot for Sinn Fein, an opinion reinforced when, in a break from his normally impeccable political nous, Gerry Adams declared that he would vote for her if he had a vote.

Citizens of the Irish Republic have a poor record when it comes to understanding the soul of northern nationalism. They are uncomfortable with its stridency, the permanent chip lodged on those green shoulders, the sense of a community which has to fight for whatever it gets.

In the early days of the Troubles, when McAleese was still a student, her family

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Just when you thought it was safe ...

A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE certainly can be a dangerous thing. Just ask Sydney Water.

Having recognised that the protozoan parasites *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia* were potentially a problem in its water supply, Sydney Water, through its subsidiary Australian Water Technologies, supported an innovative research program at Macquarie University to develop a world-class detection system for the parasites.

'If it weren't for the testing technology that Macquarie University pioneered and Sydney Water has used, the original [July] contamination would probably have gone unnoticed,' said Dr Jim Smith, a microbiologist who is part-owner of an environmental analysis laboratory in America's north-west. Dr Smith, a specialist in the detection of the parasites found in Sydney's water, is spending a year working with the Australian Environmental Flow Cytometry Group at the University, because he is convinced its detection technology is the best in the world.

The group has applied a laser-based technique—used widely in medicine to sort cells—to detect and measure the levels of parasites in the water. The new approach gives far more precise and reproducible results than conventional methods, says Smith. In addition, it can provide results in a matter of hours, as opposed to days.

But, as Mr Peter McClellan QC made clear in the Second Interim Report of his inquiry into the recent contamination, the real problem for Sydney Water has been what to do with the knowledge its sophisticated detection system provided. Because knowing the levels of parasites in the drinking water is only part of the story.

There is no doubt that *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia* are nasty customers. Both are highly infectious parasites of the small intestine and can cause forms of gastroenteritis. *Giardia* is the more common. But its infective form, the cyst, can be killed in water by adding chlorine, and the disease it causes can be treated with the drug Flagyl. *Cryptosporidium* is more insidious. It responds neither to antibiotics nor vaccines. The infective form, known as an oocyst, is encased in a coat which is resistant to the environment, including chlorinated water. It is typically removed from drinking water using very fine filters.

Once infected, the body's best defence against these organisms is a healthy immune system. While both can make life unpleasant for five to ten days—with vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, and a low fever—neither is normally life-threatening. A substantial proportion of people never suffer from any of these symptoms. But when the immune system is profoundly suppressed, as in people severely affected by HIV or undergoing chemotherapy, *Cryptosporidium* can become chronic and deadly.

In April 1993, for example, more than 400,000 people in Milwaukee, Wisconsin suffered gastroenteritis attributed to *Cryptosporidium*. Over 4000 were admitted to hospital and at least 69 people died, nearly all of them HIV positive. Less than a year later, 103 people in Las Vegas contracted severe diarrhoea, and at least 41 died, again almost all HIV positive. According to recent epidemiological estimates, however, in Australia fewer than 2500 people run a real risk of being severely affected. And recent improvements in drug therapy for AIDS have led to a decrease in the chances of chronic infection in this vulnerable group.

Only one of the six known species of *Cryptosporidium* infects humans, and only one species of *Giardia*. The cysts/oocysts must be alive to cause disease. The routine monitoring techniques currently used by Sydney Water, however, are not able to distinguish the species of parasite detected, or whether the cysts/oocysts are alive or dead, hence they provide no idea as to the risk they present. Technology for rapidly distinguishing species and viability is only now becoming available. So Sydney Water executives generally had to make decisions without the precise information.

Although it is clear from the American experience that the parasites can cause havoc, there is no documented direct link between parasite levels and prevalence of gastroenteritis in the community. We simply do not know how well the human immune system copes with these protozoan parasites. They are everywhere. We come into daily contact with them. Drinking water is not even the most common source of infection. Extensive research into the link between parasites in the drinking water and prevalence of gastroenteritis is only now in progress—in Melbourne and Adelaide. As *Eureka Street* went to press, there had been no reported increase in the levels of gastroenteritis in the Sydney area throughout the whole contamination period.

SO SYDNEY WATER has been faced with making decisions about whether people should be asked to boil their water against a background of knowledge that was hardly clear-cut. The only thing the corporation could be sure about was that they were in a no-win situation.

If a 'boil order' were justified, the community would be angry at the inconvenience, and at Sydney Water for 'allowing' the contamination. If the order were instituted and not justified, the community would still have the inconvenience and would lose faith in the corporation. The consequences of no 'boil order' followed by an increase in disease or even a death were too horrible to contemplate. In addition, whatever information was released would be bound to be interpreted the wrong way, because community understanding of the parasites was poor. There are stories of doctors who still think they are dealing with a bacterium, not a protozoan. And almost every statement released by a politician betrays breathtaking ignorance.

The kind of deliberations which took place at Sydney Water are laid out in detail in the Inquiry's Second Interim Report. They make for riveting reading. McLellan clearly feels that the leaders of Sydney Water made errors of judgement in the tough situation with which they were faced. They must have felt, in a twist on Oscar Wilde's famous aphorism, 'There is only one thing in the world worse than knowing, and that is not knowing.' ■

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(... continued from page 18)
were petrol-bombed out of their home in North Belfast. She was the oldest of nine children and she carried more than the usual responsibility for her younger siblings; one of these, who is profoundly deaf, was left for dead after a beating by a Protestant gang. At about the same time, the family of Bobby Sands and his sister Bernadette were similarly hunted out of a mixed neighbourhood. They reacted in one way to this treatment; for the young Mary the response was to concentrate all the more fiercely on her studies, finish with a first in law at Queens and assert her and her community's rights with dignity, courage and ultimately great success.

—Frank O'Shea

Bougainville bargains

NO-ONE WOULD APPEAR to have more authority to speak for Bougainvilleans than John Momis, who has been the MP for the whole of the province for all six terms since 1972. Admittedly, the elections of 1992 and 1997, held without full participation in circumstances of civil war, have hardly accorded him the same support as the previous four. However, in those four, when he was a Catholic priest, he won absolute majorities while the party he founded and led, Melanesian Alliance, dominated the polls.

It should not be surprising that his stance on independence for Bougainville has seemed ambivalent—to his harshest critics even devious. He was, after all, the delegate who, during Bougainville's first secessionist movement in 1975, petitioned the United Nations—a month before Papua New Guinea's declaration of independence—for a separate sovereignty.

In this he was misunderstood. Ideologically he believed that Papua New Guinea could achieve cohesion only through decentralisation, and that anything less for his province would be unacceptable. The Somare government's failure to accommodate demands for provincial government led to Bougainville's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) on 1 September 1975 and the subsequent impasse was resolved only by the grant of semi-autonomy for all 19 provinces in August 1976. Momis became Minister for Provincial Affairs and architect of the system.

However, the Momis rhetoric did not always match his political moderation, perhaps because both that and his own mixed-race status made him feel it imperative to placard his full identification with other Bougainvilleans. Hence he would tell Bougainvilleans that they had 'an absolute right to self-determination'. Moreover, he was passionately opposed to the intrusive Conzinc Rio Tinto mine at Panguna and saw even its capitalist philanthropies as corrupting. This led, during his 1987 election campaign, to his inflammatory charges of gross exploitation which have been seen by some commentators as the match that lit Frances Ona's rebellion.

After the rebellion erupted, Momis condemned its leaders for lacking a mandate

to act on behalf of Bougainvilleans and for 'hijacking' the secessionist issue. Since then he has participated in the various peace initiatives but has not always convinced his critics that he is not playing a double game for his own aggrandisement.

His latest statement—at a leaders' congress in Buin, South Bougainville, on 22 August—should help. Independence, he said, was 'an unrealistic goal' and those calling for it were ignoring Papua New Guinea sovereignty under international law and 'misleading the people'. The same has to be said for foreigners who, for whatever motives, romantically advocate secession as a basic right and a salve for Bougainville's problems. 'Papua New Guinea is a sovereign nation,' said Momis, 'and the UN has no power to direct [it] ... to grant independence.'

A meeting of 'some leaders' (excluding Kabui and present premier, Sinato) is a more apt description for the grandly named congress of 21 'pan-Bougainville chiefs' plus two women (one the wife of 'General' Kauona). On 22 August the congress reaffirmed last year's peace and ceasefire declarations, welcomed Port Moresby's recission of the army callout order for the province, but expressed concern that the peace process had slowed down, and sought a process which asserted 'the right of people to self-determination'. Unfortunately, a so-called 'chief' in Bougainville can mean any male whose leadership is, however temporarily, acknowledged by any (even small) community.

Momis denies that the signatories represented 'the entire population' and that the people are united in an aspiration for independence. Long-term observers can readily believe this, especially of the generally more advanced Buka islanders in the north (roughly a quarter of the population). Even for them, however, the issue is not one of legitimising the Papua New Guinea state as much as extreme wariness of being dominated by Bougainville 'mainland', especially by the central Nasioi to which the rebel triumvirate of Ona, Kauona and former premier Kabui belong. Bukas and others know that the revival of their once-prosperous province, now trashed by anarchic revolt, cannot be accomplished with leaders like Ona. They know they are better off with Port Moresby.

That is, of course, unless Port Moresby does something offensive—not by any means off the cards—to unite the conflicting factions again (for example, demanding that Bougainville join the present provincial regime). The immediate problem is how to organise the Bougainville Reconciliation Government which is supposed to be elected in some way by the end of the year. A committee currently looking at this is unlikely to find a suitably democratic process, especially with the rebels still under arms and still committing random violence.

Nothing constructive came out of the Buin meeting, but no alternative vision emanates from a Port Moresby beset with its own turmoil. To the national politicians, now that they are realistically accepting that the Panguna mine cannot be restarted, Bougainville is more remote than ever.

Unfortunately, in spite of his majorities, Momis has long lost a lot of his credibility. Many leaders are unlikely to take his advice to 'talk about what is achievable', and the non-signifying flag of self-determination will continue to flap at the continuing talks. The one consolation is that so far the rebels have no confidence that they can gain by restarting a civil war.

—James Griffin

This month's contributors: **Gerard Windsor**'s most recent book was *Heaven Where the Bachelors Sit*; **David Glanz** is a freelance journalist; **Andrew Dodd** works for Community Aid Abroad (Oxfam in Australia); **Richard Leonard** SJ is the Director of the sesquicentenary celebrations of the Jesuits in Australia; **Dan Madigan** SJ is *Eureka Street*'s publisher; **Frank O'Shea** teaches maths at Marist College, Canberra; **James Griffin** is Emeritus Professor at the University of Papua New Guinea.

DEWI ANGGRAENI

Indonesia: Islam rising

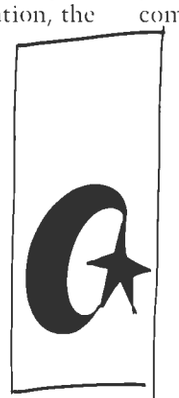
ISLAMIC SCHOLAR, Nurcholish Madjid, recently predicted that Indonesia's second wave of Islamisation would occur by 2010.

Madjid was speaking at a conference on Islam in South East Asia, run by the University of Melbourne and Deakin University. Participants who know Nurcholish and his works were not surprised by the prediction: Nurcholish has written widely on Islam in Indonesia, especially the emergence of radical Islam.

How close to the truth, however, is his theory?

At the same conference, Riaz Hassan, Flinders University Professor of Sociology, reinforced Nurcholish's prediction. A survey he conducted indicates that the most trusted key institutions in Indonesia are those representing Islam, followed closely by those representing intellectualism, education and knowledge.

In a country where Islam is the religion of some 85 per cent of the population, the trust in the religious leaders seems understandable. But while they have the respect of the masses, they have not always wielded power in the political realm.



During Suharto's New Order government especially, the former president was able to contain the force of Muslim influence and keep it at arm's length. Suharto successfully placed the Armed Forces as a countermeasure against the Muslims, thus creating an impression that, without the Armed Forces, the non-Muslim public would be vulnerable to the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. In the meantime, Suharto also cultivated relationships with Muslim groups, conveying the message to the Armed Forces that he could rally the Muslim forces against them if they failed to toe his line.

Suharto was even able to force all different Muslim groups into one political party, the United Development Party (PPP). With them all tidily contained, and the Armed Forces and the civil servants boxed into the ruling party, Golkar, it was then easy for Suharto to identify those who posed potential danger to him and the status quo, because they were mostly to be found in the third political party (his government only allowed three political parties) the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI).

PDI was indeed the most inclusive political party, housing many of the hard-nosed nationalists (who still believed in Sukarno's ideals about nationalism), the Christians, intellectuals and social democrats—basically those whose values clashed with the ideologies of the other two parties. However, PDI, which was not explicitly Muslim or under the umbrella of Golkar and did not belong to the Armed Forces, was vulnerable to the government's accusations of subversion or communist leaning. Under the New Order regime, being subversive or 'infiltrated by communists' was tantamount to trying to topple the government—a treasonable offence. PDI ran the risk of such an accusation in 1996.

When the elected chairman of the party, Megawati Sukarnoputri, became too successful in rallying support for PDI, the government began to see her as a threat. At the party's national congress, a rival congress was engineered in another city, where a government-sanctioned chairman, Soeryadi, was elected. Naturally Megawati's supporters were outraged, and insisted that she was still their rightful leader. On 27 July that year, the Soeryadi-led PDI camp demanded that the headquarters in Jakarta be relinquished to them, but the Megawati-led supporters refused to leave the building. A full-scale physical confrontation occurred where a number of Megawati supporters were arrested and later charged with subversion.

So, being neither Muslim nor a Golkar supporter could mean being vulnerable to the all-powerful authorities. And since change, if it were to occur, would not come from Golkar, it would have to carry the Muslim label.

While the New Order government had succeeded in improving the country's economy, the uneven distribution of wealth had also caused a widening gap between the rich and the poor. In a country where communism has been declared enemy of the state, therefore banned, any individuals and organisations who have dared question the government's social justice policy (or lack of it) have had communist labels forced on them. Unless of course, they were Muslims.

Thus Muslim militancy was born. In the lower strata of the society, people have been using their Muslim identity when demanding social justice from the government. After the fall of Suharto, the different political groups emerging onto the political scene cannot ignore the potential power of the Muslim masses in initiating change.

One of the keys to change, it appears, is in the hands of the two largest Muslim bodies, the Nahdatul Ulama (NU), a grassroots organisation with some 30 million members, and the Muhammadiyah, an organisation of business practitioners, teachers and professionals, with a slightly smaller membership. Among the country's Muslim population, NU has always been known as traditionalist and Muhammadiyah modernist.

NOT LONG AFTER Independence, in the early '50s, Indonesian Muslims enjoyed a limited period of economic revival, which benefited members of the Muhammadiyah. They continued a tradition of founding educational institutions where their children experienced Western-style learning. By the late 1960s, when the New Order government had just taken power, young Muslims from Muhammadiyah had

graduated in various disciplines, forming a powerful Muslim middle class. And they soon used their combined assets skilfully.

With their Western education they entered the fields of business, government services and academia. Realising that Islam was the only significant alternative power to the ruling party, this new generation also took advantage of their Muslim identity to enter politics. Not all of them positioned themselves in the alternative power: a fair number joined the ruling party, thereby becoming the Muslim influence in the government circle. And since they were already established in the civil service and experienced in policy-making, their influence in the policy of the government's Islamic university, IAIN, was also strongly felt.

Yet despite the presence of Muslims throughout Indonesian society, Islam—being the religion of the majority of the population—is still identified as representing the country's peasants and the lower middle class.

THE NEW ORDER government practised a curious combination of capitalism and authoritarianism, where they gained economic dominance by renting their power to ethnic Chinese businesses. By choosing the ethnic Chinese to be their money spinners, they were able to retain political power as well as accumulate wealth. They knew the ethnic Chinese had no political power of their own, hence would remain dependent on them for personal security. Ethnic Chinese had lived in Indonesia for generations and indeed were Indonesian citizens, but were always regarded as non-indigenous by the majority of the population. Their prominence in business only bred resentment all round. So collectively they became the government's convenient hostage, as they were made to feel 'indebted' to the government's protection. Here the Muslim business people also used their 'Muslimness' to compete with the ethnic Chinese. The did not have equivalent prominence in the field, but they had a psychological power base among the population.

The emergence of Muslim influence did not elude Suharto. To make sure it did not develop beyond his control he encouraged the founding of a Muslim think-tank, the Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Association (ICMI). He appointed his most trusted protégé, Dr B.J. Habibie (now President Habibie) as head of ICMI. The government-sponsored think-tank did attract noted intellectuals, partly because people wanted to be close to power, and partly, it seems, because many liked to be identified as 'intellectuals'.

ICMI was closely watched, however, and the members were not free to express opinions that deviated from the official line. When the chairman of Muhammadiyah, Amien Rais, criticised the government's business dealings with some multinational mining companies, he was pressured to resign his chairmanship of the Board of Experts of ICMI, and 'encouraged' to shift to the innocuous Board of Counsellors, as a mere member. His demotion prompted various reactions in Muhammadiyah. Some were concerned that Muhammadiyah might have fallen out of the government's favour, others tacitly supported his stance. Among those concerned were some who expressed disappointment that Rais may have jeopardised his organisation's standing with the government (namely Suharto). In retrospect, the incident has provided Rais with credibility as an independent thinker, who later, during the last days of Suharto, emerged as an alternative leader.

In the meantime, NU, which as a political party merged into PPP in 1973, retained its name but changed the nature of its organisation—into a social one. NU maintained its power base for some time in rural areas, where it managed the *pesantrens*, the rural boarding schools. Understandably, NU had extensive social influence among the rural population. However, the NU leadership gradually realised that, if they wanted to gain political power in the New Order government, they needed to compete with the other forces already in place. They began to send their children to universities too. One of the universities founded by NU, the Nusantara University in Bandung, is now one of the mainstream learning institutions.

