

EUREKA STREET

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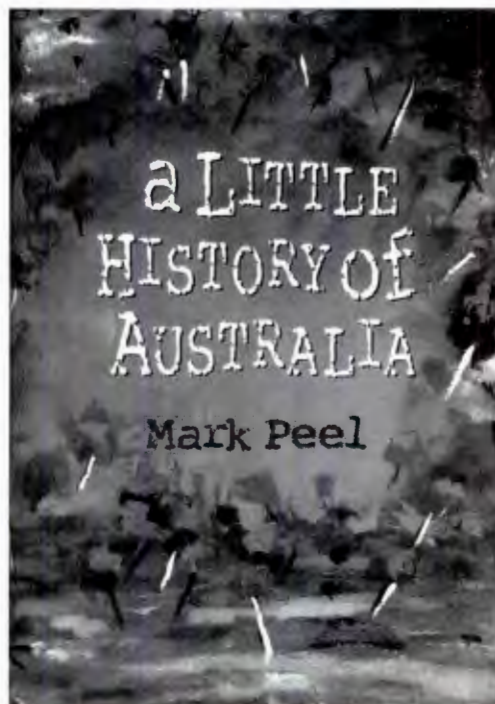
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Fax (03) 9428 4450

Publisher

Michael Kelly SJ

Editor

Morag Fraser

Consulting editor

Michael McGirr SJ

Assistant editor

Jon Greenaway

Production assistants:

Paul Fyfe SJ, Scott Howard,

Juliette Hughes,

Siobhan Jackson, Chris Jenkins SJ

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Ten degrees of separation

BEFORE HEADING FOR LONGREACH to sell the ten-point plan on Wik, Prime Minister John Howard restated his opposition to blanket extinguishment of native title on pastoral leases. His Deputy, Tim Fischer, assured pastoralists that the plan contained buckets of extinguishment.

Two weeks before, the feisty National Party backbench Senator Bill O'Chee had let the cat out of the bag: 'The Prime Minister is now basically in a position where we want him to be. Mr Howard's position has changed substantially in the past week. We've now got the situation where native title will be extinguished one way or another on private property. All we are now really arguing over is who pays compensation and how much.'

In the public exchanges between the Liberals and Nationals, the choice has not been between extinguishment and co-existence but between extinguishment up front, the blanket variety, and by the back door, through which will come the 'buckets' variety.

The lawyers are now drafting the complex legislation that walks the fine line between buckets and blankets. Meanwhile the Aboriginal negotiators have been bleeding and Labor has not come to their rescue. While Geoff Clark, the ATSIC Commissioner responsible for native title, called for a boycott at the farm gate, Sugar Ray Robinson, the Deputy Chairperson of ATSIC, fresh from securing the twelve signatures to the Century Zinc deal, suggested extinguishment of native title on leases held by Australian families of modest means.

Legislation will not be passed by the House of Representatives before August. The real parliamentary action will not commence until at least October when the bill reaches the Senate where the ten senators on the crossbenches will oppose any legislation adverse to Aboriginal interests which is not guaranteed to be consistent with the Racial Discrimination Act.

Labor, distancing itself from the Keating largesse, will agree to most of the ten-point plan. It will be up to the Labor Opposition to determine how much the ten-point plan is to be modified to ensure compliance with the Racial Discrimination Act and to maintain the balance of rights set down in Keating's 1993 Native Title Act.

Opposition Leader, Kim Beazley need answer only three questions. Will Labor insist on Aborigines retaining guaranteed access to the Native Title Tribunal? Will Labor hold out for native title holders maintaining a right to negotiate with mining companies at the development phase on pastoral leases? Will Labor insist that any state legislation permitting a state government to acquire compulsorily native title rights comply with the Racial Discrimination Act?

In 1993, the two major gains made by Aborigines, the only incentives for them to register their common law rights, were access to the National Native Title Tribunal for the

determination of claims and a two-fold right to negotiate at the exploration and development stages. The ten-point plan is a Trojan horse for trimming back these gains, depriving Aborigines of gains made regardless of Wik. Kim Beazley has already signalled Labor's agreement to a once-only right to negotiate.

The ten-point plan speaks of 'measures to encourage the States to manage claims within their own systems'. Presently, Aborigines have the right to go to the national tribunal for the determination of claims. States can insist on the use of their own systems only for development applications on native title land, not for initial determination of native title.

The plan proposes an abolition of the right to negotiate for proven native title holders in three instances which have nothing to do with pastoral leases:

- in relation to the acquisition of land for third parties in towns and cities
- in national parks
- in relation to the acquisition of native title rights for third parties for the purpose of conventional government-type infrastructure.

When it comes to the balance between certainty for pastoralists and justice for Aborigines, the Aborigines come off second best by a long shot. If they pass a strict new threshold test, they will be able to access the land for defined traditional purposes. But states will be free to legislate, taking away their right to negotiate with mining companies. Also states will be able to extinguish permanently any native title rights which may have revived at the end of a pastoral lease. They will also be able to extinguish existing native title rights so as to upgrade the pastoralists' lease to 'perpetual or exclusive leases or freehold'.

The native title holders will not have a right to negotiate but only procedural rights equivalent to other parties with an interest in the land and compensation which can take account of the nature of the co-existing native title rights. This is a racially discriminatory proposal, given that no other person can presently have his/her rights compulsorily acquired by government simply so as to give the rights to another person for private use and enjoyment.

This proposal goes well beyond reinstating pre-Wik certainty. It is fundamentally inconsistent with the claim by Mr Donald McCauchie, President of the National Farmers Federation, that 'during the entire Wik debate, Australia's farmers have never asked for anything more than they had before December 23, 1996.' If the farmers have not sought an increase of their pre-Wik rights, why are they to have them increased, to the cost of native title holders and taxpayers?

The pastoralists could be given absolute certainty to perform all activities authorised or permitted under their leases without need for payment of any compensation. If compensation is to be payable to Aborigines for loss of rights which are to be transferred

to pastoralists, the pastoralists should pay, and not the Australian taxpayer. The Howard plan envisages the Commonwealth paying 75 per cent of the compensation for compulsory acquisition of native title provided the state charges the profiting pastoralist 'something for the betterment factor involved in the upgrade of the title'.

By the time the debate reaches the Senate, taxpayers in the towns and cities will realise that the pastoralists, assured blanket certainty in buckets, want more. It will be up to the Senate to stop the land grab. It will be up to the High Court to hold back Rob Borbidge and Richard Court from a racially discriminatory extinguishment of native title.

Prime Minister Howard may well have a mandate to bring the pendulum of Wik back to the centre. But he has no mandate to do it in a racially discriminatory

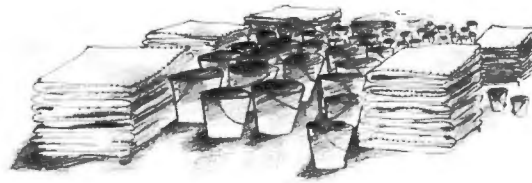
way. And he has no mandate to allow his National Party colleagues to freehold 40 per cent of the Australian continent under the Longreach label, 'Flick Wik, Be Quick'. All players agree that pastoralists should have the same

certainty and the same rights they had before Wik. Only if government tries to give them more will the nervous Labor senators quibble with the legislation.

Even those voters ill-disposed to Aborigines will come to their senses by October when the Senate distinguishes a land grab from certainty, and when they realise that state governments are proposing compulsory acquisition legislation which, if not racially discriminatory, will allow government to acquire anyone's backyard not just for a public purpose but for transfer to the neighbours. The cornerstone of the Howard plan for the first time places everyone's Hills hoists up for grabs—by Borbidge, not by the blacks. This highlights the absurdity of politicians responding to racist hysteria and flirting with extinguishment on a scale somewhere between buckets and blankets.

FAILING LEADERSHIP BY THE MAJOR political parties paralysed by Hansonism, only Senate debate and High Court reasoning will protect all property holders from the populist idiocy of Longreach. A country priding itself on non-discriminatory laws cannot afford the uncertainty of the extinguishment option which would undermine the security of all titles forever. It is time for a return to common sense and blanket certainty for all of us; time to be quick and give the greedy fear merchants the flick. A ten-point plan put through the Senate sieve of non-discrimination will deliver certainty with minimal gain for Aborigines and no loss whatever to pastoralists. ■

Frank Brennan is adjunct Fellow in Law at the Australian National University and Director of Uniya.



Diversionsary tactics

IN AN EXTRAORDINARY ATTEMPT to shift focus off the Government's poor performance in addressing the big issues confronting Australia—employment, Wik, Hansonism, the Federal Budget and the 'stolen generation'—John Howard has turned to an old flame of his, the GST. The Liberal Party's on-and-off love affair with a GST is being revved up again.

Since the October 1996 National Tax Reform Summit, the media has presented a view that there is a growing consensus on 'the need for tax-reform'. By the time this is translated into headlines it has become a growing consensus of 'the need for a GST'. Some in the business sector are actively encouraging this view. ACOSS and church groups, including the Australian Social Welfare Commission have continued to differentiate these two statements in an effort to emphasise the need for a broader tax-reform agenda.

It is likely that the Government, as keen to move on a GST as newly weds are to find the bridal chamber, will claim that community consensus on a GST exists. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Government must accept the conclusion reached during the Summit, that a GST of itself is unlikely to be accepted by the electorate. Business leaders would be well advised to join the welfare sector in informing the

Government not to interfere until a genuine consensus on broad tax reform can be reached. There is ongoing work by Summit participants to examine tax reform across the board, reform which may or may not include some type of GST. An air of optimism exists among many of the key participants that agreement on tax reform may be reached. But, like any major reform agenda, this one will take time and will require considerable research, openness, and a readiness to engage in ongoing dialogue and negotiation before a consensus can be reached. Now is not the time for the Government to do anything other than support this remarkable courtship—even if it is jealous.

Another disappointing feature of the debate thus far has been the acceptance of the argument that a GST necessarily catches tax-cheats. There must be a strong statement from our national leaders that the attitude that paying tax is a terrible imposition, to be avoided at all costs, is undermining habits of civic morality and responsibility.

Only time will tell if the GST is more than a Great Smoke Tactic. ■

Toby O'Connor is National Director of the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission.

Rhetorical answers

ASYLUM SEEKERS HAVE BEEN HEARTENED, and the Government discomfited, by two recent Court decisions.

On 2 May a full bench of the Federal Court found that the East Timorese enjoy Portuguese nationality, as the Government had hoped. But the Court also found that decisions on asylum must consider not only the abstract question of nationality, but also whether asylum seekers will be guaranteed effective protection. It also spelled out what effective protection means. Since Portugal has so far has effectively refused to process cases unless the asylum seekers themselves voluntarily request them to do so, the East Timorese cannot be guaranteed effective protection.

The second case was brought before the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) by a Cambodian who had been detained for four years. He argued that his detention violated the First Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Australia is a signatory. On 15 May, the Court found that the man's detention was arbitrary because it was not subject to reasonable review. The Court also found that he was entitled to compensation for his detention. The Australian Government must now state how it will respond to the judgment.

These findings leave the Australian Government with a difficult choice. Its instincts will no doubt be to nullify the decisions by legislation or by administrative sleight of hand. A Government which fears any binding commitment to human rights would be tempted to repeal Australian acceptance of the

Optional Protocol (under which the Tasmanian Gay law was also challenged).

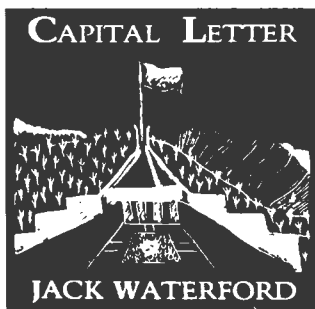
It would also fear that the need to consider whether asylum seekers will be protected effectively may make tribunals less expeditious in rejecting applicants. And it would like to force East Timorese asylum seekers to leave Australia.

But the legislative option also offers disadvantages. In particular, Portugal, which already regards the Australian policy towards East Timor as hypocritical, will be confirmed in its refusal to negotiate any forced deportation of asylum seekers from Australia. The 10,000 Australians who have pledged to offer sanctuary to the East Timorese will grow.

Moreover, the Wik process, the Hanson affair and the Australian refusal to include human rights clauses in treaties, have already drawn attention to an Australian culture of devaluing human rights. The UNHRC decision and any repudiation of the Protocol will increase suspicion that Australian commitment to human rights is in rhetoric only. It will also draw attention to what has become one of the harshest regimes for asylum seekers in the western world.

The Government would do better to institute a humane regime of detention that complies with our international obligations, and to allow the East Timorese entry to Australia on humanitarian grounds. ■

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



Leadership questions

THE SENSE OF THE HOWARD GOVERNMENT in drift, and staggering in and out of bogs, is no mere matter of bad tactics and

bad luck. The Government is having major problems in deciding where to go. Critically, John Howard is not feeding in ideas, his own instincts are increasingly awry, and not a little governing is by instinct alone.

Problems such as *Wik*, the undermining of National Party leader Tim Fischer, the embarrassment of being found in bed with Malcolm Colston, the reach and the pull of Pauline Hanson, appeasing the media barons, increasing and more obvious disenchantment from both small and big business, and some serious miscalculation with the Budget strategy plus a silly stumble over the selling of it, have not been only a matter of a failure of execution of policy. There's hardly been a policy in the first place. Those sniffing the breeze for a better driver, however, should bear in mind that most of those seeming to have clearer ideas of a destination may be even less able than John Howard to balance the load.

Peter Costello, for example, may have few political friends but he has not a few admirers and would clearly deliver policies which were more economically pure. He would be for stripping back the size of government more quickly, doing far more to dampen popular expectations of what government could or should be doing, and working to create a more open marketplace in which—people of his beliefs confidently predict—business will flourish and paradise will arrive on earth.

But would he be so attractive to those who want a tariff on motor cars, or a demanded concession for a Newcastle after a steelworks has threatened to close, or a special tax deduction for some type of activity—the sort of 'flexibility' that real business tends to demand? His pragmatism about organising rule-changes so as to help Kerry Packer acquire Fairfax suggests he has some flexibility, but it has not otherwise been so evident.

And could he articulate some phrases which would maintain John Howard's 'battler' constituency—more accurately wrest it back from Pauline Hanson—or articulate some moral concept of an Australia that would inspire an electorate? One has to have one's doubts, particularly while personal enemies of the calibre of Jeff Kennett will miss no opportunity to snipe.

Peter Reith, for all of his old reputation as a true believer, has shown himself personable and flexible in government, and, arguably, has, in his changes to the industrial relations framework, achieved more of the Government's original agenda than anyone else. He has also demonstrated considerable resilience, has a sense of humour and some profile beyond the narrowly economic. He lacks the committed enemies of a Peter Costello, but his numbers in a caucus battle come from the same broad faction.

If one discarded Cabinet ministers who were Senators (Alexander Downer, for obvious reasons, Ian McLachlan for being simply impossible, and John Moore for being a complete failure in devising any sort of coherent industry policy), a Liberal Party meeting contemplating a change could be looking only at John Fahey and Michael Wooldridge, whose election would represent a complete U-turn in approach for the Liberals. The mordant Liberal backbencher might well think that John Howard, with his experience, is about as good as they have got.

The problem is that he does not seem to know what he is doing, and, in reacting to criticism from one side or the other, is starting

to present a pretty unattractive picture. Not since Port Arthur has he performed an act of what might be called moral leadership. Finally, he directly attacked the Hanson phenomenon, but he has scarcely blunted her appeal, and, in the process has made it entirely clear that his policies on Aboriginal affairs are driven by a perception that most of the electorate think they were getting too much and getting too uppity.

His (and most of his Cabinet colleagues') antipathy to immigration and to the multicultural lobby is of such long-standing that his recent changes here cannot be said to be driven by a direct need to neutralise Pauline Hanson. But it would be a brave person who would deny that the marketing of government decisions in this area was not without an eye to her constituency.

The voracity of the Queensland Nationals has forced Howard to seem tough against the party, steering a middle course between Aboriginal and pastoral interests, but any close analysis will show the needs and rights of Aborigines counted not a jot. On the media front, he has attempted on several occasions to find rationales that would give an extraordinary boon to Kerry Packer, but has yet to find one that can persuade even his own backbench.

Though he concedes that unemployment is the critical problem, his party's policies still have a marked element of punishing the indigent. Leave aside the Budget's maintenance of drastic cuts to labour market programs: the likelihood is that even growth at the pace forecast will neither create much employment nor sop up the sort of unemployment—particularly of the unskilled and the semi-skilled—which the government is allowing to occur.

At the last election, Paul Keating said the contest was about leadership and a vision for Australia. Implicitly he was saying that John Howard did not fit. But the electorate did not choose between leaders. They tossed out a tired and corrupted party which had run out of steam. They put in someone of some recognised decency and competence who promised no great shocks.

AS A VITAL PART OF CALMING the electorate, John Howard had played on populist feelings that the Keating Government was out of touch with community sentiment, that there were privileged insiders who got favours at the expense of ordinary people, and that Labor, by long tenure of office, conscious stacking of the institutions and ruthless use of its powers of reward and punishment, had created an ascendancy of the politically correct. Most powerfully, it played on fears of the pace of change, and job and general economic insecurity. They had plenty of ammunition to play with.

Pauline Hanson plays to just the same gallery, but she adds in scapegoating, racism and a cultured ignorance, intolerance and indifference.

It may well be that, in the end, she implodes because she has, as John Howard belatedly says, nothing to offer. The question is whether those who lean to her will turn away because they perceive that John Howard and his team do have something.

Whether a Liberal leader whose opening up of the job market has increased job insecurity but not jobs, who has delivered growth but not jobs, who has increased the pace of change and expressed indifference or only polite regret when regions lose services, can play the anxiety card out in the boondocks is an interesting question. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*

Bad sports

From Rosemary Walters

One of the most dismal reasons given for voting against the Labor Government is that Australians aren't equal to dealing with the Big Picture, with its tackling of issues like social justice, Native Title, caring for the poor etcetera. Supposedly we Australians can only think about sport and our own mortgages. No wonder the Government is choking off the ABC. That is where the big national conversations are happening and little people like ourselves couldn't be expected to participate in such debate.

Rosemary Walters
Western, ACT

Library disquiet

From Robert Barnes

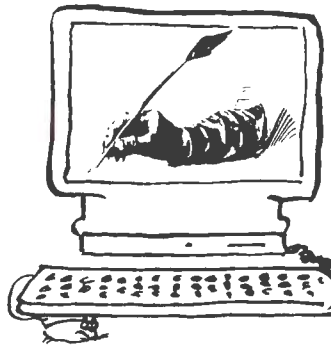
Mr Warren Horton's attempt (*Eureka Street*, May 1997) to defend the National Library's present collecting and electronic policies would be more convincing if he had addressed the central claim of my article (March, 1997), that those policies have impoverished the Library as Australia's national research collection.

Mr Horton portrays me as one of a small Canberra group who alone oppose those policies, for their own selfish purposes. In fact the Australian Academy of the Humanities, in its submission to the West Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy, warns as follows:

'Not only is it clear that no co-ordinated approach to maintaining this [library] infrastructure and to rationalising the available resources has yet been developed, but also an over-dependency on electronic sources of information at the expense of a balancing policy of collecting printed materials is rapidly emerging. The printed monograph remains the favoured technology for disseminating longer and more permanent texts. In this situation the National Library of Australia's unilateral decision to cut its collecting of overseas printed material by 60 per cent, before ensuring that other libraries can collect such material in its place, is particularly damaging'.

Mr Horton seems to believe that, by cutting its collecting of printed

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material in Canberra, the Library somehow benefits the rest of Australia. This would only be true if the Library's World 1 project for electronic alternatives to print had achieved anything other than a financial black hole. One of the points of my article was precisely that, with much information still available only in print, it still makes sense to concentrate comprehensive collections in a few libraries, even if researchers have to travel to them from elsewhere.

He tries to defend the Library's spending only nine per cent of its budget on acquisitions. Even allowing for its other responsibilities, and the fact that some acquisitions come to it free, this is still a remarkably low percentage, when it is the Library's statutory first task 'to maintain and develop a national collection of library material'. Australia's larger university libraries typically spend 35-45 per cent

of their budget on acquisitions. The National Library should be able to reach at least half that percentage.

Mr Horton claims that the Library consulted widely before carrying out its cuts to overseas collecting. As I pointed out, the scale of these cuts was only revealed in a memorandum of May, 1995, by which time they were already under way. There was no consultation at all about them, or about where they were to be concentrated.

According to him, 'the library has categorically denied the assertion that they shaped the collection policies to reflect the previous Government's Asian strategies, but Barnes still says "this disclaimer is disingenuous"'. It is disingenuous because, as I pointed out, it is not the Library's continuing to collect Asian material, which is debatable, but its decision to stop serious collecting from Europe and America (and even most cultural material from Asia).

Mr Horton continues to praise the concept of the Distributed National Collection, despite its very limited success. The Council of Australian University Librarians, in its submission to the West Review, points to its fragility: 'repeated rounds of subscription cancellations at almost all universities' have 'undermined the distributed national collection', and further 'this trend has been exacerbated by simultaneous cancellations at the other major research libraries such as the National Library of Australia'.

Australia's other research libraries have, as Mr Horton pleads, increased their spending in the last 30 years. However, as the Academy of the Humanities and the Council of Australian University Librarians point out, they are all now cutting their spending, and therefore less and less able to build up comprehensive collections.

One of the aims which the National Library has now abandoned was, precisely, to build up a collection of some depth in most of the central areas of knowledge which concern Australia. That aim could still, with careful selection, be achieved. Mr Horton admits there is a problem in the intake of overseas monographs by Australian libraries, but claims 'our policies have not caused it'. They have certainly not helped the problem either.

Mr Horton also claims, in regard to the funding of World 1, that 'we did not divert collection funds to it'. This contradicts the Library's Strategic

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Plan, which explicitly linked the funds required for its objectives, including its electronic policy, to 'a reduction in collecting and processing printed materials published overseas'.

World 1 has now been terminated for five months, but the Library has still made no statement on its costs, claiming it is prevented from doing so for legal reasons.

Whatever these reasons may be, the Library has, as Mr Horton proudly states, already tendered for a new Networked Services Project. It seems extraordinary business practice to proceed immediately with such a new project when there has been no inquiry into why the first one collapsed.

The New Zealand Library is party to the same negotiations on World 1. However in that country detailed accounts of the termination have been published in the national press, questions have been raised in parliament, a ministerial inquiry has been held, and the library has been censured for wasting money trying to develop new technology, when its proper function is to supply information to the nation.

Its director-general resigned shortly before the termination, and his position is being left vacant while the government considers the library's future. New Zealand's concern shames Australia's apparent indifference, especially considering that ours is a much larger and more important collection.

Mr Horton defends the professionalism of the Library's staff and the calibre of its Council members. In my article I acknowledged the expertise of the staff, and I do not question the eminence of its Council. I therefore find it all the more surprising that the Library has nevertheless developed and been allowed to follow such unsatisfactory policies.

Mr Horton, finally, paints me as a Luddite, 'just looking back to the vanished world of a generation ago.' In fact in my article I acknowledged the potential benefits of new information technology. The National Library however seems to have swallowed all too gullibly the hype surrounding this technology. Its current policies are premature and unbalanced and, far from solving Australia's library and information problems, they have only exacerbated them. They urgently need to be renewed.