What is noteworthy in the *pesantren*-style learning is its emphasis on philosophy of individual development as well as on group-learning. *Pesantren* teachers have long believed that their pupils are individuals with individual as well as collective potential.

Since very few NU members were involved in large businesses, those who went to universities became intellectuals, and rarely found themselves in the position of competing with anyone in business. Two such thinkers are the organisation's own chairman, Abdurrahman Wahid, popularly known as Gus Dur, and Nurcholish Madjid, the originator of Paramadina, a social organisation which has also founded a university.

Nurcholish is an independent thinker, but of NU origins. His works reflect a great deal of NU basic philosophy. Paramadina attracts very fine thinkers and extremely committed workers for social justice and the empowerment of women. They are good Muslims but respect the teachings of other religions and, necessarily, other ethnic groups. NU, which has always been known as an organisation for traditionalist Muslims, nowadays has a comprehensive education structure. Paramadina University, while not officially an NU institution, bears a great deal of NU identity.

WHILE MUHAMMADIYAH members were no strangers to Western-type education and sophisticated lifestyle, it is interesting to see the development of NU in Indonesia's intellectual life. Muhammadiyah has wide and established influence in all sectors of the country's middle-class, including medium to large businesses. NU's power base is mostly among the agrarian and small business class. The unfair distribution of wealth affects mostly the NU community. During last year's riots, where churches and shops belonging to ethnic Chinese were burned down in East Javanese towns, it was

alleged that some NU members were involved. Gus Dur promptly made a public apology for his supporters' involvement, and at the same time exhorted his supporters not to subject themselves to incitement to violence, emphasising that such acts were contradictory to the writings in the Qur'ân and the teachings of Muhammad.

Both Muhammadiyah and NU are moving toward 21st-century Indonesia, each in its own fashion: NU mostly bypasses the roads to large and medium businesses, while Muhammadiyah is putting down its roots in them.

ISLAMISATION IS NOW an irreversible trend in Indonesia. In 15 years' time the country will be saturated with Muslim influence, if not Islamic thought.

In the political arena, this influence is already very visible. While over 50 political parties have appeared since the fall of Suharto, only a handful appear to have the durability necessary to survive the current crisis. In fact, at a seminar held by the University of Indonesia in Jakarta last August, political observers from Australia, the USA and Indonesia agreed that five big parties would emerge. Three of these have explicit Muslim labels. The PKB, predicted to gain 20 per cent of the votes, was founded by NU. The PAN has as its leader Amien Rais, the chairman of Muhammadiyah (who, since PAN's official launch on 22 August has had to resign the chairmanship). And the PBB was founded by the Indonesian Islamic Broadcasting Council. Even the other two, PDI (Megawati's camp) and what is left of Golkar, while inclusive in principle, have more Muslim than non-Muslim members.

Nurcholish Madjid believes that the second wave of Islamisation will become increasingly exclusive. By the year 2010, Muslim experts will have entered and taken leading positions in the political arena, the bureaucracy, business, education and academia. Islam will no longer be seen as the religion of peasants and lower middle class: it will represent whole sectors and cross-sections of Indonesia. The non-Muslim population will need economic or political leverage, or skills that society deems indispensable to be able to maintain their current positions. And even with all of the above, they still run the risk, as minority groups, of being sources of resentment and hence targets of social aggression.

To the ethnic Chinese especially, Islamisation may mean a significant degree of hardship for the business practitioners among them, because they will have to compete with a significant group who have a power base in society as well as economic and political leverage. Those who are involved in medium and large businesses will face competition with Muhammadiyah members, and the small businesses in the rural areas will have NU members as their competitors.

But this trend does not necessarily mean that Indonesia is on the way to Islamic fundamentalism. The modernist Muhammadiyah members are acutely aware that they will have serious problems taking part in the global economy with Islamic fundamentalism pulling at their coat tails. Foreign investors are suspicious of fundamentalism in any religion, let alone one they do not understand well. In the NU camp, the growing number of Islamic intellectuals and scholars like Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurachman Wahid, who are very vocal in their liberal and pluralist beliefs, tempers the potential danger of fundamentalism.

Most NU scholars, in their writings and public speaking, promote the creation of a tolerant Islamic society, and decry the formation of an Islamic state. While Indonesians are inherently respectful of religious leaders, as indicated in Riaz Hassan's research, they also hold intellectuals in very high esteem. Institutions like Paramadina, therefore, are likely to have a great deal of influence in shaping a more pluralist and multicultural Indonesia.

In the meantime, smaller Muslim social and political groups are not likely to start the ball rolling toward fundamentalism, partly because there is very little community support for it, and because successive governments have been consistently opposed to it.

Not least important is that Pancasila—the five principles that were first adopted as the national philosophy by president Sukarno, then transformed into the state ideology by Suharto—guarantees freedom of religion. While there have been recent discussions about dropping Pancasila as the state ideology, because it smacks of totalitarianism, there have not been suggestions that it be given up altogether.

The second wave of Islamisation, as Nurcholish calls it, may well not herald fundamentalism, but it certainly will bring change to Indonesia. ■

Dewi Anggraeni is the Australia correspondent for *Forum Keadilan* and the *Jakarta Post*. (See also 'The beam in our eye', p10)

VINCENT MATTHEWS

Getting across the message

PARANOIA ABOUT the media is prevalent among politicians.

In the wider community distrust of the media is as common as the disaffection with politicians.

Generally criticism of the media has come from what can be loosely termed left-wing sources, based on the theory that newspaper, radio and television proprietors have commercial interests that coincide with the policies of the conservative parties. But recently this attack on the media has originated from the right of the political spectrum and is worth analysis.

The most remarkable examples of this attack have been an extraordinary polemic by the new editor of *Quadrant* magazine, P.P. McGuinness, and the campaign against the ABC by Communications Minister, Senator Richard Alston. The paranoia of politicians over what is said and written about them is understandable. But it is unbecoming in one who has enjoyed a prosperous career as a professional in newspapers.

The McGuinness article on the future of *Quadrant* was surprising not only for its intellectual shallowness but for its obsession with some ill-defined forces in Australia that were apparently seeking to control the nation's thought processes. The McGuinness prologue to his editorship tended to take a glib yet caustic view of the media and indicated a deep resentment bordering on hostility to Australian journalism. There were wider implications in the McGuinness article because he represents an influential body of opinion in this country.

McGuinness wanted *Quadrant* under his editorship to 'slough off the stultifying mediocrity and conformism which has dominated Australia's media'. He referred in his article to 'an attempt to impose on the community as a whole a mindset which derives from the sixties and seventies and is reminiscent of the same "party line" approach to thinking on intellectual and public policy issues'. The extravagance of the language went on with allegations that disagreement with 'certain policy approaches' is 'greeted with abuse and hostility' while 'dissent ... is suppressed wherever possible' or 'dismissed in contemptuous terms'.

He claimed there was 'a whole generation of potential readers who have been conditioned into either not reading a great deal, or expecting confirmation of current orthodoxies and political fashions among the political elites in what they do read'. 'These people', he said, were 'already more than sufficiently catered for in the content of the mainstream media, especially in the ABC and in newspapers like *The Age*'.

This offhand criticism of *The Age* was strange given that the newspaper for several years published a column by McGuinness, paid handsomely for it and gave it generous space. One of his more notorious columns was a vigorous defence of the tobacco industry and a rejection of the campaigns by the medical profession on the health dangers of smoking. Another, following his visit to Japan, urged a relaxation of the ban on killing whales because the Japanese fishing industry wanted more whale meat for the Japanese market. To be given ample space to promote such unorthodox views surely demonstrated that claims of suppression of dissent were false.

There also appeared to be a large gap in the McGuinness case against the media when he wrote of 'newspapers like *The Age*'. But what newspapers in Australia are 'like *The Age*'? Rupert Murdoch controls newspapers with 60 per cent of the circulation in Australia. Are his publications also to be lumped into this 'stultifying mediocrity and conformism' dominating the media?

Have they been responsible for 'the bile, bitchiness and personal hostility' which have, according to McGuinness, become all too common in the media? I feel sure Rupert Murdoch would be most disturbed if this were the case.

Nor would Mr Kerry Packer be pleased if he felt his popular Channel Nine TV network, or any of his big-selling magazines were performing any role that would justify the McGuinness accusations.

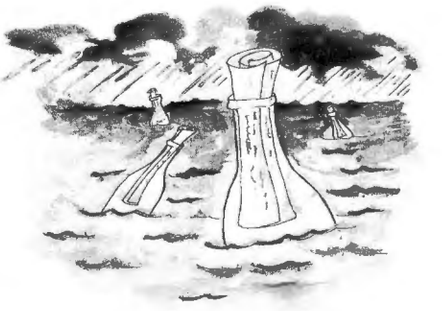
McGuinness further attacked what he called the 'political elites' in Australia. But who are they? After all, every State and Territory government except one at the time McGuinness wrote were controlled by Liberal and/or National Parties, as is the Federal Government.

Surely McGuinness would not include John Howard, Jeff Kennett or Richard Court among the political elites whose orthodoxy needs to be challenged.

One characteristic nearly all political leaders have in common is their lament that whenever they suffer an electoral defeat or severe criticism, it is their communication which has failed. Never their policies. 'We're not getting our message across' is a political cliché.

However, the media represents by and large what the community is thinking, doing and believing, however reprehensible to some those thoughts, actions and beliefs might be. The media isn't a monolithic think-tank that issues daily directions on political or cultural topics, but is made up of thousands of journalists all struggling to earn a living, working constantly against time constraints to produce stories appealing enough to get into print or on air.

This applies whether the journalist is doing a State round or operating out of the Canberra Press Gallery. Given the personal and professional competitiveness among journalists it is unrealistic to accuse 'the media' of trying 'to impose on the community a mindset'. There is ample opportunity for any views on current



matters of concern to the Australian community, and particularly those held by McGuinness, to be expressed in the media.

Take just one example. The most frequent contributor to newspaper letters columns is Des Moore, the nation's leading advocate of the economic rationalist theory and a great admirer of McGuinness. He is also occasionally given full feature-length space, even, one might add, in *The Age*.

And dare we mention talkback radio, particularly in New South Wales? There, indeed, dissent is suppressed, but no doubt it isn't the sort of dissent McGuinness has in mind.

The case for economic rationalism is presented most forcefully almost daily by Alan Woods (*The Australian*), Alan Mitchell (*Financial Review*) and Max Walsh (*Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*).

No government Minister, State or Federal, would ever be denied access to the ABC's news or current affairs programs to express views similar to those of McGuinness. So where is this conformism and stultifying mediocrity which dominates the Australian media? It is, of course, a myth.

There is a parallel here with Senator Alston's accusations of bias against the ABC.

Bias is indeed in the eye and ear of the reader or listener, but the debate could be clarified if only some politicians could be truthful and honest. In this case what Senator Alston really meant was not that the ABC was biased but that it wasn't biased.

As a politician Senator Alston is committed to the interests of his party and the government of which he is a senior member. He is, therefore, very clearly biased in favour of those interests. He, and several of his colleagues, are angry because the ABC isn't also biased in favour of their views and policies. The fact that, however imperfectly, the ABC attempts to present a balanced picture of political events and inevitably exposes government faults and failings is bound to infuriate those dedicated supporters of the government.

An example of Ministerial ambivalence over the ABC's position was manifest during the waterfront dispute. Let us suppose the ABC had broadcast only the views and comments of the stevedoring company Patrick and the Federal Government and ignored or suppressed the representations of the union and the ACTU. There would not have been a peep of protest from the Government.

The ABC would have been demonstrating the right kind of bias.

Accusations of bias in the media are nothing new, of course. As far back as 1948 a Royal Commission into the Press was held in Britain, during a period of the Attlee Labour Government. One of the witnesses was the managing director of the *Daily Express*, then owned by Lord Beaverbrook, a fanatical campaigner for the Empire and the Conservative Party. He denied there was bias against Labour in the newspapers and said that in fact 'all journalists are socialists'. The editor of the *Sheffield Telegraph*, who was in the public gallery, called out 'Nonsense!'

'Well,' corrected the managing director, 'the best ones, anyway.' ■

Vincent Matthews writes freelance, having been political editor of the Melbourne *Herald* and chief of its Canberra bureau. He was Head of the Government Information Unit for four years in the Fraser Government.

South of the border

WHAT ON EARTH HAPPENED to Latin America? When I was in El Salvador some years ago people often spoke of the Protestant Pentecostal groups. Some saw them as right-wing germs infiltrating from the USA, others as a cancer in a body which was Catholic by right. Some saw them as both.

On a bus one day, I chatted to a pastor reading his bible. He was a *campesino*, lived on the edge of the small town of Tacachico, and served a small congregation. He seemed more of the people than the parish clergy, was totally unfunded, and wholly admirable in his life. He made me reflect on the agenda of the Catholic church for Latin America. It seemed designed to deal with dangers perceived within the Catholic church: the challenges posed by liberation theology, base communities and independent religious. The program of renewal, called the New Evangelisation, seemed based on central control and a fairly abstract catechesis. I would not have put money on it in Tacachico.

Three good recent articles discuss the development of Pentecostalism in Latin America and its wider significance.

In the *International Review of Mission* (April 1998), Samuel Escobar provides a multifaceted view of the Protestant churches in Latin America, including the history of their missionary endeavour.

With mainly North American pastors, the mainline churches were strongly anti-communist in their leaning after World War II. They have since grown in numbers and have become more diverse in their attitudes, the most spectacular phenomenon of the last 30 years being the growth of the Pentecostal churches. Escobar brings out their complexity, and also dismisses many of the stereotypes: they are not uniformly politically apathetic or conservative. Few are funded from abroad. Nor is their appeal confined to one group in society. But Escobar notes their strength in the poor areas of large conurbations, where people survive on the strength of an informal economy and informal organisation.

In another article in the same review, Ana Langerak reflects on the reasons for the success of the Pentecostal groups. She ascribes it to the way in which they articulate and organise Christian faith, in particular, their tradition of oral liturgy, their use of story-telling and the space which they make for all, including women, to participate fully in the life of the church.

In an edition of *The Way* devoted to Latin America (July 1998), Rowan Ireland takes a long view of the phenomenon of Pentecostalism. Ireland, an Australian sociologist who has worked in and studied Latin America over 30 years, can look back at the Pentecostal movement from its beginnings. The account he gives is like that of Escobar. He identifies the common qualities of Pentecostal groups as an emphasis on conversion, insistence on personal responsibility for living and proclaiming the Gospel, priority given to personal spiritual experience, reliance on the reading of Scripture, mutual support within and between church congregations, and the space for women in the life of the church. He is not confident that either of the strategies adopted in the Catholic church—base communities and the New Evangelisation—will meet the challenge from Pentecostalism. The Base Communities are too often lacking in support and local autonomy to promise effectiveness.

Where New Evangelisation ceases to be a slogan and is translated into consistent pastoral strategies, it is doomed to fail precisely because it opposes the appealing features of Pentecostal groups. It is a strategy of centralisation, suspicious of local initiative. It gives priority to abstractions of doctrine, suspicious of religious experience. It insists on clear hierarchical control, suspicious of independent local communities.

Ireland's conclusions are sombre. He hopes for co-operation between Christians, but fears that as the Pentecostal churches themselves become more settled, they will shrink, while Eastern and other religions will grow rapidly. The result will be a religious smorgasbord.

To the Catholic theologian, the interest of Pentecostal churches is that in their enthusiasm, relatively loose structure and local strength they recall nothing so much as the early Christian communities. At the same time, the Catholic church appeals to the life of the same communities to defend the way it orders unity between churches. In Latin America the appeal of universal order is clearly less fecund than that of local mission. ■

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

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Series editors: Geoffrey Brennan and Francis G. Castles.

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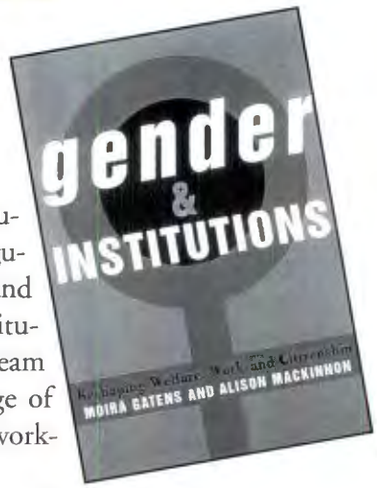

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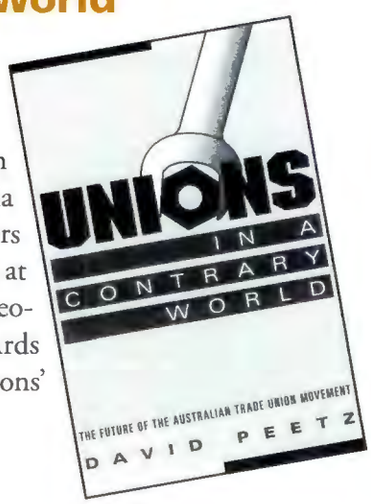

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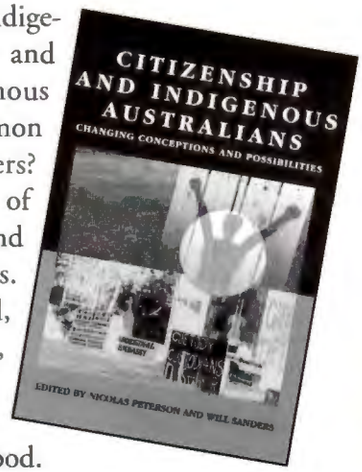

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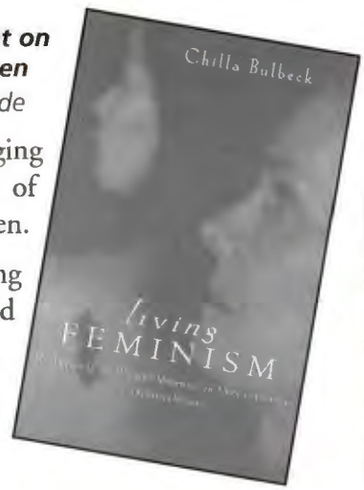

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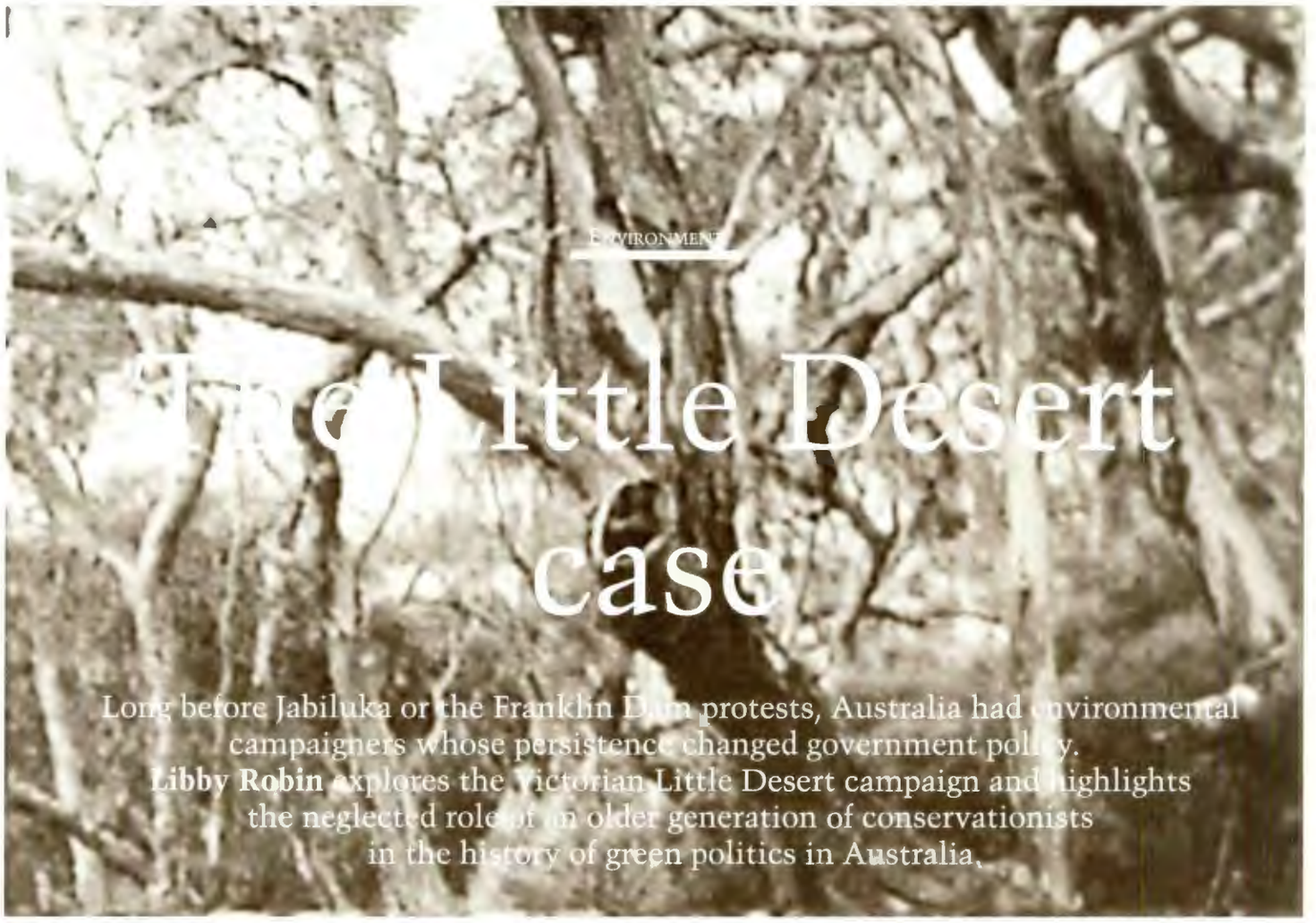

ENVIRONMENT

The Little Desert case

Long before Jabiluka or the Franklin Dam protests, Australia had environmental campaigners whose persistence changed government policy. **Libby Robin** explores the Victorian Little Desert campaign and highlights the neglected role of an older generation of conservationists in the history of green politics in Australia.

CONSERVATION CHANGED its meaning in the post-war years. In natural history societies before 1945, there had been concern about the loss of individual species and the loss of recreational nature. By the 1960s the concern for the loss of 'habitat' captured both earlier concerns. In the 1970s this developed into a fear that all of 'nature as we know it'—or, if you like, 'human habitat'—was about to disappear.

Field naturalists generally had an intimate knowledge of the nature proximate to their homes or favourite camping spots. It was their ownership of and intimacy with nature that was threatened, rather than nature itself. Nature was still passive, a resource for human refreshment. Urban environmentalists, however, began to display a concern for a nature they had never seen, for a wilderness that needed to 'be there', unused, to make sense, paradoxically, of their urban lives. This 'wild' nature—untamed, untouched—was part of a new view of nature as active subject, not merely passive resource. This was also the nature of the 'ecologically pure' (human-free) scientific reference areas that became a feature of national parks during the 1970s and 1980s.

In the 1990s, while biodiversity is a catchword, the complexity of 'wilderness' is also being explored. In the interpretation centre at Nitmiluk Gorge in the Northern Territory—one of the national parks co-managed by Aboriginal and settler Australians—the visitor is welcomed to Jawoyn land and reminded that 'Nitmiluk is not a wilderness. It is a human artefact, constructed through the ceremonies, kinship ties, fires and hunting of countless generations of our people.' National parks *are* about biodiversity, but not only about biodiversity. Ecologically minded environmental managers are having to come to terms with the fact that 'biodiversity is a whitefella word'. Environmental preservation cannot be isolated from its cultural construction.

Many of the histories of conservation and environmental movements, in Australia and internationally, have been written by activists and focus on the post-'green' period since the 1970s. These studies often emphasise the autonomy, originality and radicalism of 'popular' movements at the expense of the 'establishment' contribution made by earlier conservation bureaucrats and scientists.

The defence of the Little Desert, however, involved alliances that cut across this neat dichotomy. I was not a participant in that dispute, but I have interviewed many of its key figures. The opposition to the scheme was multifaceted, so my task has been to balance the views from the Wimmera and the city, the economic and conservation arguments, and the voices of community activists and people working within the bureaucracies that regarded themselves as 'protectors of the public interest'. The dispute came to a head in 1969—just as new ecological ideas were 'in the air'—but before the political structures of what became the green movement were established. The Little Desert campaign, therefore, offers a window on the at times painful transition from 'conservation' to 'environmentalism'.

THE LITTLE DESERT Settlement Scheme was among the last of a long line of proposals

for the 'settlement' of Australia's semi-arid lands. Agricultural and pastoral development had been the backbone of settler Australia, and the source of national mythology. 'How anybody in their senses could believe that the development of land to carry more stock was wrong is beyond my comprehension,' thundered the Victorian Minister of Lands, Sir William McDonald, more than 20 years after he first ventured the scheme to develop the Little Desert, in north-western Victoria.

In 1963 the AMP Society, one of many large financial groups to underwrite and profit from land subdivisions for new settlements, put forward a proposal to subdivide the Little Desert for agricultural or pastoral development, but after lengthy consideration the company decided that the steadily declining wool and wheat prices made the scheme economically risky. It tried to negotiate a government subsidy for roads, but in absence of that, the scheme was abandoned in March 1967.

Within months of the AMP's withdrawal, Sir William McDonald was appointed Victorian Minister of Lands. He had an energetic personal interest in the border country between South Australia and the Victorian Wimmera, as a farmer with properties on both sides of the Victorian/South Australian border, one of which abutted the Little Desert. He was aware that government indecision had been a factor in aborting the AMP plan for development, and was keen to give the government a decisive 'new look' through his Lands portfolio.

In June 1967 McDonald addressed a public meeting in Kaniva on the issue of developing the nearby Little Desert. McDonald knew the area well—both the place and its politics. The local people of Kaniva were initially enthusiastic, hoping that an influx of new settlers might make it possible to maintain the local high school and other amenities that were threatened with closure because of the area's declining population.

Early in 1968 McDonald announced a government-backed subdivision proposal, the Little Desert Settlement Scheme, an enthusiastic endorsement for decentralisation and agricultural endeavour. Like his predecessors in the Lands Department, McDonald saw land as there to be developed, not 'wasted'. He also understood the political advantage of any scheme that could appeal simultaneously to the supporters of patrician notions of the 'worthy yeomanry' and the egalitarian idea of opportunity for all. McDonald's idealism overrode the cautionary tales from earlier failed soldier-settlement schemes. His confidence in the new technologies was such that he believed this small-holding 'settlement scheme' would prosper and give families a living where others had not.

Distinguished economists and agricultural scientists, including senior university academics and officials of the State Department of Agriculture, did not share McDonald's optimism. Their views were publicised through the media, notably in a special series on the ABC 'Country Hour' in mid-1968. According to these experts, the Little Desert Settlement Scheme was not economically viable. The agricultural climate was bleak, with poor wool and wheat prices and problems of over-production. Why should public money be invested in something that could never succeed?

AT THE POINT WHERE economic advisers were arguing that the time was not right for the Little Desert Settlement Scheme, a new vision for the Little Desert emerged. Conservation activists advocated a major national park to preserve habitat for the Little Desert's many species and simultaneously provide the region with a tourist attraction. A fight about national parks was the last thing that Sir William McDonald had expected. Like many others, he did not view the 'scrub' country of the Little Desert as scenic. He shared the view of the journalist who wrote: 'Who on earth would want to preserve this horrid piece of land?'

By mid-1969, however, McDonald was forced to acknowledge that the national parks lobby was electorally significant, whatever his feelings about the beauty of the area. He scaled down his original plan for 44 wheat farms in the Little Desert to a mere 12 sheep farms and announced that the 945-hectare Little Desert National Park, established in 1968, would be dramatically expanded to 35,300 hectares. The new park included most of the eastern section of the Little Desert, which was the part with the very low rainfall, least suitable for settlement purposes. This decision was a purely political one; McDonald had not even thought to consult the Director of the National Parks Authority about it. Conservationists were not appeased. The eastern Little Desert was not 'biologically representative' of the whole area, they argued. No settlement scheme should be contemplated in any part of the area until flora and fauna surveys had been undertaken so that more would be known about what would be lost. National parks were not just 'worthless lands' available for recreational purposes; they must have some sort of ecological integrity.

New attitudes to frontiers had developed in Australia, as they had overseas. Frontiers, because of their increasing scarcity, required protection rather than conquest. There was a growing body of nature writing that counterpointed (good) nature against the evils of civilisation, and the popularity of this view was increasing as the certainty engendered by the technological revolutions of the 'Atomic Age' of the 1940s and 1950s faded. At the end of the 1960s, after unprecedented boom times for consumer society, some people were seeking a balance to its excesses.

The Save Our Bushlands Action Committee represented the united forces of eight metropolitan conservation groups, including the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, the Natural Resources Conservation League and the Victorian National Parks Association. Their case was informed by an important document prepared by the

'I never knew the Little Desert was in Dandenong'

'The Little Desert was a turning point ... it caught Bolte—Bolte came to me for the 1970 policy speech and got me to write a segment on conservation—never been in a policy speech before. He knew it was time—Bolte was a great politician—he knew that things and attitudes had changed.' — Bill Borthwick

locally based Wimmera Regional Committee, which had identified key places for nature reserves in the Little Desert. There were two major public meetings in Melbourne in August and October of 1969, each of which was attended by more than 1000 people. These meetings were supported by sympathetic press coverage of conservation issues and a barrage of letters to the editors of *The Age*, the *Sun* and the *Herald*, Melbourne's three big daily newspapers.

By late 1969, despite the strong line taken by McDonald and the Premier, Sir Henry Bolte, the Little Desert development scheme had few supporters and many opponents. Sir William McDonald was the butt of cartoonists' satire and was increasingly caricatured by strident journalists as an 'enemy of conservation'. The 'hero developer' image that he had hoped to cut was nowhere apparent. 'Hero developers' had fallen from grace. McDonald was left to construct an image of himself as a 'strong leader in the face of rag-bag opposition'. But, as the opposition's credibility continued to grow, he was increasingly seen as a bloody-minded minister unable to take advice.

The combined Labor and Country Party opposition forces held a majority in the Legislative Council, the Victorian Parliament's upper house, and seized the opportunity to discredit the government. A parliamentary inquiry into the Little Desert Settlement Scheme was established in October 1969, chaired by the Hon. J.W. (Jack) Galbally, a Labor MLC. The inquiry heard evidence stretching over more than 250 pages of transcript. A significant number of the 'expert witnesses' were the same agricultural resource managers who had advised McDonald against the scheme when it was first mooted. Much of the data presented both at the inquiry and in the media was officially or unofficially supplied by bureaucrats frustrated because the government was not taking their well-considered advice. The staff of the Department of Agriculture were particularly active in opposing the scheme, within the limits of public service etiquette. Their political masters were well aware of this. McDonald did not speak to the Minister for Agriculture for some time because of the 'leaks' from his department.

The parliamentary inquiry received generous media coverage on an almost daily basis. Even before the report of the inquiry was published in March 1970, evidence and popular opinion against the scheme had mounted. In December 1969, a by-election in Dandenong returned a disastrous result for the government. The Legislative Council immediately voted to block funding to the scheme. Metropolitan Dandenong was a long way from the Little Desert, as one cartoonist pointed out, but resentment about the scheme had built to a point where it was now an issue of State-wide significance. The supply vote led to a temporary halting of preparatory road-building and other activities in the Little Desert, and while this was in abeyance the protest gathered pace.

As more and more evidence emerged from the parliamentary inquiry, it seemed that the only people who would be able to farm the new Little Desert blocks 'economically' would be those who needed to make a tax loss. This was not a question of depriving rural battlers of their dream block—merely an opportunity for 'Collins Street farmers' (business and professional people from the big city) to reduce their tax burden at the government's expense.

The Little Desert campaign took place in Victoria in 1969, but it speaks to today's Victorians, who have witnessed another revolution in government. In 1997, the Land Conservation Council, the participatory mechanism that was critical to the resolution of the Little Desert dispute, was dismantled.

Sir Henry Bolte was old-fashioned in many ways, but he was politically astute enough to sniff the winds of change. It seemed that it was the new conservation vote that had decided the Dandenong by-election result against him. So he 'discovered' a more electorally appealing type of conservation just in time for the general election the following May. Bill Borthwick, who became the next Minister of Lands, recalled it thus in 1990:

> The Little Desert was a turning point ... it caught Bolte—Bolte came to me for the 1970 policy speech and got me to write a segment on conservation—never been in a policy speech before. He knew it was time—Bolte was a great politician—he knew that things and attitudes had changed. I wrote the conservation issues ... I took [the section] to [Dick] Hamer [who succeeded Bolte as Premier of Victoria in 1972] because I got it down to seven pages and I knew it should be seven paragraphs and Dick blue-pencilled it for me.

This departure from earlier policy did not go unremarked. Borthwick recalled wryly the reaction of journalists in an Ararat pub after the speech: 'We walked in on the press and they were saying "Who wrote Bolte's speech? He's saying things he doesn't understand." '

Bolte promised that land management decisions would be taken in a new way that involved more public consultation and promised that at least 5 per cent of the State would be reserved for national parks, wildlife reserves and forest parks. This was an acknowledgement of the 'conservation vote', but it was not as generous as it sounds. At the time more than 30 per cent of the State was unalienated public land. The speech was persuasive. The Liberal primary vote slipped only slightly, and Bolte's government was re-elected. Only two seats were lost, but one was Dundas, the 'safe' seat held continuously by Sir William McDonald for 15 years.

The loss of McDonald was no guarantee that the Little Desert Settlement Scheme would be abolished. Sir William's demise, however, had to be attributed at least in part to the Little Desert controversy. Although 20 years later he would deny that the scheme had been his downfall, he faced an extraordinary number of independent opponents in that election, unlike any other, and the vote in Dundas was much more

strongly anti-Liberal than in the rest of the State. The government had lost the scheme's most passionate proponent. The election results cooled the ardour of the other members of Cabinet, and even Bolte's support for the scheme waned.

The Little Desert dispute was not simply a case of conservation or preservation versus development. It was, rather, a rare moment when economists and conservationists found themselves arguing the same case. The public, which in the past had been supportive of development and decentralisation schemes, was sceptical about this one. Some felt that it was to cost the taxpayer too much, while others remembered individuals who had suffered because of the inadequacy of the land provided under earlier soldier settlement schemes. A new group was emerging that was concerned about the cost to the land itself. But the opposition was united in its concern about 'due process'.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR in major metropolitan newspapers almost universally opposed the Little Desert Settlement Scheme, but as the year progressed the emphasis shifted towards questions of political process rather than economic arguments or even conservation values. No single minister, they argued, should have the power to act in the face of popular and expert opposition and create a land-use pattern that would be passed down to future generations. Consultation and accountability became of paramount importance. The Little Desert dispute could not be said to be resolved until the matter of process had been tackled.

The whole system of public land management had to be reviewed. There was a new awareness that leaving options for future generations was more politically important than tidying up the frontier. The public demanded the right to be consulted about land-use decisions. Even before the 'green' ethic that crystallised in the 1970s, there was growing recognition that resources, especially land resources, were not unlimited. The images of the finite, blue and singular Earth that were beamed back from the Apollo 11 space mission of July 1969 shaped public consciousness, both consciously and unconsciously.