Robert Barnes
Canberra, ACT

Liberal education

From Ian Manning

Spencer Zifcak (*Eureka Street*, May 1997) has worked in various places, but has felt most free to express his views while employed in a university.

My experience is the reverse: in 1984 I resigned from a university in order to pursue applied economic research as a consultant. I have since worked on a wide range of issues brought forward by people with economic problems to solve, or in need of economic advocacy, and have found this work a considerable improvement, both in breadth and depth, over the narrow specialisation encouraged by the university. It has also released me from subservience to peer values as represented by the referees of the learned journals. Academic politics can be both vicious and time-consuming, and there is much to be said for outside politicians stepping in to provide the priorities which universities themselves find so hard to generate. Such stepping in is now inevitable, since the multiplication of disciplines means that no person, however learned, is in a position to judge the relative worth of work done in different parts of the university.

Professor Zifcak's defence of the liberal university against recent and current governments overlooks two further points. First, the economic and political theories underlying the intrusion of government policy into university management were imported, nurtured and propagated by university people (including those to whom I presented my resignation). Universities have only themselves to blame if they allowed these ideas to be taught, uncritically, to a generation of students which is now influential in government.

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Second, the application of instrumental knowledge to a wide variety of activities means that many students now come to universities for trade training: students who in former generations would have taken apprenticeships. It may be desirable for such students to absorb liberal values, but mass education cannot take the same approach as an élite university, and if only to maintain student interest, is likely to have to inculcate its values more by stealth.

Yet Professor Zitek is right to yearn for that liberal university which probably never existed, and which is looking increasingly distant even as an ideal. However, present-day universities are too big, and too expensive, to return to liberal self-government.

To approach an ideal once again would probably require a new institution, which would be small; located perhaps outside the present university system, or perhaps as a unit within, an existing university.

Its scholars would be employed with the workloads and work conditions of the fabled past. The financing would be easier if these privileges were accompanied by lower salaries than other academics: a similar scale to that applying to Protestant ministers of religion may be appropriate. The crucial question in founding such a university would be: by what values would the recreated university settle its internal disputes? I can only suggest that the churches may be the only remaining source of such values and of the expertise required to govern people who think a lot.

Ian Manning
Clifton Hill, Vic

Celibacy in Winter

From John Honner SJ

Prompted by my reference to Michael Winter's critique of recent Roman documents on clerical celibacy (*Summa Theologiae*, ES, March 97), Fr John George believes that Winter's popular views need to be challenged. With this in mind, he refers to Christian Cochini's *Origines Apostoliques du Celibat Sacerdotal*. Not only that, Fr George cites the support of Jesuit Cardinals de Lubac and Danielou for Cochini, and mentions the discredited work of Theiner, Lea and Funk. Fr George's apparent scholarship can be reduced, however, to a reading of the recent

English translation of Cochini's book, entitled *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*. Cardinal de Lubac's praise is to be found on the blurb on the back cover of this edition (though his phrases are in the reverse order to that given by Fr George), and Danielou's support is to be found quoted by Cochini in the very first lines of the author's own Preface. This is hardly independent scholarly evidence. Further, Fr George's references to Theiner, Lea and Funk etcetera obviously originate from Cochini's second chapter.

While Cochini provides a fine collection of patristic literature, he cannot be said to prove his thesis, namely, that the requirement for priestly celibacy can be traced back to the apostles. For a more detailed critique, see R. Balducelli's extended review of Cochini's book in *Theological Studies* 43 (1982) pp693-705, and, more briefly, G.T. Dennis' review of the English translation in *Theological Studies* 52 (1991) pp738-739. Michael Winter's observation, that recent documents gloss over early patristic and conciliar debates, remains valid.

John Honner SJ
Parkville VIC

Having a lapse

From C.B. Thornton-Smith

There is more truth than Ray Cassin probably realises in his comment (*Eureka Street* April 1997) regarding the 'second thoughts' in B.A. Santamaria's second autobiography that: '*Santamaria A Memoir* is not so much a revision of the first version of those thoughts, which appeared in 1981 as *Against the Tide*, as a re-publication of them with an addendum.' Indeed, *A Memoir* fails to correct errors of fact, pseudo-memories and gross lapses of memory in *Against the Tide* which have been pointed out in good time for this to have been done had the author so wished.

A striking example of both errors of fact and inexplicable lapses of memory is to be found in the comment on a report by J.T. Kane, who was to become one of the leaders of the DLP, of the 1956 ALP Federal Executive inquiry into the New South Wales branch. At this, J.P. Ormonde had given evidence that 'in 1926, Santamaria had organised a "Rexist" movement at the University of Melbourne' (*Against the Tide* p199; *A Memoir*, pp169-70). In answer to questions, 'Ormonde,

evidently unaware that the "Rexist" movement was a Belgian organisation set up during the World War Two by Léon Degrelle, answered that it was an Italian organisation which aimed to set up a monarchy in Australia. Mr Ormond apparently did not go on to explain whether 1—in 1926 aged eleven and still at primary school—intended to install the British or the Italian Royal House' (*ibid.*). As the reference for Kane's report does not enable one to find whether this is in the public domain, it has been impossible to check the accuracy of Santamaria's account of it, let alone try to establish where and how the various pieces of misinformation originated.

What one can state with certainty is that the Rexist movement had its origins in the publishing house *Christus Rex* set up by Belgian Catholic Action in 1931 under the direction of Léon Degrelle, who had come strongly under the influence of the *Action Française* movement of Charles Maurras, but had loyally submitted to the papal ban on this in 1926. In 1935 he used his position to launch an anti-Communist and anti-Capitalist political movement with Fascist or at least reactionary undertones. As Rex had moved outside the framework of Catholic Action by becoming involved in politics, it earned the active disapproval of the Belgian hierarchy early in 1936. What Degrelle did in World War Two was to enlist, and eventually become a high-ranking officer, in the 'Wallonic' Legion of French-speaking collaborators formed to fight for the Germans on the Russian Front.

Apart from other sources, Santamaria would at least have heard of Degrelle and Rex from his mentor D.G.M. Jackson, a great devotee and proponent of the monarchist and anti-Semitic *Action Française*, who in the *Tribune* of 24 September 1936 put as favourable a spin as possible on the attitude of the Belgian hierarchy towards Rex. However, even if the '1926' of Kane's report should really read '1936', it is hardly likely that in that year Santamaria, committed to bringing out the recently launched *Catholic Worker* every month, would be interested in founding a Rexist group at the University of which he was already a graduate, and there is no evidence that he did so. All this makes his riposte to the already dead J.P. Ormonde quite inexplicable, originating false information the better to

belabour him for passing on muddled and false information. Even had Santamaria's memory of the Rexist movement become hazy after 1936, it would have been jogged in 1970 by Robert Murray's *The Split: Australia in the Fifties*, where the outstandingly successful *Jeunesse Ouvriere Chrétienne* is contrasted with the 'Rex Party'.

This example of real forgetfulness can be matched by one of pseudo-memory. According to Santamaria, the Central Catholic Library made available to the members of the Campion Society formed in 1931, and which he joined in 1932, along with the works of Christopher Dawson, Chesterton and Belloc, 'the works of the French Catholic writers ... Maritain, Bernanos and Mauriac among them' (*Against the Tide*, p14 ... *A Memoir*, p11). However, by 1931 or 1932, most of the major works of these three Frenchmen were yet to be written. Even were texts available in the original French, they would have been accessible to comparatively few of the members, while the vast majority of translations began appearing long after that time. The accessions registers of the Central Catholic Library show that by the end of 1935 it had acquired five works by Maritain, one by him and his wife Raissa, none by Bernanos and none by

Mauriac. This erroneous memory of a familiarity, either on the part of Santamaria himself or among other Champions, with the subsequently most outstanding French Catholic writers of their generation is particularly ironic in that Maritain was already highly critical of *Action Française*, and Mauriac and Bernanos were to become so, while all three were to excoriate Franco's claims to be defending Christianity in the Spanish Civil War. If the name of any French writer was familiar to them at that time, it would have been that of Charles Maurras, which Santamaria seems to have forgotten completely.

Finally, in the added chapters of *A Memoir*, there occurs a flagrant conflation and false attribution. On p301, in the context of describing Hans Küng's role in discussion of the teaching on contraception in *Humanae Vitae*, Santamaria offers a 21-line quotation as coming from Küng's *Infallible?* (pp54-5). In fact, less than five lines at the beginning of this are the words of Küng himself. The rest of it is Küng quoting David Callahan, ed., *The Catholic Case for Contraception*, London, 1969, pp179-80. Although Küng's publisher, unlike Santamaria's, has not indented long quotations, the quotation from this work is clearly indicated by single

quotation marks at beginning and end, with at the end, which also happens to be the end of Santamaria's 'quotation', a superscripted number for the end note.

C.B. Thornton-Smith
Balwyn North, VIC

Having a hope

From Graham Kearney
I read with interest the article in *Eureka Street* April '97 entitled 'Northern exposure' by Margaret Simons. Most people in Queensland would like to see a good government in power. I guess by definition good government includes such things as corruption-free government and public service, a police force that serves the public rather than serving the political masters of the day, and an independent public service and judiciary. Noble aims no doubt!

The ideal is not always possible—human nature being what it is. I do not disagree with the main thrust of the article. However, the people of Queensland are not responsible for factors beyond our control—to the extent that the incumbent Government has yet to face the Electors at a General Election.

Graham Kearney
Chambers Flat QLD

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THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC



Last Rights

WHEN RONALD RYAN was executed by the Bolte Government on February 3, 1967, his body was buried in an unmarked grave within the grounds of Victoria's Pentridge Prison.

Ten prisoners had been executed at Pentridge between 1932 and 1967. Another 139 had been executed since 1855, mostly at the old Melbourne Gaol, with others at Ararat, Ballarat, Beechworth, Castlemaine, Bendigo and Geelong. But by 1967, the hanging season had ended throughout Australia.

But this was not the last that we heard of Ronald Ryan. Over the years, there has been constant debate about the conduct of his trial, his conviction for murder, and the determination of the then Premier, Bolte, to see the death penalty inflicted.

More recently, the family of Ronald Ryan, his surviving wife Dorothy, and his daughters, Jan, Wendy and Rhonda, petitioned the Victorian Government for a memorial to mark the grave sites of those who had been executed. In May 1995, they wrote to the then Prisons Minister, Deputy Premier Pat McNamara, 'in the hope that it will be remembered and recognised by the authorities that Ronald Ryan has a wife, daughters, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who care'.

The family received no clear answer to their request at the time.

They approached The Brosnan Centre for help with their request. I had petitioned the Prisons Director on this matter in October 1994, following the announcement of the planned closure of Pentridge and the privatisation of most of the Victorian prison system. By the beginning of 1997 I had a growing pile of correspondence on the issue, but no definite answer.

On March 19 of this year the Victorian Prisons Minister, McGrath finally agreed in principle with our suggestion that a plaque or tombstone be erected in the vicinity of the graves, to enable the families of those executed to visit the site and to pay their respects to their family member.

Thirty years after the execution,

Melbourne's family morning tabloid *Herald Sun* announced the news with the front page headline 'Monument to Killers', noting that 'taxpayers may foot the bill for the monument'.
—Peter Norden



All the world's a stage

You may play well or you may play badly; the important thing is that you should play truly. Now remember firmly what I am going to tell you: the theatre, on account of its publicity and spectacular side, attracts many people who merely want to capitalise on their beauty or make careers. They take advantage of the ignorance of the public, its perverted taste, favouritism, intrigues, false success, and many other means which have no relation to creative art. These exploiters are the deadliest enemies of art.

—Constantin Stanislavsky, from *An Actor Prepares*

MY DESPAIR ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE and the theatre was reinforced not too long ago when the teenage son of a colleague of mine announced that he wanted to be an actor.

His work experience week at school was coming up and I suggested that he apply to the Sydney Theatre Company for a place. If he was lucky, I enthused, he might have the opportunity to watch professional actors in rehearsal or even assist in some limited capacity backstage in a professional production. When his mother passed the suggestion on he was astonished. The Sydney Theatre Company? What was that? He had his heart set on being an extra in the local television series *Home and Away* or, at very least, observing the making of a television commercial. He had never in his mind even remotely associated the profession of acting with the stage. Most of all he had dreamed of being an actor in Hollywood.

For some time now acting has been presented in the media, particularly to young people, as a get-rich-quick scheme. An enormous gap seems to have emerged between the ideal of acting—the search for truth through empathy—and what we are encouraged to believe is the pinnacle of success in that profession, Hollywood. Even acting institutions whose work focuses primarily on the stage, like The Australian Theatre For Young People and NIDA, have accepted the banal ascendancy of Hollywood as a reality in attracting young people to their courses. In their advertising material, for instance, they eagerly point to former pupils, Australians who are now working in Hollywood, as their great cultural triumph. Of course, in reality encouraging a young person to go into acting to become rich is about as absurd as urging someone to join a religious order to earn frequent flyer points.

So it was with some trepidation that I went along to interview a group of young actors from St Aloysius College in Sydney who had just staged a production of *Twelve Angry Men*. I had arranged to meet the director of the play, Robert Schneider, and some of the principal cast members in the drama auditorium where I had seen the play performed a few nights before. Perched on a plastic chair in the middle of the performance space, waiting for my young interview subjects to arrive, I was surrounded by a small army of cheerful young men tidying up the auditorium in preparation for school holidays. Boys with brooms, boys with

ropes, boys with boxes, bigger boys telling smaller boys what to do, boys with half-eaten lunches in paper bags—all jumped on and off stage as if performing in a play with a thousand tiny scenes. A painted skyline of New York hovered over all of us.

Finally, my interview subjects arrived and we got down to business. I explained to them my anxiety about the media and its portrayal of acting. I asked them what was their understanding of the acting process.

'I think it's a mixture of things, but mostly the desire to understand and feel what another person feels, and craft this into a performance', says Lachlan Rose. The others agreed their aim was 'to live their character's experiences on stage' and 'to communicate this lived experience as truthfully as possible to the audience'.

So what had been my experience of their production, they asked? As with all amateur productions (and not a few professional ones) I explained, the most startling thing is the way the play itself comes in and out of focus so abruptly. You can be gazing at the stage with mild detachment, wondering whether they'll be serving lamingtons at interval, then suddenly be taken out of yourself and utterly absorbed in the drama.

'The thing that you begin to understand', says Kieran Wilcock, 'is that action on stage is not just external activity. The most important business is often happening on the inside—what someone is thinking or feeling at any given moment. Of course the same thing applies in real life. Although a lot of the time you tend to forget this.'

Interestingly, sport in schools is almost universally understood as a character-building exercise whereas plays and musicals, particularly in boys' schools, seem rarely to be viewed with the same seriousness. I asked the group whether they had been involved with sports teams and what they felt was the psychological difference between being in a sports team and being in a play? They agreed that there were essential similarities. 'There's the same sense of commitment to the group, an understanding that you're one part of the whole,' says Jay Tinkler.

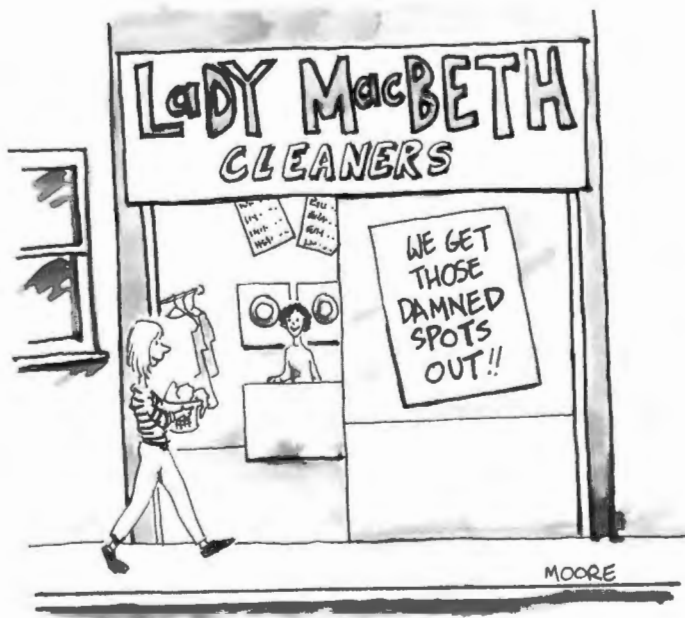
'There's also the whole aspect of learning to work together, negotiating people's strengths and weaknesses,' agrees Sam Ardasinski.

'You can let down your team members in a game by making a mistake but there is not as much of your true self invested in a game. Of course there's some, but on balance it's more a matter of skill than character. Whereas in acting there seems to be something much deeper going on,' says Shaun Kenny.

One of the extraordinary things about being in a school play, it has always seemed to me, is the degree to which you become completely engrossed in this remarkably fragile enterprise with fellow students risking public failure at a highly socially precarious stage in your life.

I asked the boys why, with so much at risk, why did they do it? Some valued the thrill of performance above everything, others saw the courage to commit to something which involved social risks as challenging, others still appreciated the opening to explore the self. However, the opportunity for intimacy with fellow students was universally agreed on as the most significant benefit. There was an internal, imaginative collaboration with fellow actors which was 'deeply satisfying—almost mystical'. All agreed that after the play was over an invisible link had been established between them. One boy expressed some sadness that after the production had finished he had sensed that 'something that was very important was gradually receding, perhaps forever'.

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In a word

Every state is an association of persons formed with a view to some good purpose ... —Aristotle, Politics.

REMEMBER 'INCENTIVATION'? 'Downsize.' 'Rationalise'. Every year seems to bring its own word. The word of the month, indeed the year, is 'Stakeholder'. A stakeholder, they tell us, is a person or group who represents an interested party in political negotiations. The debate over native title has reverberated with calls to bring together 'stakeholders' in order to decide on an equitable outcome. The purpose of a stakeholder is to articulate his/her group's particular economic and material interests as strongly as possible.

There is a theory of politics behind this: it says that democracy is about the advancement, through public means, of private interest. We form groups that represent our material interests. On election day we each vote for the group whose interests best matches our own, and the group which commands the greatest loyalty wins. In other words, democracy is nothing but a way of adding up private (and normally economic) self-interest. 'Stakeholding' takes this theory of politics as a battle of lobby groups further. It extends it beyond election day, to govern the whole process of policy-making.

When Frederick the Great remarked that war was just politics pursued by other means, this was the theory of politics he had in mind. The idea of a vested interest which such an approach to politics enshrines, facilitates compromise only in the way that the cold war did: mutually assured destruction forces a partial peace between warring factions, but at a price of entrenching their antagonism indefinitely. The clash of stakeholders, though it may lead to trade-offs and *modus vivendi*, can never lead to mutually assured understanding.

This seems perfectly natural. But there is another way. At its very birth, Aristotle understood democracy entirely differently. For him, politics was the realm in which people left their private interest behind, and gathered together as equals to decide on public policy—not through the ruthless advancement of self-interest but by transcending it. Not 'interest groups' but rational disinterest marked democratic debate. As the philosopher Hannah Arendt explained, for the Greek city-state, 'political economy' was an oxymoron; for us it is a tautology.

Aristotle offers an alternative vision of politics. Admittedly the idea of disinterest hardly had a good track record in ancient Greece. It was used to justify the exclusion from their 'democracy' of everybody involved in the day-to-day production of economic life—including large numbers of slaves, and all women. This history suggests we ought to be chary about believing that we are ever entirely able to discard our own perspective in favour of some rational 'objectivity'. On the other hand, a democracy comprised of 'stakeholders' insists that there is nothing but self-interest to guide us, nothing but subjectivity.

But there is perhaps a third way, sometimes called 'inter-subjectivity'. It, like Aristotle, asks us to leave our own interests behind; but only to the extent that we try and imagine what it must be like to have somebody else's perspective. For Aristotle, disinterest was an act of reason. Inter-subjectivity is an act of imagination, through which we learn to accommodate and respect the interests of others as well as ourselves. Such an approach leaves the way open to move from 'my' interests and yours—to ours.

During the cold war, such a move was never possible. Our leaders could not imagine that their enemies might have legitimate needs and desires, and so politics unfolded as a giant game of self-interest. 'Stakeholding' encourages the same social blindness, demands that we take positions rather than engage in conversation. We appear on the field of politics as rivals, not participants.

Aristotle would have been horrified. So should we be. We see the corrosive effects of the 'stakeholding' mentality all around us, in the advertising campaigns of the National Farmers' Federation, the single-minded lobbying of the National Party, and the hysteria whipped up by many of our State Premiers. Their idea of politics is grounded in self-interest. I have not heard one word from these people which suggests that they are trying to understand the needs and desires of Aboriginal people.

Well, to hell with stakeholders. Let us all participate in democratic debate by understanding other people's positions, and not simply by advancing one's own. By rational disinterest tempered with inter-subjective compassion, our aim should be to make our country 'an association of persons formed with a view to some good purposes'—not just (as in Athens) for some of us, but for all of us.

—Desmond Manderson

Editor's note: next month we shall disinter 'disinterest'.

to become professional actors? 'It has never occurred to me that I'd be good enough' says Shaun Kenny. The others agreed that not only did it require courage, 'but that you needed extraordinary persistence and stamina and a willingness to accept financial instability as a way of life'. So they understood that most actors' lives were far outside five-star hotels, private jets and Armani suits? 'Oh yes. It's a hard life, all right', they agreed.

After the cast members left I spoke briefly to the director of the play, Robert Schneider. I had assumed that many of the observations made by the boys about the process of acting had been prompted by him. Their conclusions surprised him. He said they had arrived at them independently.

Leaving the auditorium, munching on an apple, walking amidst a throng of spirited boys heading for home I felt relieved and happy. I didn't care how tiny or unrepresentative it was. In a quiet corner of the world, I told myself, the search for the human soul through the theatre was still taking place. I imagined Stanislavsky, standing in a modest, cold, unglamorous theatre space, looking very pleased indeed.

—Rosey Golds

The hostage and his hosts

MUCH OF THE WORLD'S media was inclined to celebrate the manner in which 72 hostages were finally released from the Japanese embassy in Lima, Peru, at the end of April.

Time magazine carried a cartoon of President Fujimori looking like Rambo and a photo of him leaning triumphantly from the door of the bus that carried the hostages away from 126 days' imprisonment. Behind him, in the embassy compound, were the bodies of all 14 Tupac Amaru guerrillas who had held the hostages. *Time* reported the secrecy with which the assault was prepared and suggested that Fujimori's attempts to negotiate, which included offering the guerrillas safe passage to Cuba, were only to blind the assault that was always in the offing.

It did not explain how, if there was such secrecy, both AP and Reuters were on location to photograph commandos emerging from the tunnels they had dug into the embassy grounds. It did quote an officer as saying that each terrorist had 500 bullets in

his body by the end of the raid.

Juan Julio Wicht has another perspective. Wicht, a 65-year-old-Jesuit priest, is the professor of economics at the Universidad del Pacifico and had been sponsoring research which related economic development in Peru and Latin America to that in Japan and Asia. This was how he came to be at a function at the Japanese embassy on 17 December. He could have been liberated along with the majority of hostages on Dec 22 but chose to stay behind. 'I told the guerrillas that I was a priest and wanted to remain,' he says. 'They were surprised but shook me by the hand.'