The successful result for the Little Desert lent confidence to the whole movement. On this wave of enthusiasm, the Conservation Council of Victoria (now Environment Victoria) was established to act as an umbrella organisation for all conservation groups. Bolte handed the Lands portfolio to Bill Borthwick after the 1970 election, and he immediately sought to distance himself from the Little Desert Settlement Scheme which he described (later) as 'a bad error of judgment on the part of my government'. Borthwick reconstructed the dispute as 'a peg on which conservationists could hang their hats'. The lessons of the dispute shaped the way he reorganised land-management bureaucracy. Nature lovers, the emerging green movement and utilitarian conservationists alike claimed the Little Desert as 'their' victory. These groups had very different visions of land management—something that subsequent governments were to discover—but at the time of the Little Desert dispute it was possible for one iconic victory to satisfy all.

Borthwick's new Land Conservation Council had to be credible to the concerned general public. Unless real public consultation could be seen to occur, the potential for a Little Desert type of protest was ever present. The new mechanism was 'above politics'. This authoritative, independent (although government-approved) body was charged with the responsibility for inquiring into all matters of public land management. Generally it is only a potentially divisive issue that will drive a government to risk a public inquiry for the sake of legitimising its own policy. The Little Desert Settlement Scheme thus stands out as a very divisive issue, for its practical result was not just an inquiry, but rather a permanent mechanism for inquiry.

A further 18 years were to pass before the Little Desert National Park was expanded to include the hard-won western end. Yet during that time, the post-victory fervour gave conservationists faith that the new Land Conservation Council would 'do the right thing'. The resolution of the dispute was not the extension of the national park, but the mechanism for public consultation on land management. The Little Desert campaign took place in Victoria in 1969, but it speaks to today's Victorians, who have witnessed another revolution in government. In 1997, the Land Conservation Council, the participatory mechanism that was critical to the resolution of the Little Desert dispute, was dismantled. ■

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HUNTING NOT TRAVELLING

Is he hero, demon, or Australian history's intellectual force to be reckoned with? **Peter Cochrane** embarks on a critical reassessment of the history of Henry Reynolds.

THE MAJORITY DECISION OF THE HIGH COURT in favour of land rights for Eddie Mabo's people made the work of Henry Reynolds a matter of national importance.

The judgment was influenced by a new reading of Australian history, to which many scholars had contributed over the previous 20 years, but none more so than Reynolds. It raised his work from academic audience to national headlines. Few, if any, Australian historians have ever exercised such clout through their work. His third book, *The Law of the Land* (1987), figures in the footnotes of the *Mabo* judgment. Important passages are virtual paraphrases. Sir William Deane (then on the High Court) sent him a note of thanks. This startling movement of new historical knowledge into the realm of law has made Reynolds a hero for some, a demon for others and an intellectual force to be reckoned with.

Journalists are now writing about Reynolds as the 'preacher' who is our moral conscience, and the 'prophet' who may take over the mantle from Manning Clark. There is nothing prescient about Reynolds. He is a political strategist, not a preacher or a prophet. His work raises important questions about political efficacy and the use of history. He deploys John Locke, the Anzac legend and history itself to influence the present and shape the future. But is his impact on jurisprudence the measure of good history? And what of his more recent work?

The *Mabo* judgment signalled that one understanding of Australian history had been fatally undermined by another. *The Law of the Land* was a well-documented assault on the proposition that Aborigines had been dispossessed of their lands *in law* when the Crown first asserted sovereignty over Australia. Reynolds' careful research established that the doctrine of *terra nullius* was untenable. Before that it might have been deplored but it was accepted as legally correct. His work fed off and into a new sensitivity in Australian society about the entitlements of Aboriginal people. It discredited older readings or interpretations of Australian history upon which jurisprudence had relied for nearly two centuries.

Above: photographs of Henry Reynolds courtesy Allen & Unwin; 'The Conciliation' by Benjamin Dutterau from the cover of the Penguin edition of Fate of a Free People.

It took a long time for Australian history to create a Henry Reynolds. The preconditions simply were not there until the 1960s. Colonial historians had sanctioned dispossession with reference to natural laws and the 'march of civilisation'. At best, Aborigines figured as foils to explorers and settlers in a triumphalist adventure tale—as fierce trouble-makers or pathetic remnants. By the late 19th century when nation-building replaced settlement as the central civic theme, Aborigines were a 'dying race', with social evolutionary law confirmed by their marginalisation and invisibility for most Australians—they were mostly known by their absence. Change and progress were the

stuff of history and since the blacks knew no change and made no progress—they were primordial and 'timeless'—they could at best be a colourful digression or a 'melancholy footnote'. So much earlier writing on the Aboriginal people comes down to the Europeans' primitive grasp of the concepts 'change' and 'progress'.

The consequences for scholarship were momentous. Since Aborigines belonged to the past but not to history, they became the subject of anthropology. School primers told children, quite explicitly, that Aborigines were not part of history because they had none. It was the job of anthropologists to 'peer at them and to try to guess where they came from', wrote Walter Murdoch in *The Making of Australia*, a school text published in 1917. The distinction between history and anthropology was itself a creation of colonialism. The indigenous people were to anthropologists what artefacts were to archaeologists. They were like the platypus or kangaroo, 'creatures often crude and quaint, that elsewhere have passed away, and given place to higher forms', wrote W. Baldwin Spencer in 1927. Historians mapped the course of the higher forms with occasional references to the lower.

THE SHIFT AWAY FROM SCHOLARSHIP based on racial prejudice was a slow process pushed along by individuals such as A.P. Elkin at Sydney University and, after the Second World War, by the prehistorian John Mulvaney at the Australian National University (ANU). Mulvaney was committed, among other causes, to explain how Aborigines were excluded from the discourse of history. The first academic appointment in Australian history was not made until 1948. In 1953 Mulvaney was the first university-trained prehistorian to make Australia his subject. The new academically based history, a post-war phenomenon, was therefore not so very slow to get around to Aboriginal history. It had first to get over a fascination with convicts, the labour movement and the ALP, but by the 1960s there was change. In 1961, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies began to fund research. In 1963, the 'Aborigines in Australia Project', headed by Charles Rowley, was established at ANU.

The new research drew moral force from Aboriginal activism in Australia and the anti-colonial movement abroad. W.E.H. Stanner's Boyer Lectures, 'After The Dreaming' (1968), were a landmark. Stanner called the absence of Aboriginal people from Australian history 'the great Australian silence' and noted that the silencing continued. Henry Reynolds would learn this when he declared his intention to study Aboriginal history and the editor of Australia's premier history journal told him not to bother, 'there's nothing in it'.

In 1969 John Mulvaney's *Prehistory of Australia* was published, followed in 1970 by Charles Rowley's mammoth trilogy *Aboriginal Policy and Practice*. Humphrey McQueen's *A New Britannia* appeared in 1971, identifying racism at the core of 19th-century Australian nationalism. At La Trobe University in 1973, John Hirst taught the first course in Aboriginal–European relations. It included a lecture on what was to become known as the stolen generation. Reynolds' first book was almost a decade away. And it would be another 20 years or so before history's new trajectory would affect the law.

In 1971, the Gove Land Rights case affirmed the old supremacist histories in their dominance. In the Gove Case, the Yolngu people had asserted their traditional rights in the land against the aluminium giant Nabalco. On the basis of the available knowledge, the presiding Justice Blackburn concluded that Aborigines might belong to the land, but the land did not belong to them. 'It was an amazing dismissal of Aboriginal tenure', wrote Reynolds. He later described this view as the 'distinctive and unenviable contribution of Australian jurisprudence to indigenous–European relations'. Blackburn's judgment broadly reflected the historical scholarship available at the time. Jurisprudence and history were in harmony with one another.

There were additional obstacles to any breakdown in this particular alignment of history and law. The Yolngu provided evidence which included 'title deeds' in the form of ritual and sacred objects, and their own oral history or folklore, which they presented to the Court. The problem they faced was the great divide in rules and conventions of legitimacy between their own culture and the European culture in which they were ensnared. The law favours positivist historical narratives, not ritual objects which contravene the rules of evidence, or oral history which may come under 'hearsay'. The question of admissibility emphasised how much the Aboriginal cause would in future have to depend on a conventional narrative that the Court could accept. This is why Reynolds' approach was such an important breakthrough. It was not just his new facts—though no-one is better at extracting them from the historical record than Reynolds—but the conformity of those facts with the conventions of evidence of Anglo-Saxon law.

Reynolds is no stylist. That too worked in his favour. He makes a point, he lists his examples, much as a social science text would do. His work can read like a report. That suited the judges. As one critic has noted, he narrates 'through aggregates and minimally described lists of incidents'.

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The method is thin description. His achievement in *The Law of the Land* is a relentless documentation—chapter and verse from the staple sources—of the recognition of indigenous rights by international jurists and British officials (local and London) in the 18th and 19th centuries. The mass of evidence he turned up can be separated into six categories, as follows:

i) Evidence of European jurists of the 18th and 19th century indicating the acceptance of indigenous land rights based on prior possession.

ii) Evidence of the recognition of indigenous rights in the instructions given to navigators at this time.

iii) Evidence of the recognition accorded to these rights by senior colonial officials in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land.

iv) Evidence of Colonial Office concern for the recognition of native title from 1836, when colonial indifference to native title in Australia was becoming alarmingly clear. The despatches of James Stephen, Sir George Grey, Lord Glenelg and Earl Grey are notable in this respect.

v) A reinterpretation of the meaning of land reserves set aside for indigenous people, indicating that these reserves were an acknowledgement of prior ownership, not a response to its negation.

vi) The insistence by the Colonial Office that all pastoral leases 'contain a reservation preserving native title rights'.

Reynolds' books typically draw to a close with a discussion of the moral issues involved. He provides ammunition at both the factual and the moral level. The *Mabo* judgment was swayed by both. History and law were realigned, but so too was law and justice, reflecting a climate of opinion in which *terra nullius* had become untenable. The judges recognised that the legal system could not turn away from new facts without creating disrespect for the law. It could not be seen to be frozen in an age of racial discrimination. The credibility gap between the legal 'truth' and the new understanding of Australia's past had to be closed. Reynolds' analysis had appeal because it left the high moral ground to the law by consigning blame to white settlers and colonial governments who ignored or defied or misunderstood the law. An outstanding passage in the Brennan judgment clearly expressed the shift in sensibility:

Reynolds' third book The Law of the Land *(1987) figures in the footnotes of the* Mabo *judgment. Important passages are virtual paraphrases. Sir William Deane (then on the High Court) sent him a note of thanks. This startling movement of new historical knowledge into the realm of law has made Reynolds a hero for some, a demon for others and an intellectual force to be reckoned with.*

> A common law doctrine founded on unjust discrimination in the enjoyment of civil and political rights demands reconsideration. It is contrary both to international standards and to the fundamental values of our common law to entrench a discriminatory rule which, because of the supposed position on the scale of social organisation of the indigenous inhabitants of a settled colony, denies them a right to occupy their traditional lands.

The new facts underwrote a new morality. The new morality gathered up the new facts. It was the moral atmosphere, more than any finality of evidence, which confirmed the supremacy of the new history.

THE DEMONISERS CALL REYNOLDS a purveyor of 'black armband' history, a radical, even a revolutionary. In one booklet, sponsored by the Australian Mining and Exploration Council and entitled *The Australian History of Henry Reynolds*, Geoffrey Partington stole cynically from Orwell to categorise him as a 'transferred nationalist', meaning someone who has sold out his own kind. He also described Reynolds as one whose nationalism is 'purely negative', and whose commitment to indigenous people is a mere substitute fad to fill the gap left by the failure of communism.

The pure nastiness here is a measure of Reynolds' effectiveness. If his undoubted skills were serving Anglo-Saxondom at the big end of town, any exchange would be nose-tappingly hearty and hale. The discomfort goes deeper than cheap labels reveal and, to some extent, contradicts these labels. What distinguishes Reynolds' major achievement is his apparent respect for the common law, his grounding in an historical method shared by most of his critics, and his belief in history as a pursuit of truth, in his case a kind of morally charged positivism that you can find in many a line from his works: 'They seem unable to accept the objective facts of the past', he wrote of his critics in 1995. 'The Colonial Office officials who recognised Native Title were right. The settlers who didn't were wrong', he asserted in *The Law of the Land*.

The *respectability* of Reynolds' work galls his critics. They know he has defeated them on their own ground, on the sacred terrain of the English law and from the core texts of their own narrative. His hard labours within this framework make the 'black armband', 'transferred nationalist' labels seem more like a decoy than a serious assessment. As one commentator put it, he has written 'the kind of history that the law can take notice of'. And it has. In a postscript to the second edition of his major work, Reynolds posed the following question: 'can we seriously object to attempts to gain compensation in ways that are fully in harmony with our Anglo-Australian legal traditions?' He quotes John Locke's view that men entered into society in order to protect their property. The idea that men might actually lose their property on incorporation was 'too gross an absurdity for any man to own', wrote Locke. Yet that is what happened to Aborigines, writes Reynolds in *Frontier* (1987).

VESTED INTERESTS ARE NOW IN A DIFFICULT POSITION: the stalwarts of property rights find themselves arguing for the extinguishment of indigenous title recognised in common law—if not in colonial practice—for centuries; the champions of gradualism and defenders of British institutions are attacking its very core—the High Court. Geoffrey Blainey's academic writing on Aborigines is not in this tradition, but his journalism is. In the *Bulletin* he represents *Mabo* as if it were a murder case, in which the question was how did they die. He told his readers that the judges appear 'not to have completed their research of the facts of the Aborigines' dispossession'. Disease, he insists, was the main killer. The obfuscation is remarkable—*Mabo* was not about cause of death but about rights in land. It was not about influenza but entitlement embodied in common law. Its legacy is to make entitlement an ongoing question for judgment.

Thus there is a new role for history in shaping the future. After *Mabo*, the future Reynolds helped to shape was *Wik*. For a year he worked with a Cape York Land Council solicitor looking for evidence the Wik people needed. His findings were published in a law journal and in 1996 the *Wik* judgment affirmed that native title and pastoral leases could co-exist. The historian Bain Attwood has argued that this unsettling role for history is at the core of conservative unhappiness and panic. It helps explain the demonisation of Reynolds. According to Attwood in *In The Age of Mabo* (Allen and Unwin, 1996), 'Mabo forms part of a new historical narrative which portends for conservatives the end of (Australian) history as they conceive it, and, therefore, the end of their Australia.' The new history threatens some Australians with the loss of their 'customary narrative' and in that way questions their very identity. It not only puts Aborigines into the mainstream of history, it also subverts the tenets of the old narrative—the theory of peaceful settlement, the conception of British justice as just to all and the proposition that British colonisers were humanitarian in goals and practice. *Peaceful* and *legitimate* settlement was a 'treasured tale', a bedrock of 'meaning, order and composure'.

The conventional past affirmed a settled present. Like the Gothic revival in Victorian England, it helped to stabilise identity. The implication of this argument is that at least some of those opposed to *Mabo* feel they have lost their map of the past and thus lost a part of themselves. The alarm is palpable. In that same *Bulletin* essay, Blainey argued that the black armband view 'has run wild, and is out of control'. He called the High Court a 'citadel of the new attitude', suggesting, perhaps, his own sense of marginalisation, of being locked out. Shades of the immigration debate. The walls of the citadel have been penetrated by a trojan horse called the 'new history'.

Reynolds has continued to be out of control—his work on the past continues to meddle with the future. *Aboriginal Sovereignty* was published in 1996. The issues of law are complex here but essentially he was pursuing the question of 'sovereignty' or rights to self-government, following a methodology similar to that in *Law of the Land*. The sovereignty argument followed the analysis of dispossession propounded in the *Mabo* decision. From land rights onward to self-rule. The central question was, did Aborigines exercise a form of sovereignty? Were they governed by laws of their own, before annexation? If so, could this have been recognised by international law in the 18th and early 19th centuries? Reynolds argued that the evidence suggested that the criteria required for sovereignty by international law at that time were met by Aboriginal societies. They were, to put it briefly, political communities.

But if sovereignty was exercised by Aboriginal tribes, when was it lost? And how? And can it, should it, be restored? If *Mabo* had determined that land rights may have survived in parts of Australia, as it had in the Murray Islands, then is it likely that sovereignty had survived too? Traditional custom and law is surely still alive in Torres Strait, Cape York, Arnhem Land, the Kimberley, the Central desert and other places. Reynolds' logic was clear: were the High Court to recognise a right to self-government, as it recognised a right to native title, then a profound injustice would be overturned.

In addition to these core ventures into legal history, Reynolds' consistent achievement has been to take the old history's account of Aboriginal people's responses to colonisation—most of it patronising, sentimental and sad—and to represent them as active agents, resisting dispossession and making sensible, indeed political choices, from a fast-diminishing range of options. This concern has been morally driven but validated by the historical record. And it has been sustained across several shifts in the direction of his research.

Reynolds' work began with what is called 'contact history' or race relations on the frontier. His paradigm for interaction between Aborigines and Europeans was dominated by conflict—white violence and black resistance. The conflict model led straight from his own experience on moving to North Queensland where he felt the past at work in the present:

> It was not just the unaccustomed violence and hatred which often grew as lush as guinea grass but the smaller more subtle things—expressions, phrases, jokes, glances; even silences, which sprang up out of local historical experiences I knew little about. (Quoted in *Age of Mabo*, xvii)

Previously, historians writing about white–Aboriginal relations had begun their study with official British records, then moved thematically from England to Australia. Their main concern was white experience. Reynolds, by contrast, began on the colonial frontier where contact took place and he was primarily concerned with black experience, how Aborigines perceived the colonisers, and how we might understand their ideas, actions and responses to dispossession. Writing about Aboriginal–settler relations was not a new field, but Reynolds approached the task in a new way. Settler motivation, government policy and European ideas were largely absent from his first and most imaginative book, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (1981).