Wicht says that the hostages were treated reasonably. 'The terrorists never applied



physical mistreatment. Sometimes they were verbally aggressive, but not systematically and not often.' The hostages were never allowed into the open air. Food was not scarce but, according to Wicht, it was cold, glutinous, and unappetising. There was no electricity and no running water. After a couple of months, the hostages were plagued by rats, especially at night when they were required to sleep on the floor. The hostages organised classes among themselves. Wicht taught Spanish to the Japanese. They had some books and could play chess and cards. But boredom weighed on them heavily. They had too long to ponder various possible resolutions of their situation.

Wicht says that the ordeal was made worse because none of the hostages had any idea what the future held. 'It was a darkness in which I felt incredibly close to God. Some of the others told me the same thing.' Nevertheless, he also developed a relationship with the terrorists. 'They always called me "father". Some of them had never met

a priest before. Even in a Catholic country like this, there are few priests in rural areas'. Wicht told them that what they were doing was unacceptable. 'They responded that if I was a priest I had to support social justice and should be on their side. I told them that social justice had to be obtained without violating human rights. We had a tense but respectful dialogue.'

The terrorists allowed Wicht to celebrate Mass. Some of the hostages who had not been to Mass for 25 years received startled letters from their family members saying 'Dad, we can't believe you're going to Mass'. However, Wicht says that the worst part of the whole experience was when he noticed that the terrorists themselves were standing quietly nearby when Mass was on. After a while they began to show a real interest. 'I had to ask myself what I would do if they came up for communion. I was terrified they would do that.' What would he have done? 'I would have asked them to lay down their weapons first. But they never came for communion.' That hope has well and truly died. The prospects of the 400 Tupac Amaru prisoners who remain in Peruvian jails also look grim.

—Michael McGirr SJ

On-line glancing

AN ENTIRE NEW LANDSCAPE has been revealed to me—a spacious place, full of learned and courageous people I can't actually see except through text and icons, through images and design.

This is my first visit to the world of multimedia and the internet.

I'm a radio producer. I love sound and love making daily radio. And now my job

has taken me on a new 'broadcasting' path: the Internet Forum.

I know little of the technology, nothing of the racy and clever applications that guide me through this coded space. But I've agreed to produce 'content' for a website, as well as producing a trio of real-time internet forums.

This is wonderful—such an honour. I'm also anxious because I have only a week to make it all happen. The key to the success of the website and the real time, text-based forums rests with multimedia developers Rob Manson and Cinnamon Pollard.

Rob weaves a quiet magic via a laptop computer. He uses a combination of a new text manipulation programming language, Pearl and Java, as his palette. It's an alternative to the Palace or other chat software, which would involve people downloading.

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The Australian Multicultural Foundation, in association with the World Conference on Religion and Peace, is hosting the **Religion and Cultural Diversity Conference** - 28th to 30th July 1997, Melbourne.

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For further information on Registration and Conference Program contact:
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The on-line community is less inclined to get involved if they have to download software.

Another factor in this freer approach is that it doesn't involve choosing a particular software product, and by extension endorsing it. This is the ABC after all.

Cinnamon Pollard says that 'the choice of Pearl and Java script enables as many people as possible to access it. It's for equity and access. We tried to make it as compatible as possible with as many computers and browsers.'

There's no term for this integrated software that generates the content and becomes part of the overall structure. It's more than a series of pages or screens that talk to each other, and to the users, and talk in a particular way to the chosen panellists. It's all those fanned pages together as a

Frontier was several years in the making, with Professors Marcia Langton and Henry Reynolds as historical consultants on the series. *Frontier* combined documentary source material from 1770-1938—diaries, journals, paintings and city and town records—which demonstrated the extent of land wars between Aborigines and the 'settlers'. Two thousand Europeans lost their lives in the war for land. Twenty thousand Aborigines were killed by poison, massacre and gunshot.

The three internet text-based forums happened the night after the broadcast of each hour-long documentary reflecting issues raised there. Broadly the three themes for *Frontier Online* were 'Treaties', 'Personal Responsibility', and 'Reconciliation'.

The 'live panel' was activated for around 90 minutes, and after an introduction was

number of 'postings' from those who said 'why weren't we told about our history' was overwhelming.

The panellists were absorbed and extremely generous. Some replies were novella-length, others sharp and critical. The logs of all three 'live panels' are still there on the *Frontier Online* website: frontier@your.abc.com.au

Each 'live panel' was on-line for around 90 minutes at a time. A *Guestbook* sat alongside the 'live panel'. It was (and still is) open 24 hours a day. Users could (and can) drop in there and leave a note if they couldn't join the panel. It's also a living resource; an ongoing archive of what people think of co-existence and the future for reconciliation in Australia today.

Frontier Online is one attempt to put real substance and content on the web. It



whole document/site, yet each page/screen stands alone and becomes the substance of *Frontier Online*.

From Rob Manson's electronic scrolls of code, emerge templates (in the jargon they are 'implementation of software') upon which Cinnamon Pollard will create the website and publish the content. Content is material like photos and biographies of panellists, questions and statements from myself and Stephen Rapley who is moderator and host of the live internet events. It's the crafted graphics created by the TV series' graphic designer and artistic director, Dan Mavric. There's also background information, resources, and an explanation of how to get to the technology and how to use it. How to navigate the *Frontier* site? Use a navigator bar, of course!

Frontier Online follows *Frontier*, a three-part documentary series screened over three weeks on ABC-TV in March this year.

'posted' by the moderator, the forums began with questions to the panellists who sat at their computer terminals. The on-line audience could respond in real time via an editor, (just in case we were swamped with replies). The panellists 'talked' to each other and to the on-line audience. The mood of each forum was differed according to the dynamics of the guests. For me, sitting amongst some of the Sydney-based panellists, quietly tapping out probes and responses, was an odd sensation, so unlike the drama of live radio.

There was an average of 30,000 accesses each week, with an average of 350 people logging on. The pace was sometimes slow, and sometimes incredibly fast, so that an answer to a given question might not appear immediately on the screen for interruption from others.

The level of knowledge about Aboriginal Australia in many of the on-line audience was sophisticated and detailed. Yet the

doesn't allow itself to be obsessed with the software, merely using it as a tool for an open debate, a forum for the on-line community. It is the force of people's words that holds the text forever in cyberspace as a memorandum to historians and educators and a plea for the notion of truth in history-telling.

—Donna McLachlan

Note: the *Frontier Online* website and its soon-to-be-launched curricula for students of Aboriginal Studies, created by education consultant Kaye Price, is part funded by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

This month's contributors: Peter Norden SJ is director of Jesuit Social Services; Rosey Golds is a freelance writer; Desmond Manderson is a senior lecturer in Law at Macquarie University; Michael McGirr SJ is editor of *Australian Catholics*; Donna McLachlan is producer of *Frontier Online*, for ABC Multi Media.

Three parties, one state

IN APRIL THIS YEAR, 11 young people, all in their twenties, belonging to Indonesia's Democratic People's Party (*PRD*) were given gaol sentences between 18 months and 13 years. Their crime? Subversion.

The party's chairman, Budiman Sudjatmiko, got 13 years. According to the prosecutor, he was 'guilty of undermining the state ideology and inciting students and workers to demonstrate against the government, discrediting the New Order government under President Suharto, and rejecting the sociopolitical role of the Armed Forces.'

How could this happen in a country where economic growth has reached 7 per cent, where the GDP growth has actually exceeded the rate of inflation, and where rice self-sufficiency has been achieved, where nearly 200 million people of over 300 ethnic groups espousing four main religions have lived relatively peacefully? Was the government becoming jumpy because it was so close to the election? Has it always prosecuted dissenters? If not, what kind of dissenters does it prosecute? There are no easy answers to those questions, though many speculate that the election has a great deal to do with the recent show of force.

To liken Indonesian politics to a shadow play is an understatement. In a shadow puppet show, at least what you see on the screen, while two-dimensional, is a reflection of the real puppets made alive by the puppeteer. Observing Indonesian politics is more like being in a big room walled by panels of glass, and some of these panels are real windows while others are mirrors reflecting yourself, the windows and the rest of the mirrors from different angles. Each time you think you've read the situation correctly, you only have to turn several degrees to discover that there are aspects you've overlooked.

On May 29 Indonesia goes to the poll. Three political parties are contesting for power. Why only three? Because only three are sanctioned and authorised as political parties represented in the Legislative Council and

contestants in the election. *Golkar*, the ruling party, *PDI* (Indonesian Democratic Party) and *PPP* (United Development Party). *Golkar* represents the present government and its civil servants, *PDI* offers home to a combination of nationalists, Christians and intellectuals who openly refuse to join *Golkar*, and *PPP* is a catchment for various Muslim groups.

Golkar, the ruling party, is supported by the establishment and a great number of people whose livelihood depends on the stability of this establishment. These are mostly people who are relatively comfortable in their jobs and have fair prospects, as well as those who don't have fair prospects yet don't believe that there are better alternatives. Since it is the biggest of the three—expecting to collect some 70 per cent of votes—*Golkar* has supporters among the Muslims, the Christians, the nationalists and other minority groups, including the intellectuals and the non-politically minded.

The present New Order government's legitimacy is in its remarkable achievements in economic growth and national development. When it took over government in 1965, Indonesia was regarded by international economists as a basket case, to quote Benjamin Higgins, author of *Economic Development*. The current president, Suharto, promptly gathered well-respected economists and other technocrats, and organised the Army to

play an active role in the national development. When he was able to show the outside world that the country was now safe he began to encourage foreign investors to come and park their capital in Indonesia. Within less than a decade inflation was steamrolled by GDP growth, and the next decade was to see the nation achieving rice self-sufficiency. In a nation where the bulk of the population assesses its government's performance by the price of rice (the staple diet), this New



Order government had gained what is equivalent to an elephant stamp.

It didn't stop there. In 30 years the share of manufacturing in GDP rose three-fold, despite the potential crisis caused by the fall of oil prices. Indonesia is now one of the regional economies others look at with some respect.

However no government is without flaws. When he came to power, Suharto, then an Army general, may have given the impression that the Army would always have a say in government from then on. Several years down the track, however, the President began several institutional reforms which affected the role of the Armed Forces. Up till then, the Army had grown from a combination of an impromptu and improvised army consisting of students interrupted in their studies by the independence war in the 1940s, those of the general population driven by a strong nationalistic fervour, and the younger recruits from the new Armed Forces Academy in Central Java. In 1969 Suharto began to upgrade the syllabi of the academy, and toughen the conditions for recruits. In other words, he made the Army in particular and the Armed Forces in general, increasingly professional. This had the effect of limiting military intervention in government.

SUHARTO WAS NOT UNIQUE in this case. Many military leaders who became heads of governments had done the same. He wanted the military to obey him but kept them at arms' length when it came to political manoeuvres. To avoid the military's feeling alienated however, officers were given positions in the public and diplomatic services, without being allowed input in the process of decision making. If any of them tried to overstep the boundaries, they would be sacked in the next reshuffle, or quietly pushed aside to pasture. The President has always kept the highest control button to himself.

Germs of dissatisfaction began to sprout among the military in late 1980s, when they saw some of the powerful positions went to civilians, and when those in the military who spoke up against blatant corruption fell out of favour.

Suharto was adept, however, at keeping gratified those in the military who were still loyal to him. Division among the military did not appear to bother him unduly. In fact that way he knew that they would never be united in their opposition to him. This was very important considering that the military was present in every level of government, from village heads, provincial governors, to ministers. In the meantime, he went on a campaign to win the hearts of the Muslim population. While his haj pilgrimage was no doubt genuine, it was done in a very public way, and there was a great deal of publicity about his religious devotion.