Journalists are now writing about Reynolds as the 'preacher' who is our moral conscience, and the 'prophet' who may take over the mantle from Manning Clark. There is nothing prescient about Reynolds. He is a political strategist, not a preacher or a prophet. His work raises important questions about political efficacy and the use of history. He deploys John Locke, the Anzac legend and history itself to influence the present and shape the future. But is his impact on jurisprudence the measure of good history? And what of his more recent work?

Its impact was immediate. Reynolds made the 'other side' a legitimate topic for historians and the general public. He disproved the assumption that Aboriginal perceptions were completely lost; he put them within reach of the white imagination; he compelled us to see that Aboriginal responses were other than passive and helpless. His book was a broadside against simplistic and demeaning views about the Aboriginal past. It launched a public career in which, for some, he has earned the title 'keeper of Australia's national conscience' (A.T. Yarwood).

CRITICISM OF *THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FRONTIER* comes out of a field which the book helped to create, but there have still been many critics. The limitations of Reynolds' model have been revealed by less well-known historians working on a smaller, regional scale, who have uncovered varying patterns of co-operation and accommodation between black and white and who are not convinced that violence predetermined the tenor of later relations in a general way. Patterns of interaction other than conflict are acknowledged in Reynolds' work but, if anything, the conflict thesis has only hardened with time, his later writing stressing the ubiquity and persistence of racial violence, and how this primary experience coloured all subsequent relations. Reynolds took his evidence from all over Australia and thus propounded a sort of 'general theory'. His early work was pioneering, but it was necessarily single-minded (some would say tunnel-visioned) in its pursuit of the violence thesis—the paradigm tight and neat—and its sensational implications meant it was ready-made for media attention.

Subsequent study reveals, for example, that his paradigm best applies to the far north and the north-west and the far south (Tasmania), but will not do for Victoria and South Australia, nor for the Swan coastal plain around Perth, as Bob Reece has shown in the journal *Aboriginal History*. A more recent historiography does not deny the impact of European violence, but points to a spectrum of Aboriginal–European relations, to a range of widely differing 'encounters in place' (John Mulvaney) which collectively press towards a comprehensive picture. Mulvaney's approach differs sharply from Reynolds', emphasising uncommon but instructive cases of 'collaborative racial relations' where the 'mingling of cultures' was marked by peaceful co-existence and 'signs of respect from both [sides]'.

Yet tall poppies are easily caricatured. That Reynolds 'overdoes the violence theme' is now a throwaway line in Australian history circles. White violence and Aboriginal resistance is the core of *The Other Side*, but there is more to it. Some of the book is concerned with themes that are preliminary to violence—broadly, inter-cultural relations—where Reynolds is dealing with Aboriginal perceptions of whites through their traditional belief systems, with attempts to conciliate whites, to draw them into clan systems of reciprocity and kinship, and with continuity and change in Aboriginal culture resulting from contact. A final, highly suggestive, chapter also covers variations in patterns of interaction beyond pastoralism—in whaling, mining, agriculture and forestry. The greater problem here is method: both resistance, and its preliminaries, are dealt with by means of thinly described examples gathered indiscriminately from all over the country.

THERE IS AN ASSUREDNESS ABOUT REYNOLDS' WORK which is disarming. He concluded *The Other Side of the Frontier* with the claim that he had turned 'Australian history, not upside down, but inside out'. The implication of uniqueness runs through the book. There are barely any textual references to other historians working in the field, either locally or overseas. In Africa, the Americas, New Zealand the Pacific Islands, this sort of contact history—looking at 'the other side'—had been common for 20 years. Reynolds made no mention of it, though his later interest in the common law tradition has extended his points of reference.

As for the local scene, you could read that text and assume he was totally alone. A quite complex field of historical research and contestation is reduced to Reynolds against the old school. As if to declare this, he does quote one other Australian historian—W.K. Hancock, circa 1930, who called Aborigines 'pathetically helpless'. Reynolds did not locate his work in relation to other historical scholarship. That may have broadened his readership but it also allowed him to oversimplify the situation. For example, the alleged break with past history was by no means total. Reynolds was in fact borrowing from an older tradition of Australian history writing—from Russell Ward and other 'radical nationalist' historians, who celebrated the anti-authoritarianism, collectivism, egalitarianism, initiative and adaptability of the Australian character. Only in Reynolds' work these qualities belong to Aborigines rather than convicts, diggers and bushrangers. The labels had been switched.

> The settlers were transplanting a policy of possessive individualism, hierarchy and inequality. Aboriginal society was reciprocal and materially egalitarian, though there were important political and religious inequalities based on age and sex. (Penguin, 1982, pp69–70)

In the Conclusion he took this further, casting Aborigines as Anzacs, fearless underdogs defending their way of life, and calling for them to be remembered in our national commemorations of war and loss. Fourteen years later he closed *Fate of a Free People* (1995), his history of the Aboriginal Wars in Tasmania, with virtually the same call, arguing that the reconciliation movement now made it even more imperative. The question not posed is whether Aboriginal responses to colonisation can be accurately characterised in terms of triumphalist settler and national typologies. While Reynolds was overturning European understandings of Aboriginal behaviour on the frontier, he was simultaneously tying Aboriginal identity into an avowedly European framework of national character.

The proposition that Reynolds has mastered the art of writing the same book several times over is partly true. There seems no doubt that he is powerfully drawn to the dispossession/resistance or the 'oppositional' model of Aboriginal–European relations. It is his trademark. *Fate of a Free People* is merely a regional version of the 'oppositional' model propounded in his early works, though his account of resistance now shades into an analysis of accommodation which is more complex than before. Thematically the ingredients for *The Law of the Land* (1987) and *This Whispering in Our Hearts* (1998) can be found, somewhat abridged, in *Frontier* (1987). Not only quotations but entire themes get recycled in expanded form and somewhat altered perspective. Chapter 6 of *Frontier* is called 'Rights of the Soil'; chapter 3 of *This Whispering* is called 'A Reasonable Share in the Soil'; chapter 7 of *Frontier* is entitled 'This Whispering in Our Hearts'. The land rights question canvassed in *Law of the Land*—jurisprudence, local and London officialdom, the humanitarian perspective—is reworked for Tasmania in chapter 5 of *Fate of a Free People*.

But shifts in Reynolds' work over time should be acknowledged. The violence/resistance paradigm did make way for a concern with land, proprietorship and the common law, which in turn has been joined by Reynolds' most recent focus on the humanitarian movement in *This Whispering in Our Hearts*. Each of these phases in his work has a moral subtext which surfaces powerfully in his conclusions: i) the activating and ennobling of Aboriginal people in Australian

history; ii) the deception and injustice of *terra nullius*; iii) the recognition of a decent, human legacy among white Australians. And yet the sameness in the latter part of his career is inescapable: *This Whispering* is very similar in method and spirit to Reynolds' first book—a story of depredations and massacres, this time balanced by expressions of concern from (largely ineffectual) humanitarians. Reynolds all but confesses this in his Conclusion: 'With the humanitarian crusade woven into national historiography, the story becomes richer, more complex, and, in many ways, more decent ...' Note: 'the story'. It is his story, further refined, the balance now more satisfying. In a sense *This Whispering* has taken Reynolds back to where he started.

Recycling takes a toll. *This Whispering* is Reynolds' latest and least impressive book. For the most part it is a string of short biographical profiles which moves the account abruptly from one colony or State to another, and which leap-frogs whole decades (and whole issues) at a time. The result is pottedness. Missing, for example, is the relationship between governments and missionaries, the legislative history of 'protection', so full of the ambivalence of 'whisperings', and the tensions between secular and evangelical humanitarianism. Victoria, the colony where Aborigines got the most sustained political attention, is passed over, although it was Victorian government which set the pattern for Aboriginal administration all over Australia with the Protection and Management Act of 1869. The Act's purpose was to control but, importantly, to care as well, and it contained harsh penalties for employers, publicans and others who harmed Aborigines. If it was ineffectual, then it was no more so than the humanitarians Reynolds chose to study.

The distinction between history and anthropology was itself a creation of colonialism. The indigenous people were to anthropologists what artefacts were to archaeologists. They were like the platypus or kangaroo, 'creatures often crude and quaint, that elsewhere have passed away, and given place to higher forms', wrote W. Baldwin Spencer in 1927.

It is not clear why *This Whispering* is overloaded with missionaries, leaving little room for other types of humanitarians with very different perspectives on Aboriginal culture. The concept 'humanitarian' is largely undifferentiated. Reynolds does discuss the scholar and settler Robert Menli Lyon (WA, 1830s), the remarkable man who defended (and studied) the ensnared warrior, Yagan, but later in the eastern colonies a significant category of secular critics emerged, men with frontier or contact experience who disagreed with the missionary system and its segregate and civilise policies. In Victoria, men such as A.M. Howitt, police magistrate of Gippsland, and James Dawson, a local guardian of Aborigines at Camperdown, were significant ethnographers with close ties to certain clans, and with views that were hostile to missionary practice and protective policies. Howitt was accepted as a tribal elder and helped organise a *kuringal*, a major regional initiation ceremony which took place in 1883. Missionaries complained about the revival of 'pagan corroborees and absenteeism'! Bain Attwood has suggested that bourgeois liberalism, the valued individualist ethos, actually fed into their advocacy of more independence and self-reliance for Aborigines. Apparently they could envisage black yeoman farmers. But Reynolds does not explore this secular branch of humanitarianism at all.

When he wrote in *This Whispering* that the story was now more complex, he meant that he had added the humanitarians to his oppositional model. Otherwise, complexities are smoothed over, and nowhere more than in the concluding chapters, where the scope of what had become a humanitarian movement, in the 1920s and '30s, is seriously understated.

BUT THE PROBLEM IS MORE THAN NARROWNESS. Reynolds' account is strangely off balance. He chooses here to represent humanitarians as a London/Geneva-oriented grouping who see themselves in the anti-slavery tradition and who share an empire consciousness of the necessity for good works in the area of Aboriginal welfare. Reform-minded Australians, he argues, 'attempted to apply the strategies and theories of Imperial administration to Australia'. Some reform-minded Australians clearly did. But what of the Australian nationalists of the period who rejected the empire and sought liberal social reform? Reynolds writes as if there is nothing in Australian soil to nourish humanitarianism. He follows a correspondence trail—an empire interchange—and fills out the story around it with secondary sources. The account narrows inevitably into another case study—this time of the grazier's daughter, Mary Bennett, who had spent much of her adult life in England and who took her allegations of slavery on pastoral stations to the British Commonwealth League.

Reynolds completely misses the connections between nationalism and reform. In the late 19th century it was possible to sympathise with Aborigines, but also necessary to explain their world away to make way for progress. In the 1930s, with European culture falling apart, the Aborigine

could figure in a new understanding of nationhood, liberated from old preconceptions. Literature led the way. The Aboriginal world could be seen, at last, as a source of value, wonder, even national regeneration. This progression was evident in the work of K.S. Prichard, Xavier Herbert, Eleanor Dark and others. If a wider field of social protest was a precondition for Herbert's *Capricornia* (1938), it is also true that Prichard's *Coonardoo* (1928) is remarkable for prefiguring much of that protest. Literature is not merely the effect of politics. 'The energies of art invade, with a shaping intensity, the energies of life', wrote J.J. Healy in *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia* (1978), a book which should figure in the history of our whisperings.

Missing from Reynolds' work is the 'effervescent dialogue' (as Healy put it) between literature and politics, and also the dialogue between nationalism and humanitarianism. Xavier Herbert was a central figure in the politicisation of Aboriginal issues in the 1930s. Prichard embodies the connections between communist anti-racism (which is not mentioned at all), literature and humanitarianism. Reynolds' humanitarians are a sort of reformist Round Table. Well-educated, well-travelled, sharing in an 'empire consciousness' of the need to improve imperial administration of the Aborigines. 'The country was, after all, part of the Empire', he writes.

THIS IMPERIAL LEANING seems odd coming from Reynolds. There is, strangely, no room in his pantheon for the less-elevated push against social injustice. Left-wing activism gets half a page, the anti-racism of communists and trade unionists not a paragraph. Perhaps it is a blind spot with origins in *The Law of the Land*. In that work it is the Colonial Office men who are the heroes and London is the fount of compassion. The progenitors of what he cleverly called the first land rights movement were, in other words, English gentlemen. At the Sir Robert Menzies Centre in London in 1996, Reynolds asked assembled historians: 'Will Australians of the late 20th century have less respect for Aboriginal rights than the aristocratic Englishmen who ran the Colonial Office 150 years ago?' The heroes of *This Whispering* follow on from the champions of *The Law*.

Such an approach will not do. Its inadequacies are especially apparent when Reynolds comes to the sesquicentenary of NSW in 1938. He ponders whether Mary Bennett knew that the Day of Mourning protest was an exclusively Aboriginal affair, and what she might have done if she had been turned away. With nothing to say, he turns to counter-factual history. His only reference point into the sesqui is Mary Bennett. Had he followed the nationalist rather than the imperial current, Bennett might have been left aside—she had already figured in earlier chapters—and local connections noticed. The controversial literary nationalist P.R. Stephensen, a key figure in raising interest in the plight of Aborigines, is a classic case. He had encouraged the organisation of the Day of Mourning. He was instrumental in getting *Abo Call* going, a newspaper for the Aboriginal Progress Association. He was the publisher of *Capricornia* and he arranged for extracts to appear in *Abo Call*. He signals the movement's links with Aboriginal people. Reynolds' group, mostly, seem to float above the objects of their concern. With his embarrassing declarations in favour of Nazi Germany and fascist Japan, Stephensen also embodies, as well as any of Reynolds' missionaries, the ambivalence and paradoxes within humanitarianism.

The law favours positivist historical narratives, not ritual objects which contravene the rules of evidence, or oral history which comes under 'hearsay' ... This is why Reynolds' approach was such an important breakthrough. It was not just his new facts—though no-one is better at extracting them from the historical record than Reynolds—but the conformity of those facts with the conventions of evidence of Anglo-Saxon law.

Prichard is important because of the excitement her novel created beyond the literary world, but also because of her influence on Herbert, James Devaney, Mary Gilmore, William Hatfield, Eleanor Dark, Vance Palmer and Henrietta Drake-Brockman. Devaney mattered because it was his book (*The Vanished Tribes*, 1928) which inspired Rex Ingamells to launch the movement which became the Jindyworobaks. Stephensen was also an influence. And so the connections go, or should. These are all points in a matrix linking activists with artists, writers, trade unionists, publicists, raffle organisers and so on. They are a 'movement'.

But not in *This Whispering*. The interplay of politics and art, nationalism and conscience, is lost beneath a welter of evidence about the anti-slavers in London and cognate organisations in Australia. The select bibliography gives no indication of an interest beyond the short reach of the book. While it directs readers to primary sources, there is no mention of the academic scholarship it comes after, notably Mulvaney's writings on the humanitarian tradition, which is a subtle exploration of paternalism, racism and the complexities of the humanitarian position.

Historians commonly cite Reynolds' indifference to theory while rarely saying how it affects his work. The very word 'theory' has cachet, reflecting an uneasy position within the discipline. Reynolds' style is the shortest distance between two points. He is more a hunter in the past than a cultured traveller. Criticism has to be qualified by the size of his 'bag', but not muted. He follows an idea tenaciously. He is unreferential. There are few digressions. The corners of a concept are not explored. Things don't broaden out. The result in *The Other Side* was an overdetermined account of settler violence and resistance with little sense of patterns of contact in pastoral country, other than variations in intensity. Years later it is the same story with the humanitarians added on. Key concepts such as 'humanitarian' or 'movement' have not been carefully explored. For the 19th century that meant the absence of ideological differences and rivalries. In the 20th century the problem is more serious still. Poor conceptualisation complements cultural narrowness. It is not the absence of literature *per se*: it is the failure to see how the energies of literature, for example, feed into and off politics to a fuller field of relations within humanitarianism. *The Other Side* was an overstatement but a valuable corrective. *This Whispering* undercuts its own purpose.

HUNTING, NOT TRAVELLING, extends the cultural insensitivity of Reynolds' work. A classic case is that of Truganini: In *Fate of a Free People*, we find his account of the 'Friendly Mission' of George Augustus Robinson to conciliate the warring Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land. Truganini's role as guide, translator and negotiator for Robinson had been described by earlier historians in the most demeaning terms. The labels string together: treacherous, vain, self-serving, promiscuous, a 'white man's doxy'. Robert Hughes called her a 'bright, promiscuous girl' and a 'sealer's moll, sterile from gonorrhea'. Reynolds, on the contrary, abstracts from her personal life (however it was) and situates Truganini as one of a group of Aboriginal women who guided 'the conciliator' (Robinson). Other accounts have suggested Robinson's mesmeric and hypnotic powers in order to explain his success. Reynolds' analysis shifts the mantle to Truganini and her female companions. He analyses their key role as mediators and diplomats and argues that Truganini had a political agenda of her own—to negotiate a peace with freedom and dignity and to save her people from annihilation. 'I knew it was no use my people trying to kill all the white people now,' she said, 'there were so many of them always coming in big boats.'

Historians commonly cite Reynolds' indifference to theory while rarely saying how it affects his work. The word alone has cachet, reflecting an uneasy position within the discipline. Reynolds' style is the shortest distance between two points. He is more a hunter in the past than a cultured traveller ... He follows an idea tenaciously. He is unreferential. There are few digressions. The corners of a concept are not explored. Things don't broaden out.

Possibly the most familiar piece of visual evidence for this event is on the front cover of the Penguin edition. It is Benjamin Dutterau's painting of 'The Conciliation'. Reynolds says nothing about this at all. It is ignored in the text as is Dutterau himself, his obsession with the 'conciliation' and what that might tell us about the impact of the 'Black Wars' or, notably, about intercultural contact between Hobart town and so-called 'domesticated blacks' such as Truganini. None of these possibilities drew Reynolds in. The painting itself is remarkable for it affirms the role of the women in the mediations: G.A. Robinson stands passive. He is attended by women who actively point or lead the warriors to him. One woman seems to have stood aside having already done this. She watches attentively. Otherwise the warriors stand back. Document-bound history pays a penalty in the evidence it misses. But for Reynolds, the truth is in the documents, in the words of his protagonists, and it is final.

Dutterau might also have figured at the end of the book where Reynolds winds up on the theme of 'surrender'. He does so with a quote from John Locke, whose advice to dispossessed peoples was to use the law and, if they failed, to try and try again till justice is eventually done, even if it takes generations. The law will always come good—that is the message Reynolds leaves us with. The cunning in Reynolds is radical intent backed by the leverage of the Enlightenment. ■

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Thanks to Rob Darby, Phillip Deery and Tim Bonyhady for comments on an earlier version of this article. *Footnote references are available on request: tel. 03 9427 7311, email: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au*

Re-jigging Australia

Yes, there is life after tax and elections. The Australian National University's Research School of Social Sciences has been pondering the future in a research project devoted to reshaping Australian institutions. The findings are now published in a series of books by Cambridge University Press and reviewed in Eureka Street *this month and next.*

A Federal Republic: Australia's Constitutional System of Government, Brian Galligan
Deliberative Democracy in Australia, John Uhr

THESE TWO BOOKS are written by political scientists who describe our political institutions and proffer some suggestions for reform.

Brian Galligan surveys Australia's constitutional system of government. His thesis, influential among those at the February Constitutional Convention who favoured a minimalist republic, is that Australia already has 'a constitutional system that is fundamentally federal and republican rather than parliamentary and monarchic'. In constitutional terms, there is simply need for a little name-changing at the top.

Galligan is surely right when he postulates that Australia's main problems are not constitutional but social and political, given the country's need to compete in a globalised economy while maintaining some commitment to justice for all.

He writes clearly and authoritatively about federalism, the Senate, and intergovernmental relations, making vertical fiscal imbalance and horizontal equalisation comprehensible. Though the Cambridge Press always publishes books which have an air of abiding permanence to them, this can be deceptive—especially in the realm of political science. Galligan wrote before the Coalition came to power, so John Howard's promised GST with proceeds to the States gives an old-time ring to Galligan's observations that the likelihood of redressing vertical fiscal imbalance had receded with Paul Keating's taking the whip hand of the prime ministership and affirming the Commonwealth's monopoly over income tax.

Having previously written the most definitive history of the High Court, Galligan is one of the few political scientists who writes with the same familiarity and authority on the third branch of government as he does on the other two—which are the most tried and tested paths for his academic colleagues. His chapter on the protection of rights carries the findings of the fascinating survey he and Christine Fletcher conducted. They found that the public is far more interested than the political elites in the constitutional protection of their rights. The public has much more time for the judges than the politicians have had.

Galligan argues that, whereas Americans mark centenaries as times for celebration, we Australians use them as opportunities for reform and reshaping. He espouses the now-settled list of reforms: an entrenched bill of rights, recognising the special rights of the indigenous people, and the republicanising of the head of state. His conservative critics will be unsurprised, given Galligan's frank disclosure of his personal position in the preface. Born in the heart of One Nation country, he went away to get an education:

> Growing up as a fourth generation Australian in rural Queensland, I never considered the Queen and the royal family as anything but British and foreign. Having retired British military gentlemen as State governors which was still the practice then, reinforced the impression of the vice-regal office as an anomalous institution. Being a Catholic, I thought it improper that Australia's head of state should also have been the head of the Anglican church. This seemed wrong in principle and caused the monarchy, instead of being a symbol of national unity, to reinforce petty sectarianism and the pretences of a provincial

Protestant ascendancy. Moreover, being a democrat, I was opposed to any Australian office of state being hereditary.

Ironically, it was the youthful Queen's visit in 1954 that confirmed for me the alien character of the monarchy.

Like Galligan, John Uhr was also one-time head of the Federalism Research Centre at ANU. He shares Galligan's view that 'many of Australia's existing political institutions already possess many republican qualities—in fact if not in name'. Unlike Galligan, he offers no personal testimony. Being a long-time parliamentary committee secretary in the service of the Senate, he is thorough, restrained and writes with a deft touch in his treatment of the changing place of Parliament in Australian democracy.

Brian Galligan is surely right when he postulates that Australia's main problems are not constitutional but social and political, given the country's need to compete in a globalised economy while maintaining some commitment to justice for all. ***—Frank Brennan***

Having set out a theory of deliberative democracy, he then makes a detailed study of Parliament in theory and Parliament in practice. Here is a real insider to the complexity of the parliamentary process. He has been able to step down from the House on the Hill and reflect on the democratic character of what goes on in those back rooms of parliamentary committees that we hardly ever hear about.

He produces some effective case studies. For example, in walking us through the 'Means of Legislation' he compares the routine passage of the 1993 Telecommunications Amendment Bill and Paul Keating's 1993 Native Title Bill. Incidentally, the five-year lead time to publication of the book does make the detail of the examples a little more demanding on the reader who does not immediately share Uhr's fascination for the disguised parliamentary processes. Like much routine legislation, the Telecommunications Bill absorbed less than an hour of the Parliament's time and was never subject to formal vote. All parliamentarians are deemed to have supported it.

Occasionally, at least to this reader's relief, the disciplined and dispassionate academic writing of the scrupulously observant political scientist gives way to Uhr's light touch and humour, which reveal more than the author's own quizzical view of things. He observes that the House of Representatives passed ten times more bills in its ninth decade than in the first, it having reduced the average sitting time per bill from twenty-five hours to two. Uhr opines, 'Although this might indicate a remarkable feat of micro-economic reform with increasing improvements in efficiency, the real situation is probably that these trend figures indicate a steady decline in due standards of deliberation.'

In his treatment of the Native Title Bill, Uhr observes that Keating's consultation process before the drafting of the bill 'was an unusually open example of public policy making involving extensive community consultations and many rounds of pre-legislative negotiations with interested groups'. The bill then went through what was, until then, the longest Senate debate in history. Though he gives a thorough description of the parliamentary process, Uhr could have contributed to his theory and practice of deliberative democracy by analysing how the government's lack of Senate control gave indigenous groups the opportunity for greater participation in the legislative process (thereby enhancing deliberative democracy), while also giving the minor parties a veto over key provisions which then led to amendments which were unworkable (thereby undermining deliberative democracy).

In his concluding chapter, Uhr combines 'theory and practice to highlight Australian reform priorities—in the event that sufficient political will exists to try and enhance the place of deliberation in Australian parliamentary institutions'. He has a 12-point plan which illustrates rather than catalogues a range of reforms in the three performance areas of representation, law-making and accountability. While seeking greater independence for ATSIC and the Auditor-General, he would like to see the High Court subject to greater scrutiny by the Parliament. When launching the book, Sir Anthony Mason expressed some concern at Recommendation 9:

> Parliament should establish specialist mechanisms to provide itself with regular opportunities to examine the performance of the High Court and its contribution to national government , taking due account of the views of appropriate professional organisations.

Acknowledging that the Court is fully accountable for its expenditure of public funds, Uhr suggests, 'The next step in accountability is to upgrade the quality of parliamentary review of the performance of the High Court and to lift the scrutiny from administrative inputs to policy impacts and from financial to political costs.' The Uhr recommendation applied to cases such as *Mabo* and *Wik*—especially in light of Fischer's and Borbidge's abysmal political attacks on the court and Attorney-General Daryl Williams' decision to proffer no defence—would result in anything but an enhanced practice of deliberative democracy.

If deliberative democracy has been enhanced in an Australian republic by 2001, Galligan and Uhr should be invited to the celebrations. They have contributed substantially to the project.

—Frank Brennan SJ

Reviving the Fourth Estate,
Julianne Schultz

TERTIARY COURSES in journalism are extremely fashionable at the moment. Many have yet to decide whether they are courses about journalism, or courses in how to be a journalist. Of course the two are not mutually exclusive, but the difference in emphasis is certainly important to the students and the industry. In the author notes to this book Schultz is described as having 'unique experience as both a journalist and a journalism academic'. This is pushing it a bit, and gratuitously insulting other fine journalists-turned-academics, but it is true that the combination is unusual and this fact impoverishes both journalism and academia.

When the academics who teach journalism don't themselves have solid industry experience, they have a personal stake in teaching theory at the expense of practice. And when journalists don't respect the academics, they rob themselves of a potential source of constructive critique.

Last year I tutored in journalism at one of the new concrete block universities. I was in an odd position. I am a journalist of almost 20 years' experience, but I don't have a higher degree. This means I was almost as bemused by academia as academia was by me. I remember one week when my students had been lectured on something called 'public journalism'. The term mystified me. Not much journalism, I thought, took place in private. What could public journalism be?

I went to the lecture and found out that it is a theory, or an aspiration, for journalism according to which the media would make more attempts to connect with and reflect the concerns of its public, rather than of a political elite.

In spite of the risk that 'public journalism' might come to mean 'cosy journalism', and in spite of the barely cloaked hostility of the lecturer to the mainstream media in which most of his students hoped to find jobs, public journalism seemed like a worthy aim in need of a more sensible name.

But when I told journalism colleagues about the theory, they snorted with derision. They had no doubt that they were already serving the public. 'Academic wankery', was the tone of their remarks.

Schultz canvasses these ideas, and at its best her book is an example of the ways in which academy and industry can usefully intersect.

One of her main arguments is that journalists in Australia are, while seeing themselves as servants of public interest, at the same time remote from the concerns and opinions of the public.

At the heart of her book are the results of the survey of 247 Australian journalists done as part of the international Media and Democracy project in 1992. The results, reproduced in full as an appendix, are not very surprising to anyone who knows journalists. They confirm, broadly speaking, that most journalists aspire to independence and a watchdog role within the democracy, while realising that these ideals are compromised by the requirements of commerce.

Most telling is the finding that journalists want to serve the public, yet are limited and uncertain in their attempts to divine public opinion and interests. Asked how they determined what was newsworthy, most nominated other media reports and the judgment of their colleagues as the most important sources of guidance. Schultz comments: 'This finding demonstrates how the insularity of journalism is reinforced. This then adds to the perception that journalists are members of an elite whose primary reference point is other journalists.'

The book originated as a doctoral thesis, and I suspect has scarcely been edited since submission. Although there is excellent content, a great deal of time is spent in establishing the terms of debate and demonstrating intellectual worthiness, and all this is done in a rather verbose and tedious fashion.

By the second half, though, Schultz hits her stride, and gives a fascinating and lively review and analysis of the 'golden age' of Australian investigative journalism in the '70s and '80s when people like Bob Bottom, Marian Wilkinson and Chris Masters were at the height of their powers. Governments, High Court judges and senior bureaucrats fell as a result.

Although others have written parts of this story, I am not aware of any other comprehensive review. Schultz's analysis is excellent and thought-provoking. This is exactly the kind of writing journalism academics could and should do. Nobody in the mainstream of the industry is going to have enough perspective and objectivity to provide such penetrating analysis of recent professional history.

The contrast in style and vigour with the earlier material is so great that it is easy to imagine this as a struggle between academic and journalist.

Reviving the Fourth Estate only partially fulfils the promise of its title. A great deal of space is spent in reviewing the history of the notion of the media as a fourth estate—independent of and a watchdog on government and the powerful. Very little time is spent on suggesting ways in which the jaded and imperfect Australian media might move closer to the ideal. The only solid suggestion is that journalists need to move closer to the public. There are very few ideas about how this might be done in practice, and how to balance the risk of cosiness with the need to be responsive.

Schultz would have written a better and more useful volume, I think, with a bit more of the brevity and incisiveness. Lightly edited theses rarely make good reading for the general public.

Nevertheless, there is more than enough valuable content here to make me wish that journalists would read it. They won't, of course. **—Margaret Simons**

When the academics who teach journalism don't themselves have solid industry experience, they have a personal stake in teaching theory at the expense of practice. And when journalists don't respect the academics, they rob themselves of a potential source of constructive critique.

—Margaret Simons

Unions In A Contrary World: The Future Of The Australian Trade Union Movement, David Peetz

THE VICTORIAN town hall union delegate leant across the table and thanked management. 'Every time you send out a memo on the enterprise bargaining agreement I sign up two more members. Would you like to go on commission?'

This cameo sums up why people continue to join unions. Recruitment tends to be in the public sector, when management is piling on the stress factor, where the union holds meetings and where delegates are active on the ground.

Yet the overall trend in Australia is still running against unions, with the organised proportion of the workforce falling by 40 per cent between 1976 and 1996. The Maritime Union might have fought off those who would drag it to the knacker's yard, but the general prognosis for unionism is still commonly perceived to be gloomy.

This book by David Peetz, senior lecturer in Industrial Relations at Griffith University in Brisbane, challenges the assumption. He points out that Australian unions have come back from tougher setbacks before, rebounding from disaster in the 1930s to tot up record membership post-war.

He cites two rather more immediate factors that could work in unions' favour. The first is the way that the introduction of 'modern management' tools such as just-in-time programs or quality circles creates employer–employee friction, opening up the possibility of unionising currently non-union workplaces. Such management techniques were the most significant factor in union recruitment, according to one survey cited by Peetz.

The second is that many more workers want to be union members than actually are, especially in smaller workplaces where management hostility to unionism is more overt and deep-seated. Overall, what Peetz calls the 'unwillingly excluded' outnumber the 'unwilling conscripts' (those who are forced to join because of closed shop arrangements) by at least two to one.

Yet the cold facts point to decline, not growth. Why? Peetz rehearses some of the more commonly recognised reasons—the economy-wide shift from public sector to private, from permanent employment to casual, and from traditionally well-organised industries to sunrise service sectors.

None of this is new. What is, is Peetz's identification of an 'institutional break', a watershed in union affairs. This break is

the assault in the 1990s by conservative state governments and now the federal government on those elements of the arbitration system which bolstered compulsory unionism.

Not that it can all be sheeted home to governments. Unions haemorrhaged members from 1991 onwards in those areas where closed shop arrangements had gone hand in hand with inactivity. It was not so much that most workers objected to compulsory unionism, rather that they saw no reason to stay in a union that did nothing for them when the opportunity to leave arose.

The four surveys on which Peetz has built his book all show the same pattern workers want to see their union officials, they want to be consulted, and they hold the union in higher esteem if there is a delegate in their workplace. The key factor is not necessarily gaining wage rises: a union that takes up any question of concern builds loyalty and commitment.

As Peetz puts it: 'Indeed, an effective delegate presence and active union role were almost guarantees against deunionisation, and were important in reducing the likelihood of union collapse.'

The insight is valuable (and union officials should take careful note). But Peetz begins to lose his way when he tries to put the decline of the past decade into the context of the Accord between the union movement and the former Labor government. He is an unabashed supporter of the Accord. It prevented the introduction of such nasties as a GST and staved off the kind of cataclysmic attack on union rights suffered in the early 1990s by workers in New Zealand.

He points to a general acceptance of the idea of co-operation between unions and government to strengthen his case. The Accord, he argues, is not a culprit when it comes to union decline. Yet that leaves an obvious question: why did so many workers leave their unions in the 1990s if they were happy with the Accord (which was strongest in the 1980s).

Peetz himself gives evidence that the Accord had led to a fall in real wages of 5 per cent by 1990. From then on there is a recovery, but what the raw data do not show is that increases in real wages under the new enterprise bargaining regime went hand in hand with loss of conditions and a general increase in workload and stress.

The evidence was there to be seen in 1993, when only John Hewson's Fightback! package saved Paul Keating from popular wrath, and it was confirmed in 1996. One Nation is still trying to trade on that sense of betrayal among some blue-collar workers today.

The Accord may have stopped a GST under Labor, but it did not stop deregulation, privatisation and the erosion of awards. Peetz says union membership did not decline particularly sharply in the 1980s. But he himself has provided the evidence that the pent-up frustration with do-nothing unions could not be released until conservative state governments gave a legal opening in the 1990s.

This disagreement aside, the book is a valuable resource. It is a reminder that unions are not built through flashy special deals for members or amalgamations. Workers join unions to protect their immediate interests and their dignity in the workplace. They stay in unions if they see them respond to those desires.

If unions pay heed, there is no reason why they cannot be a vital part of the Australian social landscape well into the foreseeable future.

—David Glanz

Australian Cities—Issues, Strategies and Policies for Urban Australia in the 1990s, edited by Patrick Troy

ENTERTAINING ISN'T a word one reaches for when considering weighty books like this one, pitched more for students of urban planning and for policy-makers than for the general public. But there is entertainment here, chiefly in Tim Bonyhady's essay on the Battle for Balmain—an account of how planning decisions were made and contested over key sites in the inner Sydney suburb.

Those who enjoyed the documentary *Rats in the Ranks*, which covered the machinations of the Leichhardt City Council, will find the same cast of characters at work here, plus some developers, some state politicians, the courts—the whole democratic and demographic disaster.

It is a wonderful account of how planning happens, or fails to happen, in practice.

Bonyhady comments at one point:

> The impotence of planners is notorious. They sometimes can stop things but rarely start them. Their plans are usually no less dependent on developers than on other branches of government. After analysing land use controls from Broadmeadows to Berwick in 'shaping Melbourne's Future', Brian McLoughlin concluded that local planning works when the interests of all parties coincide! Otherwise he found that planning fails, particularly if developers do not co-operate with local councils.

If taken to heart, Bonyhady's words could serve to undermine all the good intent and serious thought of the rest of this volume. But that would be to take the book on far too superficial a level. Here there are various approaches and points of view by 14 contributors on topics, from the interaction of governments to the behaviour of households, that together shed fresh light on the problems of cities, what solutions are possible, and what we should be trying to achieve.

A major theme is the potency of the different levels of government, and the strengths and weaknesses of a system in which local government makes the on-the-ground decisions, but is increasingly rendered irrelevant by intervention at state government level.