In terms of ideology, *PDI* is the most inclusive. While many in *PDI* are hard-nosed nationalists, who still believe in Sukarno's ideals about nationalism, the other interest groups like the Christians, the intellectuals and the social democrats



joined this party because the ideologies of the other two parties somehow clashed with their own values. However *PDI* has been cursed with leadership problems. A party with such a wide ranging interest needed a leader who would be the focus as well as a rallying force. Two years ago they seemed to have found one, Megawati, a daughter of the late first president, Sukarno. Megawati became the symbolic bearer of her father's charisma for the nationalists in the party. Indeed she was becoming so successful in rallying support for *PDI* that the government began to see her as a threat. So 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. *PDI* was now divided between Soeryadi's and Megawati's camps. As far as the government was concerned, there was only one *PDI*: Soeryadi's. The other was illegal.

If the government thought that *PDI* had been rent asunder and was on the way out, they were disappointed. This intervention caused deep resentment among the increasingly educated middle class, which by this time had reached seven or eight per cent of the population. Many people expressed that it offended their sense of fair play, and that the events had increased awareness of their democratic rights. Instead of waning into oblivion, Megawati became the focus for different groups of opposition, many were disillusioned and disenfranchised. Among these were a group of young people who aspired to defend the rights of the workers and the poor, subsequently forming *PRD* (Democratic People's Party). The tension came to a head on July 27 last year when a group of Soeryadi's *PDI* members and followers raided *PDI*'s headquarters in Jakarta, which up till then were still manned by Megawati's supporters. These people tried to evict Megawati's supporters by force. The clash turned ugly, claiming a number of casualties. Arrests were made, among these were members of the newly formed *PRD*. This led to accusations that *PRD* intentionally drove the rioters to use violence. Its chairman, Budiman Sudjatmiko, and other leaders were arrested and interrogated.

In two separate trials in Surabaya



and Jakarta, April 22 and 28 respectively, eleven of their activists, including Budiman, were eventually given gaol sentences. Interestingly, in handing down the sentences, the judges did not mention the July 27 riot.

While supporters of Megawati had not abandoned her, they needed another recipient for their votes, since they were not ready to vote for the authorised *PDI*. There was only one alternative left. Would *PPP* be able to meet their aspirations?

At a glance, *PPP* has the potential to be a major party, as it encompasses various Muslim groups who don't trust *Golkar* to represent their welfare and interest. Two major Muslim groups who form the base of *PPP* are the *Muhammadiyah*, whose focus is education and intellectual debate, and the *NU* or *Nadhlatul Ulama*, the more grass-roots movement, numbering some 40 to 50 million supporters.

However in reality, locating a common ground apart from their religious faith for these people is not easy. To begin with, as an Islamic party, *PPP*'s identity has been somewhat watered down, because according to a 1985 government regulation, all political parties must espouse the state ideology *Pancasila* or the Five Principles. The first principle of *Pancasila* is 'belief in one

God', which is generously inclusive. So no party can insert a particular credo into its constitution. *PPP*'s leadership has until recently been very conservative and reluctant to upset the apple-cart. In one example, when one of their members in the Legislative Council, Sri Bintang Pamungkas, openly criticised the Suharto government, he was promptly recalled. Sri Bintang subsequently formed another party *PUDI* (Indonesian United Democratic Party), which did not quite take off, yet managed to form a breakaway group from *PPP* nonetheless.

SOME MEMBERS OF *Muhammadiyah*, who otherwise would be firmly behind *PPP*, have been lured to join another interest group, *ICMI* (Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals) led by a very solid *Golkar* minister, the minister for Research and Development, B. J. Habibie. While there is no problem with being a member of both *Muhammadiyah* and *ICMI*, it is no good news for *PPP*, because *ICMI*, while possessing no powerbase, has strong *Golkar* patronage.

Another problem for the conservative *PPP* is the controversial leader of *NU*, Abdurrachman Wahid, known to his followers as Gus Dur. Gus Dur is far from conservative. In fact he is a pluralist. After the social unrest in West Java earlier this year, where several churches and shops owned by Chinese-descent small business people, were gutted and destroyed, Gus Dur made a nation-wide statement, apologising to the victims. He did this after discovering that a number of the rioters were *NU* people. He has also been quoted speaking against human rights violations in East Timor, inside as

well as outside Indonesia. But there is nothing *PPP* leadership can do in regard to Gus Dur, barring knitting their brows, rolling their eyes and clenching their teeth. Gus Dur is the elected and respected leader of the bulk of *PPP*'s strength. His followers are not all or always in agreement with him, but they respect him and recognise him as their rightful leader. Attempts to push him aside have always failed.

PPP's leaders were driven to more than brow-knitting and teeth-clenching when several weeks before the official election campaign began, Gus Dur organised a mass meeting of *NU*, where he 'introduced' Siti Hardianti Rukmana, known to the population as Tutut, none other than the current president's daughter. While both Tutut and Gus Dur denied that it was part of pre-campaigning, in Indonesia, where politics have to be read and interpreted by watching every bit of body language and clothes language of the players, most people were surprised, some dumbfounded.

Among the outraged were not only *PPP* leaders, but also loyal supporters of Megawati. Up till then, Gus Dur had been seen to be Megawati's moral supporter. The friendship between those two, in the days when *PDI* was still intact, once gave hope to many that the set up of *PDI* supported by *NU* could form a nucleus for a civilian government to gradually replace the present one.

When Megawati herself was asked, whether she felt betrayed by Gus Dur, her philosophical answer was, 'No. He and I are still very close friends. In politics we are like two spinning tops. It appears that I have stopped spinning, and he still



Photographs, from p18: Megawati Sukarnoputri; Jakarta Street vendors; razor wire protecting the American Embassy; food cart outside the Presidential Palace; Jakarta McDonalds's; the Suharto Presidential Palace with ceremonial guard.



SUMMA theologiae

John Honner culls the theological crop

is. As you know, a top spins to different directions. No, I'm not surprised or feel betrayed.'

With *PDI* and *PPP* practically in disarray, *Golkar* has no effective opposition. And it seems that the 70 per cent estimation on *Golkar's* part is neither wishful thinking nor excess optimism.

While there is no doubt that the support for pro-democracy movement is increasing, it has lost its focus and rallying point. This may be detrimental considering that it is not big enough to regroup quickly before the election. In the meantime, *Golkar* still has the support of the nation's civil service, most of the business community, and those who are not politically minded, which means at least half of the population. Decision makers will not abandon *Golkar* because they know that is where power is and will reside for a long time yet.

The two minor parties will remain small, unless they can attract significant popular support. To do so they need to regroup and solidify, and show strong and believable leadership. However, we must give credit to them for trying, especially to Megawati, who did, whether the government would admit it or not, inspire enough fear, for the authorities to want to remove her from *PDI* leadership.

The way to push for democracy, maybe, is not from outside *Golkar*, but from inside. Maybe that was what Gus Dur was trying to do.

AS FOR DEMILITARISATION of the government, this can only be done gradually, and only when the military are convinced that the civilians who take over power are capable and reliable. More important, they want to be sure that these civilians are not going to victimise the military. At the moment, while there is some dissatisfaction among them, there is not enough evidence that parties other than *Golkar* can guarantee that.

With this certainty to win, it is curious what the government fears from independent election monitors, national or international. Maybe it suspects these monitors would rig the election? ■

Dewi Anggraeni is a Melbourne-based novelist and the Australia correspondent for *FORUM Keadilan*, and feature writer for the *Jakarta Post*.

THE JOINT THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY, owned by the Jesuits and the Uniting Church, is located at Ormond College in the University of Melbourne, and its theological pickings are rich.

There are lots of very serious articles in the serious journals, of course, but this month I found none of intense significance. Joseph F. Kelly, however, has a very readable study in *The Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Spring 1997, called 'On the Brink: Bede', which gets this month's prize as the pick of the crop. Kelly considers the Venerable Bede as a figure for our own times, for he stood on the brink between the rapidly passing ancient world, which he loved dearly, and the emerging modern medieval world which he frequently criticised. Kelly concludes that Bede established himself as the conduit and shaper of patristic values to the Middle Ages and beyond. And he was successful in this, says Kelly, for four reasons: he knew his scripture, his Latin was not so elegant as to be inaccessible in the new age; he spoke the language of the barbarians (German!); and he was *interesting* to read.

I note a new journal on the shelves: *Theology and Sexuality: the Journal of the Institute for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality*. And, no, it doesn't come from California, but from Sheffield in England. The articles are chatty and less scholarly than one might expect, given the quality of the editorial board, but the journal may be worth watching.

Celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, the Australian Journal of Feminist Studies in religion, *Women-Church*, is a magazine of articles, reviews, recent publications and coming events. It appears twice-yearly, and is distinguished by its sharp focus and considerable vitality. The first number for 1997 includes a thoughtful article by Susan Smith RNDM (who lectures at the Catholic Institute of Theology in Auckland) entitled 'Marian Dogmas and Catholic Feminism'. Smith explores ways in which feminists might, and might not, appropriate meaning from the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption.

Literature and Theology is a journal, now in its eleventh year, published by Oxford University Press. In the March 1997 number is a short review by Peter Stiles of the *Oxford Book of Australian Religious Verse*, edited by Kevin Hart and (surprise, surprise) published by Oxford University Press. Stiles concludes, succinctly, that this 'anthology reflects very effectively the intensely private and secular nature of spiritual sensibilities within Australian society. It also suggests the difficulties of satisfactorily accommodating traditional expressions of Western belief within such a vast, alien continent.'

On the international scene, *Origins* is always a newsletter worth reading. Published weekly by the Catholic News Service in the USA, it is a no-frills collection of current documents and discussions. The March 27 number of this year is chiefly given to the Common Ground Movement, initiated by the late Cardinal Bernardin and now taken up by Archbishop Oscar Lipscomb of Mobile, Alabama. Given the divisions in the American Catholic Church, the Common Ground Movement attempts to strengthen the unity of the Church using the shared beliefs of all Catholics. This movement is itself already controversial, but it may well be the way of the future and is certainly worth watching. If you can't get hold of a copy of *Origins*, try the most modern of all libraries, the internet, on '<http://www.catholicnews.com/cnsorigins.html>'.

People on the Move is the journal of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. This is not a journal of which we hear often, but it is already 25 years old. The June 1996 number includes an article on refugees in Asia by Quentin Dignam.

On a matter of less weight yet of some local concern: volume 27 (March 1997) of *Liturgy News*, a quarterly from the Liturgical Commission of the Archdiocese of Brisbane carries some notes on hygiene and the common cup: with proper practice, medical opinion monitored over the past ten years suggests, at worst, a 'low risk' of sickness being transmitted through the sharing of one chalice among many.

Finally, I note two tributes to the late Henri Nouwen, published in *The Christian Century* (March 1997), which offer glimpses of the quirks and vulnerabilities and needs of one of the most gentle and compassionate of Christian writers this century. ■

John Honner sj is editor of *Pacifica: Journal of the Melbourne College of Divinity* and chair of the library users' committee of the Joint Theological Library.

Don't bank on it

Lincoln Wright dissects the rationales of the Wallis Report

ARTHUR SCHLESINGER JR, THE AMERICAN historian who so artfully documented Franklin Delano Roosevelt's interventionist New Deal of the 1930's, recently suggested that the imbalance in the United States between corporate power and the public interest was still a serious issue.

Where there had been some success in the management of economic fluctuations, the same could not be said, Schlesinger suggested, for the management of modern corporate power, which has flourished with the decline of the union movement and the globalisation of business.

Much the same criticism could apply to Australia. In a global economy, corporations and their managers are, in a very basic way, still largely unaccountable to their own shareholders, let alone their workers. Corporations are still their own creatures, with a power and general influence unmatched by their legally equal co-citizens, the average individual.