One of the most penetrating essays, by Mark Peel, canvasses the impact of that loose but very binding group of ideas generally described as economic rationalism on our urban lives. He agrees that policies and ideas originated in the '60s and '70s probably now need reshaping, but asks that we redefine notions of 'efficiency' in delivery of government services to include measures of what is delivered, as well as the cost of delivering it.

Peel's essay is characteristic of the best of this book, where the language of urban planning we have all come to understand at a superficial level—the need for medium density development, the need for better access to services, the problems of the motor car—is re-examined and fresh categories and ways of thinking suggested.

—Margaret Simons

Collaborative Federalism: Economic Reform in Australia in the 1990s, Martin Painter
Beyond the Two Party System: Political Representation, Economic Competitiveness and Australian Politics, Ian Marsh

THESE TWO BOOKS present an intriguing contrast in analytical style.

Martin Painter's work is a detailed and fruitful study of the practice of Australian federalism from Hawke to Howard. Immersing himself in the politics of intergovernmental relations, Painter not only produces a valuable record of new initiatives in Commonwealth–State relations but also, through careful analysis of people and policy, succeeds in enlarging our

appreciation of the direction, complexity and dynamics of contemporary federalism.

Ian Marsh's book is more theoretical and prescriptive. It paints a broad canvas, reviewing the challenges to contemporary Australian government posed by the diversification of political interest groups and the pressures of economic competitiveness. In response to this survey, Marsh proposes a model for a more plural Australian politics and a more strategic Australian economics.

The argument in *Collaborative Federalism* is that the traditionally adversarial nature of Commonwealth–State relations is changing. While on the surface it may appear that Prime Minister and Premiers are locked in conflict, in particular about how to cut the federal-fiscal pie, in subterranean, intergovernmental councils and committees a new spirit of co-operation has been emerging, with many constructive results.

The catalyst for the change was Bob Hawke's 'New Federalism'. Hawke bemoaned the lack of co-ordination between federal and state governments in critical policy areas and complained about the consequent 'balkanisation' of the Australian economy. He proposed a new partnership with the Premiers to ensure the enhancement of Australia's international competitiveness and the elimination of unproductive governmental regulation and duplication. In pursuit of this new partnership, Special Premiers' Conferences and the Council of Australian Governments were established. These provided the institutional foundation for the collaborative arrangements that would follow.

New Ministerial Councils and intergovernmental committees set to work under this umbrella. They pursued a micro-economic reform agenda in fields as diverse as road and rail transport, company and credit law, vocational education and disability services, and national competition policy. Through a detailed examination of these initiatives, Painter argues, collaboration has achieved very positive outcomes. At the same time, however, he remains alert to novel problems such arrangements may generate.

In so far as the present co-operation represents the States' accession to the Commonwealth's economic agenda, for example, the very diversity for which federalism stands may progressively be undermined. The proliferation of ministerial councils also poses substantial problems for governmental accountability since the legislation in which policy agreement is embodied is presented frequently as a *fait accompli* to federal and state parliaments alike.

The new collaboration is founded upon convergence at both levels of government on an economically rationalist agenda. And yet the agenda itself may prove anti-federal as the States are faced with the prospect that their traditional function—that is the independent provision of public services—might be subjected increasingly to federally agreed, market-related purchase and service-delivery arrangements.

Collaborative Federalism, then, provides a valuable antidote to the gloom which normally accompanies discussion of Australian federalism in the context of vertical fiscal imbalance, financial bickering and seemingly endless political posturing. In tracing the economic and social benefits that have flowed from the creation of new intergovernmental institutions, it also makes an important contribution to our understanding of micro-economic reform.

My problem with the work, in so far as I have one, is that it leans too far to the descriptive, leaving any consideration of the theory and reform of Australia's federal system to 'the pragmatic, evolutionary processes of adaptation that have shaped most of the other transformations in Australia's federal history'. Following such an exemplary study, I am sure that both politicians and policy makers alike would have benefited greatly from constructive suggestions for change, and their absence is a loss.

The difficulty with *Beyond the Two Party System* is of the opposite kind. In developing an abstracted model for a new Australian politics, Ian Marsh moves so far from political practice that his prescriptions, while interesting, lack force.

In this very ambitious book Marsh surveys Australia's political and economic development since the turn of the century. He argues that the ground of Australian politics and economics has shifted so substantially from that which spawned our two-party system in the two decades following federation that a fundamental reconceptualisation of parliamentary and governmental practice is now required.

The Australian polity now is more plural and diverse than it once was, interest groups playing a much larger part in policy development. The place of the two major parties has become much less certain as the electorate demonstrates greater volatility and new parties take root. International competition requires both government and industry to alter their strategy, structure and role.

In response to these challenges, Marsh proposes new plans and new institutions. Economic planning, he argues, must become more visionary and strategic. Here, Australia has much to learn from the tigers of Asia (the book was published before the current crisis). Parliament and parties should also be reformed to engender more plural and inclusive policy formulation.

The models proposed, however, are of an ideal type. Often, real politics is assumed away in favour of a better, kinder future. The close study of political actors and their fallible institutions so characteristic of Martin Painter's work is here replaced by a model built on books and reports.

The work contains many useful suggestions, including, for example, a stronger, more independent parliamentary committee system. The values that underlie it—for example a commitment to political learning—are also attractive. In the end, however, the model-building is so extensive and the assumptions so cumulative, that one fears the entire edifice will topple in the first gust of any Machiavellian or market-driven wind.

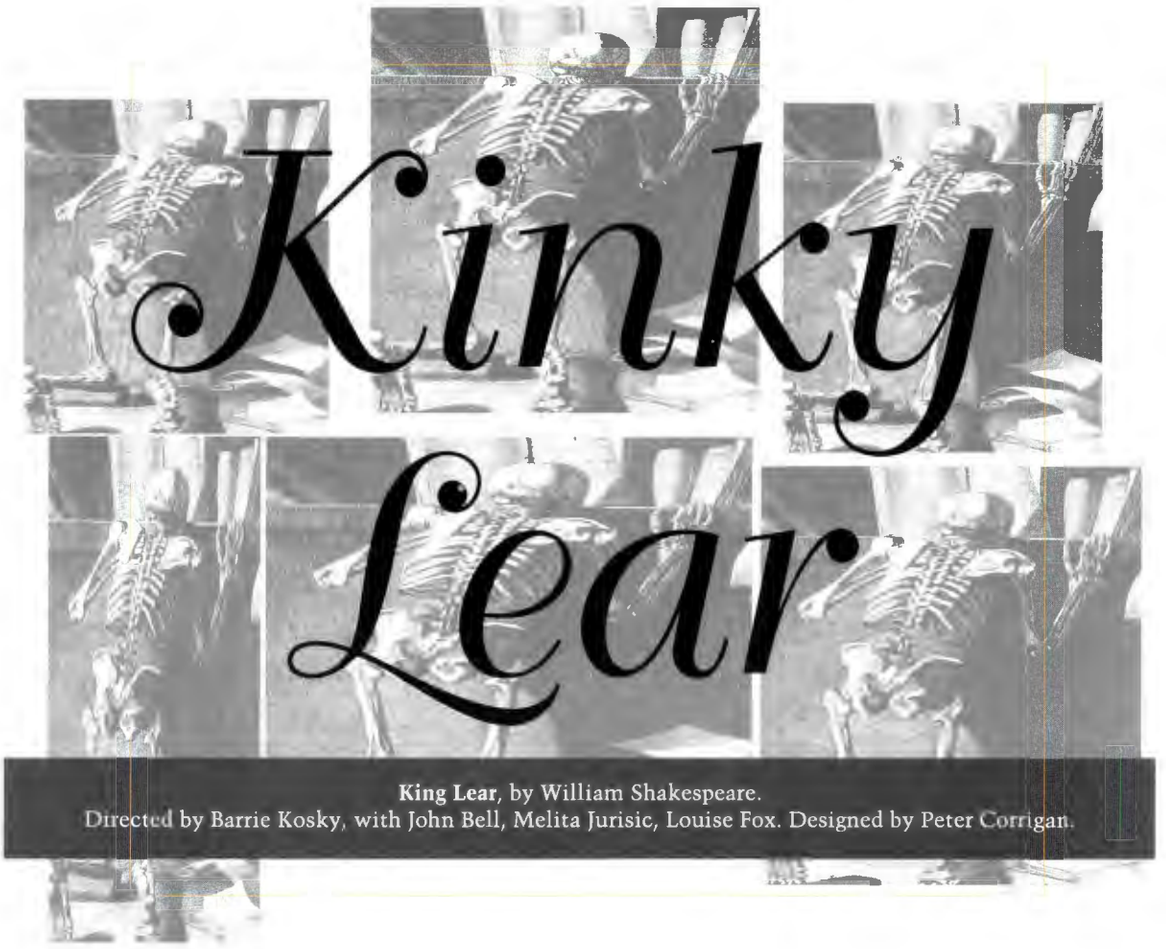
—Spencer Zifcak

*The Victorian town hall union delegate leant across the table and thanked management. 'Every time you send out a memo on the enterprise bargaining agreement I sign up two more members. Would you like to go on commission?' —**David Glanz***

Contributors: **Frank Brennan** SJ is Director of Uniya, the Jesuit Social Justice Centre. His latest books are *Legislating Liberty* (UQP, 1998) and *The Wik Debate* (UNSW Press, 1998); **Margaret Simons** is a freelance journalist; **David Glanz** is a freelance journalist; **Spencer Zifcak** is Associate Professor of Law and Legal Studies at La Trobe University.

PETER CRAVEN

Kinky Lear



King Lear, by William Shakespeare.
Directed by Barrie Kosky, with John Bell, Melita Jurisic, Louise Fox. Designed by Peter Corrigan.

SOMEONE SHOULD disabuse Barrie Kosky of the notion that he has anything of value to communicate about the text-based classics of the theatre. However remarkable he may be as a director of opera, his production of *King Lear* for the Bell Shakespeare Company is a monument to the director's self-indulgence and incomprehension in the face of a play which communicates with the brutal clarity of a fact of nature.

This may sound like a harsh verdict on a production by a director who, at the start of his 30s, is one of the most dynamic talents on the theatre scene. The only way of convincing anyone without actually forcing them to go to the theatre—a more than Artaudian act of cruelty in this case—is to describe this production, knowing full well that one can only give an image nothing like the horror of it.

The opening scene is Meyerholdian, with John Bell in Khan-like 'oriental' crown and Father Christmassy robes, red with white fur. The daughters sit at the front of the stage, facing the audience, with their backs to the king. They are dressed more or less in the manner of *The Mikado*'s Three Little Maids from School. When Lear speaks a line or two, indeed when anyone does, there is an alienating bang on the drum. When Melita Jurisic as Goneril begins to speak and to give her voice a stylised lilt, she sounds as though she is on drugs—lots of them. The rest of the cast either speak in accented English or in varieties of strine that admit of no subtlety of phrasing.

It gets worse. Louise Fox as the Fool is got up as a kind of blowzy cow-like version of Shirley Temple. She sings 'My Heart Belongs to Daddy' with élan while the play's question about filial devotion remains an open one. Indeed she sings just about everything—snatches of *Carmen*, the 'Ode to Joy'. But this rollicking and irrelevant grotesquerie is at least preferable to the horrific little-girl *echt deutsch* voice she otherwise uses. She is the first Fool I have ever positively longed to see fade away halfway through the play—something which she, alone of all her tribe, does not do. It's possible to muster arguments about Lear's sexual disgust but this interpretation seems to have more to do with the director's. It is callow, camp misogyny.

One of the other peculiar things about this production—which really could be retitled *King Lear: The Musical*—is that the text is cut, not inefficiently, to what might have been a 90 or 100-minute playing time had not the rest of the time—a fair immensity of it—been filled with Kosky's interpolations. The effect,

more often than not, is sillier than belief would credit. Gloucester and Edgar trudge round a waiting room of purple chairs while an actress faces the audience yabbering from under the rictus of a grin while music plays. The effect is like a bad imitation of Pina Bausch. Lear's knights are cavorting young men in tracksuit pants outside of which huge Alsatian-style penises hang and are subsequently jerked with abandon. The business has nothing to do with the play and serves simply as an emblem of the director's conception.

DURING THE FIRST HALF it seemed to me possible that Kosky wanted to present the action as if from inside Lear's head, though the execution still remained unpersuasive. After the interval, however, the artificiality overtook the stage whether Lear was on it or not, so this way of looking at the action collapsed anyway. None of which is to deny that the level of directorial energy is more 'exciting' at a minimum level than in most stage productions, though in this production it works at such a level of coarseness and with such concomitant verbal and dramatic ineptitude that it insults the intelligence.

Peter Corrigan's sets and costumes have a gleaming elasticity. The silly heads in the Hovel scene have a Disney-like charm which *could* have been turned sombre: the stocks in which Lear and Co. sit while they enact the fantasy of arraigning Goneril are a splendid idea as far as they go but it's hard to be fair to the residual vividness of this little cartoon opera amid all the mincing and prancing.

The last sequence of Kosky's *King Lear* represents the high watermark of his attempt to piss it all against the wall. The scene is like a quotation from the more turbulent and darkly implicated Caravaggio paintings—the ones where torture and sex come together. Edmund sits on the throne naked except for a pair of white underpants which are soaked at the crotch with blood. Blood drips from his lips too and from the mouths of Goneril and Regan who attend, competitively, upon him. Cordelia—pregnant in this production—is brought onto the stage and strangled excruciatingly, with full sound effects from the individual body mikes, by Goneril. Then Regan too is dispatched to the same accompaniment of squeals of terror and pain. Goneril then stabs herself.

The figure who has knelt, bound, at the front of the stage, dressed like an old peasant woman with her head in a bag turns out to be Lear. He does not carry in the body of Cordelia which instead lies dead before him. Nor does he say (or repeat) the word 'Howl' that traditionally introduces the most extraordinary scene in our drama. He sobs a bit and then delivers the words while stroking compulsively the protuberant belly of his daughter. Curtain.

This is all perverse (some of it defensible, some of it not), though it has to be admitted that it is a *coup de théâtre* and technically as good as anything in this risible and awful production of *King Lear* gets. The Kosky who effects it is at least an imaginative sensationalist even if it is a wonder that he fails to cotton on to Shakespeare's superior stagecraft.

The pity of all this is that John Bell shows signs that he might have been a good Lear had he got any help from his director. He comes across as the only human being on stage, as well as the only person who can act. Bell alone has the technique which allows him to circumvent the body mike. He plays down with his voice, which allows some access of intimacy, whereas the rest of the cast, with their wondering terminal climaxes and general inability to hear even the ghost of an iambic pentameter, milk the language without naturalising it, which gives an effect of bush bombast but not poetry, still less drama.

No-one should be in any doubt about the reason for objecting to this production. It is not any putative iconoclasm exhibited. It does not matter that John Bell runs about in a dress; nor are dildoes or blood of great importance. This is not, by and large, a '90s version analogous to Peter Brooks' '60s production with its loutish knights and Beckettian intentions. No, this is *King Lear* in underwear by an emperor without clothes. This is an act of dereliction by an undereducated director of great talent. On the evidence of this production, Kosky does not know how to 'do' Shakespeare, he does not know to 'do' verse drama, he does not know how to 'do' men and women in a state of heightened conflict.

Of course there are excitements, but the real rabbit out of the box is Kosky making such a bunny of himself. *King Lear* is, after all, one of the more adult plays ever written. It is also a profoundly heterosexual play; it presents the darkest of all matters between men and women. Without any hint of molestation, it presents the commonplace of a father with an excessive and blind love for his daughter. It should be a source of gay shame—it is certainly a reason to wonder—that a director of Kosky's talents should have no imaginative understanding of this and that he should take a play as savage as *Lear*, as full of tears and rage and sex and cruelty, and reduce it to such camp fluff and folderol.

His last scene is the exception that proves the rule. Here, with an edge of electricity, with a painterly grandeur and something like real shock and gravity, is the director of *The Flying Dutchman* or *Nabucco* (not the trifler of *Tartuffe* and *The Operated Jew*), but his energy is working in order to outshine the starkest and the most difficult scene in Western drama. *Lear* without the Howl, with only its mutation and muting, is *Lear* without balls or soul or heart.

IT IS ENOUGH TO MAKE you think that the great opera director is just a Muppet man in the end, a puppet-master who has had the good fortune to have professional opera singers of the stature of Jonathan Summers and Elizabeth Connell who were puppets who knew more about human animation than he did.

Whatever high place we give to Shakespeare, however much we acknowledge *Lear* as a mountain, it's worth realising the parallels between Shakespeare and opera. Both depend—the one literally, the other with the most powerful weight of metaphor—on having to get the 'music' right if you're going to get the drama.

Kosky needs actors with the experience and vocal skills, the professionalism and the power of human impersonation that the Opera Australia insists he gets from his singers. Insists, that is, by casting for him.

It's the opposite of a pleasure to say so, but Kosky's blood-and-nappies musical *Lear* is like a piano sonata played with one hand on a honky tonk. ■

Peter Craven is currently editing *Best Australian Essays, 1998.*

FLASH IN THE PAN

Four's a crowd

Perdita Durango, dir. Alex de la Iglesia. Between foetuses smuggled for cosmetic testing, Mexican voodoo sacrifices, naked Californian prom queens daubed in white paint and feathers, and ultra-violent human slaughtering, it is difficult to choose what is most offensive about this film. Option paralysis has driven me to think that the dangerous level of Coca-Cola consumption may in fact take the prize. But happily, no prize need be given—just an R rating. *Perdita Durango* is by no means flawless, but it is cleverly imagined and at times starkly humorous.

The film follows the exploits of Perdita (Rosie Perez, above) and Romeo (Javier Bardem), a couple drifting between grace and violence—in Aztec rituals, love-making, killing, and snakeskin footwear. Kidnapped into the heart of this dark mixture are two California innocents. Blonde and virginal, the innocents' closest encounter with anything dark and Mexican—outside of a taco—is *Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass*. Naturally they drink Diet Coke.