What individual shareholder could possibly hope to influence (say) the behaviour of BHP's executives after their recent decision to close the steelworks at Newcastle by 1999? What union has successfully resisted corporate downsizing or the introduction of labour-displacing technology?

As for government mitigating corporate reality, when a bottom-line consideration became paramount, BHP simply ignored its commitments to the community despite the assistance it had received from the Federal Government's steel plan of the mid-1980s.

Corporate power is notably at issue in Australia's banking and finance sector, which is the nation's most profitable corporate business. Over six months in 1996, for example, the sector made \$3.2 billion, far ahead of the resources sector or media. Only last month, in another record profit, the National Australia Bank released a profit figure for the six months to March this year of \$1.14 billion.

But although the finance sector is very profitable, its success has not translated into job growth, let alone job stability. This matters, because the finance industry is a crucial national employer, employing about 321,600 people in finance, insurance and services to finance and insurance in 1996.

The Finance Sector Union estimates that between 1991 and 1996 there was a 14.97 per cent decrease in the

total number of people employed in finance, with a 20.98 per cent decrease in the total number employed in insurance. Full-time employment at the four major banks decreased by 31,196 between 1991-96, while part-time employment increased by 9,554.

In June 1996, Treasurer, Peter Costello, initiated a stocktake of the financial deregulation of the 1980s, which followed the recommendations of the original inquiry into Australia's financial system, the Campbell Committee report of 1981.

The Campbell Report, which the Hawke Labor Government updated with Vic Martin's 1984 inquiry, led to the the first round of financial deregulation, which saw the Australian dollar floated, controls on interest rates lifted, capital inflows and outflows liberalised and the entry of foreign banks.

Costello's 'Daughter of Campbell' inquiry, subsequently called the Wallis Report after its chairman Stan Wallis, was designed to assess, among other things, the impact of technology on banking, how efficient and costly the financial system is, the state-of-play of financial and prudential regulation and, importantly, the impact of the reforms on the economy and the evolution of the financial sector.

THERE IS A FANTALISING RUMOUR, being spread mainly by the union movement, that two of the big banks heavily funded the Liberal Party at the March 1996 Federal election in order to get approval for two policy directions: the banks want a heavier use of technology in the finance sector and a relaxation of regulations that had brought about unwelcome competition, especially in the areas of superannuation and home mortgage lending.

Whatever the *realpolitik* rationale for Costello's inquiry, the average Australian expected an inquiry that tried to look objectively at the issues: high bank fees, job losses, branch closures, seemingly huge profits, and the way our economic system is now managed mainly through an often destructive monetary policy.

One of the central planks of Wallis' final report, which was released recently, is that despite the enormous reforms of the 1980s and the constant military-style exhortations for greater effort from bank workers by executives like Westpac's Robert Joss, Australia's financial system needs to be even more efficient and competitive.



At the time of the report's release, the media gave most attention to the other central planks of the report: Wallis' attitude towards mergers, his recommendation to establish two new bureaucratic agencies, and the recommendation that banks should get access to all classes of financial licence.

The new functional agencies were the Australian Prudential Regulation Commission and the Corporations and Financial Services Commission. The former would regulate deposit-taking institutions, life and general insurance, and superannuation. The latter would monitor consumer protection, corporations law and market integrity.

These recommendations are important, but Wallis' emphasis on the need for more efficiency is at the heart of his report, not only because the concept is a public relations mantra for the banks when it comes to pressuring the government for further change, but also because the finance sector really believes it—and acts on it.

At a cost of \$41 billion in 1995, or an average of 4.3 per cent of total financial assets of \$920 billion, Australia's financial system, Wallis says, is too expensive. Only by a radical extension of electronic commerce and the rationalisation of the banks' payments and distribution systems will consumers get lower prices, basically through greater efficiency.

Cheques and the bank branch system are one major source of cost. With 3.8 branches per 10,000 inhabitants, Australia has an average bank branch density which is less than Germany's or Italy's but more than in the UK or the US. Branches function at an average cost of \$1.6 million per year and Wallis says there are better and cheaper distribution strategies, such as in-store banking. As well, Australians utilise cheques heavily and use only an average number of ATMs and EFTPOS compared to other nations.

To increase efficiency, Wallis says banks should be allowed to price their products on cost, something now

The Wallis report leaves you feeling that banks really want to reduce prices and play the game ... but, sadly, government regulation and the need for more technology make this impossible. But why would any sensible banker reduce the price of a product, a loan or a fee, after an increase in technological efficiency, if he or she does not have to?

made easier by new technology, such as profitability analysis systems, which provide greater accuracy in assessing costs that were previously mispriced.

Wallis also dismisses the widespread idea that bank fees are too high and accepts the findings of the June 1995 Prices Surveillance Authority report, which found that at the time banks recovered less than 15 per cent of the cost of transactions from fees and charges.

Remarkably, given the events of the 1980s and the current rate of unemployment, Wallis also pooh poohs any suggestion that there has been a permanently deleterious impact on the economy from financial deregulation. There were problems in the adjustment phase, to be sure, but he argues these were one-off and transitional, not structural and now in-built.

WE ARE TOLD THAT THE DISASTERS of the 1980s 'probably' had real costs. Probably? Is this really the right word after nearly 17,000 bankruptcies from the early 1990s' recession, in addition to the financial disasters of Bond and Skase, increased foreign debt and foreign ownership and the social ramifications of a high-unemployment system designed to keep inflation under control?

The final report of the recent Wallis Inquiry, in some respects and despite a meritorious effort to come to grips with the flux of global finance, seems apt testimony to the way in which the nation's most profitable corporations can pressure and cajole the state to develop public policy which seems to ignore the basic concerns of average citizens.

A lot of the mischief is intellectual. Particularly the vice of simplifying complicated social realities. According to *Business Week's* economic columnist Robert Kuttner, there have been basically two approaches to regulating corporate power since the turn of the century—the idealistic and the realistic.

The idealist believes competition policy, or what the Americans call 'anti-trust legislation', will break socially nefarious imbalances of power brought on by the rise of big corporations and which are understood to impede the efficient functioning of the free market. Governments do have a limited role. If a company is too big, then government agencies should break it up and atomise its power to restore an ethically workable marketplace.

Realists like the economist John Kenneth Galbraith accept that corporate bigness, such as the stable corporate

oligopolies of the car industry or, indeed, Australia's Big Four banks, are permanent but beneficial realities. Competition policy will not return the modern economy to a free market paradise but bigness can bring benefits in the form of technological innovation, economies of scale and greater prosperity.

If excesses of power do occur, as they undoubtedly do, then they should be controlled with countervailing sources of power, such as government regulation or union power, generally through pragmatic social mechanisms that are rarely known or describable in historical advance.

As far as the Wallis report is concerned, Australia's philosophy of financial regulation should be based on what is called 'market failure', an idealist position on the above classification because it assumes problems can be solved with rules, without any significant tinkering or social adhocery. Somehow the market always knows best.

With ancestral echoes of last year's sterile Audit Commission report, Wallis' idea is that governments should intervene in the financial markets only if there are clear signs that there is systemic risk to the whole financial structure, or what is known as information asymmetry, so that consumers cannot assess risk adequately. In themselves these are worthy ideals.

But governments should not intervene for what Wallis calls, somewhat dismissively, 'community service obligations', an example of which would be the government compelling the banks to provide low-cost fees for social security transactions. Or, more importantly, the proposal to force superannuation funds to invest in small business.

The consequences of the idea that there is little room for social engineering in the finance sector are profound, but mainly as a form of intellectual and policy inertia, exemplified by Wallis' puristic rejection of a common phenomenon in banking, the cross-subsidy, which can involve deliberate mispricing to achieve useful social aims, such as the way banks in Japan finance industrial development with cheap loans.

For those expecting an in-depth analysis of finance sector job losses, the Wallis report is glumly deterministic in its two-paragraph assessment:

'The process of rationalisation, including the closure of bank branches, is likely to occur irrespective of regulatory change, since it is driven by the fundamental forces unleashed by new technologies, and other

factors,' the report says.

The availability of finance to small and medium-sized businesses,—the engine of employment for the nation—also receives little original coverage. Here again, as in the case of bank fees and finance sector employment, Wallis presents a rather banal reiteration of previously well-known opinions. It is not debt that is the problem, with banks unwilling to take on risk, but access to equity and poor government regulation.

'[The inquiry] found no evidence that large numbers of SMEs have difficulty obtaining debt ... The inquiry did not find evidence of serious deficiencies in SME debt markets,' the report says. Quoting a submission by the Australian Business Chamber, Wallis says the banks claim over 90 per cent of SME loan applications are now approved, up from 70-80 per cent a decade ago.

IN WALLIS' WORLD THERE ARE somehow unstoppable forces creating the new financial landscape, and banks must adapt to them. Changing consumer preferences, the terrific pace of technological change and the steady impact of specific types of government regulation, such as superannuation policy and taxation, determine a social momentum of sorts. Globalisation is another factor.

Efficiency, or lower cost per unit of output, is almost magically synonymous for Wallis with lower price. The Wallis report leaves you feeling that banks really

want to reduce prices and play the game but, sadly, government regulation and the need for more technology make this impossible.

But why would any sensible banker reduce the price of a product, a loan or a fee, after an increase in technological efficiency, if he or she does not have to?

Wallis would say: 'Contestable markets will make them cut prices.' or 'New technologies will create competition.' But as his own report shows, in the home mortgage market deregulation did not lead directly to lower mortgage rates.

Only in the late 1980s, when the then Labor government, not the market, forced up interest rates, did the crucial difference between what banks charge on the average home loan and what they can borrow in the money market become large enough for mortgage securitisers like Aussie Home Loans to get a start. Competition can happen, but the circumstances are highly specific.

How do we know that technological change will not lead to greater profits and greater job losses? Wallis provides no real clue. That would require a realist's attitude, and the abandonment of the Wallis report's rather sterile financial philosophy.

But without that knowledge, we cannot safely rule out those innovative forms of regulation that look after everyone—not just the banks. ■

Lincoln Wright is a finance writer at the *Canberra Times*.

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE

Caught in the current

In Turkey, where the Bosphorus flows both east and west, Christopher Houston looks at the complex intersections of religion and ethnic politics.

I REMEMBER BEING VERY SCARED, passing by the tanks and soldiers and then through the police cordon, my friend tugging at my arm to keep my head down.

The crowd was large, thousands of people with their banners, flags and slogans, condemning the State, daring the police to break up the gathering.

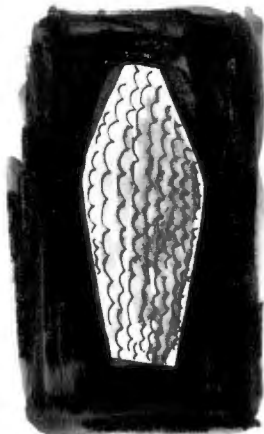
The coffin, so small in all that fury, lay outside the newspaper office where the dead journalist had worked: he had been beaten to death by police while covering a

protest, and his body thrown over a wall.

Walking back to the bus-stop seemed to take for ever. We stopped outside a TV repair shop, our attention drawn to the large screen of one of those resurrected boxes. It was showing a different funeral, the funeral of one of the country's paramount businessmen, assassinated in his office at about the same time police were truncheoning the reporter to death. The President, the Prime-Minister, the elite of the business world—all of them were

there, with the weeping brothers of the dead man. He was, according to the papers, the youngest and most-loved of seven.

Two societies, two cultures. It is often said that the fast-flowing Bosphorus runs two ways at once, from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara on its jelly-blubbered surface, from the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea underneath. This geographical oddity can be seen as mirroring the city's cultural movements—Westernising and Islamifying at one and the same time, the two flows meeting as in the Bosphorus in the nether regions of the city, in the massive slums ringing the established suburbs, or in the lives of the newly urbanising peasants creating a survival culture for themselves.