The mismatched foursome experience something close to a therapy session as they travel the highways stretching between Mexico and Las Vegas. This is not the sort of therapy a Woody Allen character might have: it's more the kind you might have with Ripley's alien.

Perdita Durango is based on a novel by Barry Gifford—the screenwriter of David Lynch's *Lost Highway*, and author of the book upon which Lynch based *Wild at Heart*.

While *Perdita Durango* is more violent than its Lynchian equivalents, it lacks *Highway* and *Heart*'s menacing strangeness and deeply weird nasties. *Durango* tends to err on the side of the known, looking at bizarre details in mundane ways, rendering them, at times, cute rather than satirical.

De la Iglesia comes close to the creative pungency he needs to pull *Durango* into the category of 'wittingly' vile rather than just 'plain' vile. But as yet he doesn't have quite the creative energy or expertise to make a masterpiece of morally smelly cinema.

—Siobhan Jackson

Five's a party

Live Flesh (*Carne Tremula*), dir. Pedro Almodóvar. This is, unusually enough for Almodóvar, based on a story written by someone else, and that someone's being Ruth Rendell only adds to the unusualness of the combination. You imagine the novel sitting uncomfortably in the flamboyant scenery of his mind, like a sun-reddened British tourist demanding egg and chips in Marbella. But the plot has gone through the filter of Almodóvar's erotically fatalistic, blackly comic Spanishness: Rendell is eating paella with all the garlic and wobbly bits and dancing a flamenco.

The film opens in Franco's dark, frightened, deserted Madrid of 1970 and ends symmetrically there in 1997—chaotic, garish and full of life. In the early scenes Victor Plaza (Liberto Rabal), the young protagonist, is born on a bus to a prostitute. Twenty years later he falls for Elena, (Francesca Neri) a diplomat's daughter and drug addict. She has absent-mindedly bonked him in a dance-club lavatory some days previously, and when he tries to follow up on it, fate's trap snaps.

Performances are excellent: Javier Bardem as David, perhaps the ultimate victim of the concatenated events, is impressive. A plainclothes policeman, he is paralysed by a shot fired at Elena's apartment as he and his partner Sancho answer a call for help. Pepe Sancho, as Sancho, is brilliantly understated as a dangerous, very believable drunkard, whose stubbornness equals Victor's, and whose intense self-centredness you come to see as quite evil. All Almodóvar's characters are driven in some way; in Victor's case literally as well, and it takes brilliant directing to hold all these different reins while allowing the wildness to exist.

And all through the darkness and the fatalness runs Almodóvar's trademark: that gleaming vein of fierce gaiety.

—Juliette Hughes

Four's company

In the Winter Dark, dir. James Bogle. Everyone talks about actors being over-exposed. But I saw Miranda Otto in this film soon after seeing her in John Ruane's *Dead Letter Office* and it is scarcely possible to believe it's the same actor: the airiness of one performance has been exchanged for the dark intensity of her character in *In the Winter Dark*.

The film is based on a short novel by Tim Winton, published in 1988. It concerns four individuals who live in a remote valley known as The Sink. The location scouts did a great job for this film: Winton's novel is set in the jarrah country of WA, but the choice of somewhere in the Blue Mountains creates the right sense of cold, damp and claustrophobia for what is a brooding, disconcerting story.

Landowners Maurice Stubbs (Ray Barrett) and his wife Ida (Brenda Blethyn) are troubled by a sudden spate of mysterious and violent attacks on their livestock. These attacks, as well as Maurice's pathological suspicion of external authorities, force them closer to two neighbours, both of whom live alone: Jacobs (Richard Roxburgh) and

Ronnie (Otto). Whatever is killing the animals is never identified. But it does become clear that this external threat brings to light all sorts of traumas which weigh down each character, often for years. Both the novel and the film are interested in the psychological implications of living under threat. They invest their energies in exploring fear and communication more than in sorting out loose ends in the manner of a conventional thriller.

James Bogle has created a fine ensemble from four quite distinct actors. The film does change the ending of the novel quite dramatically. It is more hopeful. But still not easy.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Three sisters

Radiance, dir. Rachel Perkins. *Radiance* was the popular favourite at the Melbourne Film Festival. It's not hard to see why. It has patches of startlingly good performance plus a beguiling far north Queensland location and a can't-lose plot (screenplay by Louis Nowra, adapted from his stage play).

Three grown sisters, Cressy, Mae and Nona, are thrown together for the funeral of their mother. Back home on the verandah of the ramshackle coastal weatherboard-on-stilts where their mother died, they are alternately loving and vile to one another. The cinematography, playing with the slatted light of north Queensland domestic architecture, parallels their shifts in mood: dark, light, bright, occluded.

The three women have different fathers, and divergent memories of their venturesome mother. Only slowly do the sisters reveal what they remember, treasure or resent. And under the house, in the discarded tangle of their once-shared lives, are cowboy hats and creatures and the secrets that haunt all of them.

Perkins elicits fine performances from her three actors, (Rachael Maza, Deborah Mailman and Trisha Morton-Thomas). Morton-Thomas, particularly convincing as the lacerating, put-upon and damaged middle sister, Mae, has one sequence that will lift your scalp.

It's a sombre and funny film: Euripides meets *Thelma and Louise*. Sometimes the mix works and you get a glimpse of complex humanity; other times you feel only the strain of incompatibility in a film trying to do too much. But better ambition than calculated cine-cynicism.

—Morag Fraser

Binary opposites

Les Misérables, dir. Bille August. Here is a film that looks beautiful, boasts wonderful actors, and has love, action and war. Liam Neeson has the lead role of Jean Valjean, the erstwhile criminal who learns the value of human kindness and goes on to become a man, great and good. Geoffrey Rush plays his nemesis, the rigid and emotionless Javert, who pursues Valjean. Both actors do the job. Then there are the sub-plots of Fantine (Uma Thurman), the beautiful and destitute sole parent and Cosette (Claire Danes), her illegitimate daughter. And, of course, something of a small social upheaval on the streets of Paris.

I stand by my first line: this is a beautiful and well-acted film. But the concerns of Victor Hugo's book—kindness versus corruption, humanity versus the law, experience against ignorance—are presented with such wide-eyed simplicity as to lose any possible impact. Valjean, made evil by a corrupt system, is redeemed by a rogue bishop and becomes goodness, kindness, conscience personified. Javert, made evil by the same system, becomes increasingly evil, emotionless and rigid until, in something of a parody, he becomes the character who appears and disappears in dark doorways, his great hooked nose thrust forward, smelling out those he seeks.

Les Misérables has much in common with Hollywood blockbuster action flicks: the flawed, but very good, outwitting the clever, but very evil. Of course, *Les Misérables* is in period dress and the action is not quite so spectacular. But I think the other major difference between Hollywood blockbusters and *Les Misérables* is that the latter takes itself very, very seriously. This is a Universal Tale. But presenting the opposing forces of good and evil to a contemporary audience without even the most gentle tilt at reflexivity is a touch hard to take. *Les Misérables* needed to be either more sophisticated or to indicate some self-awareness.

—Annelise Balsamo

The power of one

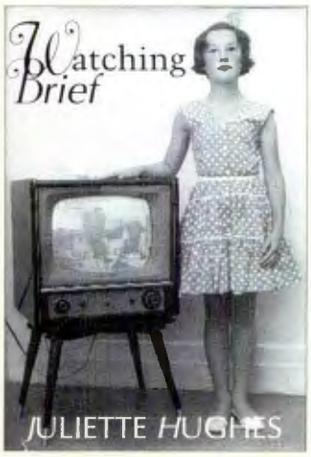
The Truman Show, dir. Peter Weir. This is the perfect paranoid's movie: everyone *is* plotting against Truman. His intimations of reality come as the shaking of a universe, like a true nervous breakdown.

The name is a fairly obvious irony in the world of deliberate lies he inhabits, in a society as enclosed as Kim Il Sung's. Everything in the small town of Seahaven is a lie. Even the sky is fake. The sea is fake, the weather is fake and so are the people. The whole place is a Hollywood studio dome, so big that it can be seen, as can the Great Wall of China, from space. And Truman Burbank is the oblivious star of a 30-year long, 24-hour-a-day television show that has followed his every movement from his birth, with 5000 hidden cameras in a purpose-built town where everyone else is an actor.

Jim Carrey is an interesting choice for this film, because brilliant as he is, somehow his style of acting distances one from his character. The obvious comparison would be *Edward Scissorhands*: the innocent protagonist for whom everyone has an agenda. Johnny Depp, as Edward, had a teenage idol appeal for which Carrey's features are too blunt, too mobile. Yet Carrey, as he did in the severely underrated *Cable Guy*, takes us deeper and into more troublesome places in the *zeitgeist* than any other film actor at the moment. Every gesture of his is prismatic with reference—the sense of distance becomes a vivid exploration. When Carrey is not on the screen the suspension of belief wavers, for the plot's probability is sometimes precarious.

Weir's film is a straight-out fable, set sometime in a future America where presumably the law against depriving someone of his civil rights has been either ignored or flouted. The deep personal betrayal by all his (fake) family and friends is the main focus: the film, although showing his struggle to escape from his virtual imprisonment and slavery, treads lightly over the social and political implications. But it's worth a look.

—Juliette Hughes



Ally's a wally

If I never see another episode of *Ally McBeal* I won't be shedding tears. And I'd be damn scared if I were a client of hers. I prefer my lawyers tough and focused, not so goldurn cute and flappy. She won't win too many cases by making sweet big-eyed collagen pouts at the judge. I must admit that I've watched only one program. Some reviewers have watched five and they should get a medal or at least a dose of insulin.

The program in question concerned the funeral of an old flame of McBeal's. What we got was the usual American leaden effort at whimsy: McBeal is afraid of death, and of having the affair found out by the grieving widow of the said old flame, who was also her professor at law school. If this plot outline had then been taken over by, for instance, the team that produced *In The Red* (about which more later), then the description 'comedy-drama' given the series in the TV guide might have been earned.

As it is, the gorge rose at the sweet little deception played on the widow. You see, she suspected her husband had had an affair, but it didn't matter As Long As He Loved Her More Than The Mistress. But we, and Ally, and all her workmates (because those collagen lips mean a big mouth in more ways than one) know that the wife, being a plain, middle-aged old thing without a narcissistic bone in her body, wasn't entitled to that. Only goldurn cute big-eyed pouters deserve lerve. As if that weren't enough, there had to be an Awfully Embarrassing funeral speech as Ally cutely stumbles and fumbles through a self-centred preamble to what (of course) turns out to be a Fine Speech In The End. I think it was supposed to be funny, but there you are, Yanks laugh at some strange things, like most of their sitcoms, when they've got TV evangelism and a complete Feydeau farce going on under their noses at the White House.

The male contingent of the house was becoming restive by the end of the show and I've since had to enter into a negotiated settlement concerning how much of this sort of stuff is allowed into the house. Seven is determined that *Ally McBeal* is to be the next big thing and I do hope they're wrong or we could see a dive in the IQs of young females nationwide, plus an epidemic of pouting. The publicity puff has been enormous, with Calista Flockhart being hailed by gossip magazines as the new icon for '90s womanhood, after they killed off their golden goose last year. But tiny, blonde, designer-dressed McBeal/Flockhart is no more typical of '90s womanhood than was big, blonde, designer-dressed Diana.

Bigtime media producers and publishers will of course have done their focus group work and come up with McBeal and her attributes as 'aspirational'. That is, that the 'average' young woman, challenged economically (can't afford designer clothes) and genetically (can't fit into them anyway) will watch the series because it takes her away from—while reinforcing—her general state of low self-esteem caused by wanting to look like a McBeal. It will probably rate very well and go on for interminable aeons. At the time I was watching, its competition on Nine was the first half of the appalling *Moby Dick* mini-series, all Monty Python and aar matey.

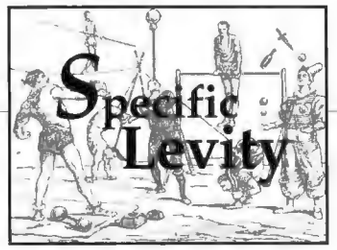
On the credit side, the ABC screened *In the Red* during September, and what a joy it was. Its dissection of the workings of the British establishment, the class system and political spin-doctoring was melded with a really quite good whodunnit, along with appeals to our well-founded prejudice against economists and bank managers. Warren Clarke was totally satisfying as George Cragge, a drunken BBC radio reporter who stumbles on the solution to the serial murders. And for real belly laughs, try the bureaucratic eccentric, Hercules Fortescue (John Sessions) and the part he plays in the fall and rise of Cragge. Machiavellian manoeuvrings by Stephen Fry as a conspiratorial Radio mandarin with eyes on the top position add to the fun. And there's a benign and deeply comic look at the work of a serene, business-like Scottish dominatrix who deals in the pathetic predilections of powerful men.

Rik Mayall as De'Ath the economist was utterly hateable—recalling his role as B'stard, the egregious Tory member. Alun Armstrong, as Chief Inspector Frank Jefferson, was perfect: respectable working class, dealing with De'Ath the venomous snob, each encounter memorable, especially the last one, where you know De'Ath's arrogant assumption (that he'll get out of jail pretty soon because of his impeccable connections) to be all too wearily true.

Nothing is going to shift the balance of power in this New Labour Cool Britannia. The message from power is always the same, just as the odd-shoed suspect *looks* hard-core *outré* until he's revealed as a very ordinary-sounding pop-singer. And the Reform Party, a brilliant creation, takes us as far as we need to go inside the halls of power. Its gargantuan epicurean leader, Geoffrey Crichton-Potter (Richard Griffiths of *Pie In the Sky* fame), shows brilliantly how so much of genuine desire for change falls away in the entropy of pleasure-seeking. Perfectly at home in chaos, he waits for his speeches to be written, and floats, improbably enough, like Octavia, the feather on the tide, neither way inclining.

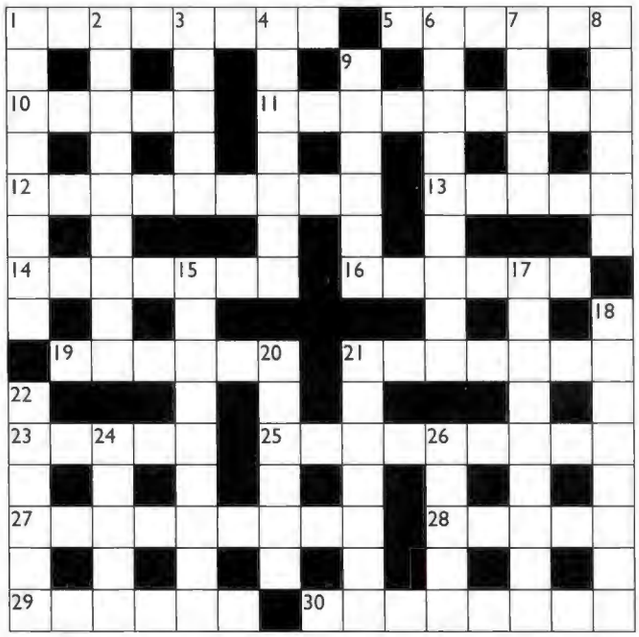
Cragge traverses the class worlds, a link between the two—he is lucid and articulate enough either to threaten or be of use to the powers that be. So he is put to good use. We are, after all, talking about the government that has been bugging the phone calls of all its citizens and most of the rest of the world, using NSA spy bases in Cornwall and Yorkshire. Someone like Cragge has to be made to fit, and if he drinks, so much the better—it will come in useful if they need to drop him later. The sense of relevance, of crucial engagement with what's happening right now, is the strong backbone to the humour. Over here we have commentators like Rod Quantock and programs like *Good News Week* and John Clarke's *The Games* to cover similar political territory to *In The Red*. But to make comic drama of this quality here we'd have to adapt, perhaps, a Shane Maloney book. And do it well. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 67, October 1998

Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS

1. Smells a rat? By arrangement, sets cups of poison out. (8)
5. Travel abroad to gain honours at Cambridge. (6)
10. Ant included in system metamorphosis. (5)
11. English envoy dressed in red was moved to inferior position. (9)
12. Renting again is somehow liberating. (9)
13. The advance guard will make a reconnaissance. (5)
14. A former theatrical director, he used to hire tug components for stage props. (7)
16. Totally disconcerted at losing the throne, it seems. (6)
19. Descriptive of someone who can't settle. (2,4)
21. Counterfeit about four. Pardon? (7)
23. Overturn down-start. What a turnover! (5)
25. Discovered weird tune heard by chance. (9)
27. I am without faults, but can be tense. (9)
28. Brian is a young Scot. (5)
29. What's in a name? Fusty lederhosen were so called with reason. (6)
30. Br Lexis and I took some books from the collection of yours truly (2,6)

DOWN

1. Guide to seniority for hard-up sailors? (8)
2. An ignoramus it's easy to name. (9)
3. Spare actor looking for a run. (5)
4. Social worker making a pile? Tertiary Entrance Ranking might help the listener. (7)
6. On receiving the Order of the Garter, Sir Mishmash directed that records be kept by the official responsible. (9)
7. Stroke I love to practise in the courtyard. (5)
8. Calm down, sober. (6)
9. Strong luminosity on the stairs. (6)
15. In the flower show the judges again give the stamp of approval to the Eden rose with the red tip. (9)
17. Examine rank to deliver a judgment that is more considered, with Regie involved. (9)
18. Peruse signs variously for different interpretations. (8)
20. Freshly attune your body to become trim and terrific! (6)
21. A burden upon the spirit. (4,3)
22. Measures a broken biscuit I left. (6)
24. Not having any occupation? (5)
26. Priest lost time with pet, possibly. (5)

Solution to Crossword no. 66, September 1998

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

ISSN 1036-1758 08