The Islamifying current. Welling up in the Koran study I attended in my cramped suburb at the edge of the Bosphorus, whose members refused to perform the daily prayer ritual in the mosque because of its ties to the Religious Affairs Department. Bubbling up in my visits to their houses, where the tea-tray would be left at the lounge room door, the discreet tap on its panels signalling to the husband that he could bring it to the table and serve his guest. And the secularising current running freely in the same rooms, encouraging the daughter to go to university and learn the skills for leaving the private sphere of the home and participating in the public realm of the city.

There is life, one imagines, at all levels of the Bosphorus, and the dual-current theory of society obscures all the periwinkles and octopi, fish and seaweeds, the sinking Coke bottles and rising plastic bags that traffic up and down, in and out of the Bosphorus and wash back and forth in the flow from East to West and West to East.

Two opposing political visions? Turkey's distribution of income is one of the most unequal in the world. If there are two cultures in Istanbul, surely they belong to the rich and the poor, to their constant struggle over work and wages, conditions and interests pushing against each other like the waters of the Bosphorus. The paraphernalia at the funerals were important—the coffin of the journalist

covered with the flag of his socialist political party, the businessman's draped with the flag of Nation. The murderers were condemned at both ceremonies in the name of the people. But who speaks for the people and what unites them?

The political geography of Turkey is more complex than the metaphor of subterranean currents of Islamism and Secularism, or the great collision between the class interests. For as the months went by and the assassins of the industrialist were never found, the rumours began that he was killed by agents of the State, who somehow entered the office complex (claimed to be the most modern in the world) and gunned down the head of Turkey Toyota on the 14th floor in the same attack. Why would the State wish to murder one of its favoured sons? Because, the logic went, the Union of Turkish Chambers of Commerce, a peak business body (of which the assassinated man was an influential member), had recently published a report on the Kurdish 'question', in which the State was urged to find a political solution to the problems including a democratisation of its own structures. So here was a warning from the State to regime-friendly businessmen: get on with your work and let us get on with ours; being rich doesn't mean untouchable...

The Kurdish question, or as the report carefully put it, the Eastern problem ... Whose problem? The State's. Any analysis of the Islamic and secular currents swirling around in Turkey has to take account of the Kurdish factor, borne along with them like corroding salt. And of course, State policies towards the Kurds. In a banal way the origin of the Kurdish problem lies in the Kurds' dispersal over four nation-states. Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey have each had their unitarian nation-building projects and each have attempted, with various degrees of success, to culturally homogenise the diverse populations within their respective borders. But the mere existence of a large Kurdish minority in Turkey is not the problem in itself: the problem at root is Turkey's insufficient democracy, which has not been able to cope with the Kurdish reality but has pursued a policy of cultural assimilation since its establishment. Turkey's Kurdish-speaking Turks, they were called. Mountain Turks.

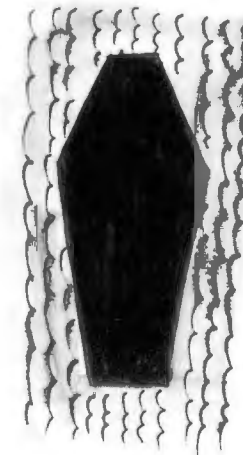
Persistent State attempts to force Kurdish people to become Turks have failed. But how long will it take the military to realise? And when they do, what surely is there that the war economy in the east of Turkey will be dismantled, so that the profit-

makers can retire a long way from the destroyed villages and tent-cities, the burnt forests and hugely swollen cities of the eastern provinces? Who will de-militarise the military?

State violence. Islamic assertiveness. Class warfare. Kurdish resistance. Like a whirlpool, the currents of political struggles merge and buffet each other.

Yet why is it that when we read about Turkey in the *Age* or in *The Australian*, it is invariably in terms of concern about the rise of 'Islamic fundamentalism', of 'Muslim fanaticism'? When did we last read about the vested interests of the secularist élite, or of the unholy alliance between the State and various Islamic business groups, or of the split between Kurds and Turks within the Islamic movement itself? Why are we encouraged to think so vulgarly about Islam and politics, when we think so finely about political distinctions within our own religious traditions?

The media would have us see in the rise to popularity of the Islamic political party in Turkey a further local manifestation of universal Islamic fundamentalism. We are to admire its religious visage by powdering its nose with the FIS of Algeria, reddening its lips with the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt.



But we don't have to surf that wave. For if we are not careful, movements that should be understood first in their own historical particularity will become detached from local political struggles, to hover like some leering blimp over the field of

political discourse in the West.

Apologists for a besieged 'Western civilisation' will invoke such movements to obscure our understanding of the very processes that are shaping us all, whether Muslim, Christian, Hindu or Jew. All of us, in our local situations, find ourselves bowing down to the deity of a production system of global proportions.

That's a rip to avoid. ■

Christopher Houston is a postgraduate student in Anthropology at La Trobe University.

Turning the tables



THE WORST THING ABOUT TRAINING to be a roulette croupier was having to learn multiplication tables again. Up to 35-times tables. To match the odds involved in playing the numbers on American Roulette. More profound is the memory I have of rich Arabs throwing around their personalised £100 chips as if they were grains of sand. This was London in the early '80s. Legalised gambling was an accepted fact of life with at least four casinos operating there.

It was a good idea at the time. I'd met another wandering Aussie who said it was much better pay than the usual bar work option, a tad more interesting, and no, cleavage and bottoms weren't part of it (the punter is not to be distracted from his/her task). I turned up for the next intake and was accepted. After two weeks' unpaid training, learning tables and moving chips, those remaining after drop-outs and dismissals were admitted to the next, more serious stage of the training program. More serious because we got paid, and we started practising on roulette wheels.

Two more weeks of consolidated tables and chip moving, now in context, playing the game, taking it in turns to be punter and dealer. My fellow trainees (we numbered about 20) were a mixed bunch of unemployed graduates, musicians, unskilled itinerants and glamorous blondes. All reasonably attractive or personable, I would say. At the end of the two weeks, which included a final lesson in grooming and make-up application, we were ready to be sent to work at one of the four casinos run by our employers.

The first game for most dealers is hell. Kind old-hands and inspectors view you with pity. Some punters like nothing better than a novice dealer at the wheel; they know chances are the person will be debilitatingly nervous, that the game will be slower and that mistakes will be made. Chips will be cleared or left when they shouldn't, and if the inspector's not looking at that particular second, then there's a chance to argue or steal a win. And you never ask the punters, even if they're just observing, where anyone had their bets placed. Rule number one, *never* trust a punter!

The training didn't cover things like the nature of the punters. Rich Arab or lonely pensioner, they were all considered the same. Suckers, basically. We would take their money, swap it for counters and not think twice about the real world. We dealt with chips, not lives. It was an unreal world. There were no windows in the casino, no reminder of the outside. No natural light or fresh air, ever. It was always night, dim and smoky. The long shiny red of the women's dresses and the Irish green baize of the roulette tables were the colours of our team in that dark. I have no memory of there being any other colours there. But there were other scenes, behind the lines: like in the canteen-cum-staff-room.

Throughout a shift you would have up to 60 minutes of dealing, a break of 15 minutes, another hour of dealing on another table, and so on. If it was a meal break, or a very quiet time of the day and with a nice pit boss, the break would be a bit longer. Of course, there were other factors that could vary the arrangements. Money, principally. A punter would demand that a dealer either be kept on or sent off early from a game. From my experience, if the player was deemed important enough, wealthy enough, he'd have his way. It didn't happen very often. A bit of gossip for the staff room when it did. Mostly though, when dealers entered the staff room, it was to resume the game of backgammon or cards, turn the next page in a magazine or book or perhaps finish showing off the wedding album or kiddy photos. Have another cup of coffee and try and resist that doughnut, again. Here was normality. Except, because of security reasons, we weren't ever allowed to leave the building during a shift, so on a break there were only two places you could go, the staff room or the loo. Not quite normality.

ANOTHER ASPECT OF THAT ABNORMAL WORLD in the staff room was a strange kind of camaraderie between us (the dealers and other gaming staff) compounded by the peculiarities of the job and an 'us' vs 'them', (the punters), mentality. You weren't supposed to converse with the punters beyond the language of the game, or hang around the tables when it was your break-time. No chance for knowing anything about your customers at all. We just knew that the habitual punters were losers, and our attitude towards them was tinged with disdain.

On a quiet afternoon shift when there were more dealers than punters (when even if there was no-one at your table you still had to spin the wheel, announce and place the 'dolly' on the winning number and keep uttering those key words 'place your bets please') the managers might wander around, keeping up with personnel. There was one manager I had a fairly decent relationship with. Each time we had a chance to chat I'd tell him about the latest 'system' some eager punter had devised for beating the odds. 'Yes', he'd say, 'very interesting, but the books tell a different story. At the end of the year, all those punters, even the seemingly successful ones ... they're all in the red.'

The casino I started in, The Sportsman, was a pretty low-key gambling spot. The Chinese favoured The Golden Nugget, and the high rollers and the status-minded went to The Ritz or The Palm Beach down the Park Lane/Mayfair section of town. (These were people who would never have to worry about collecting two hundred at the Go corner.) At The Sportsman, life was middling. There were the pensioners who came for the socialising and the sandwiches (many women in that category) and bought a stack of 20 chips that lasted them the day. (In those days the chips were a pound a piece.) Otherwise there seemed to be a broad range of age, class and ethnic groups amongst the players there. Mild, social gamblers mostly. So, fairly mild, sometimes sleepy games. When, after you've been dealing for a while and you've mastered the art of clearing a table, when you can do triple somersaults in multiplication and have a complicated bet paid out before the inspector's even looked your way, and can even bring some style to your game; then, you want some action. A game with a bit of excitement—a challenge. Not often at The Sportsman.

That was the job satisfaction involved; becoming a recognisably good dealer, and being stretched by a game. Then they transferred me to Palm Beach. A sumptuous place with high (to page 29)

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We dealt with
chips, not lives.*



The body politic

THE OPENING OF THE CROWN CASINO brought together the most powerful and best-known people in Melbourne society. Even the State Governor felt obliged to attend this, the promotion of a private gaming business.

The only discordant note was the quixotic demonstration by Rachel Griffiths and her friends. As a fond uncle, I had a personal interest in Rachel's protest. But its style also prompted reflection about its public significance.

Business commentators agree that in financial terms, the casino has so far been successful beyond expectations. It already contributes some 15 per cent of state taxes, drawing much of its profits largely from the less wealthy. Its long-term viability, however, is said to depend on attracting a middle class which is reserved or hostile.

Rachel's protest is significant because its spontaneous religious imagery—prophetic gesture of nakedness and crown of thorns—suggests that hostility to the Casino phenomenon is deep rooted. In Australia, only significant events draw spontaneously deeply on the residual religious imagination. The massacre of Port Arthur, for example, affected people so deeply that even those with no religious allegiance found in the church services almost a necessary place in which to express their own response.

There is, of course, no comparison between Port Arthur and the Casino. But opposition to the Casino has continually sought and welcomed religious expression. When Archbishop Rayner spoke of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, his remarks were welcomed. Not only had a religious leader publicly criticised the Casino, but more significantly, he had found appropriately serious imagery in which to voice his criticism. Archbishop Rayner and other christian spokesmen like Tim Costello have been seen to speak for all Victorians and not simply members of the christian churches.

If this is so, it would be unwise to locate the source of opposition to the Casino in the criticism made by diminishing churches, or in a tradition of wowsersism. It would be absurd to think that Rachel was motivated by explicit religious concerns or was led by the nose by churchmen. Nor are most opponents of the Casino opposed to gambling. They

do, however, loathe the way in which it has been made central to the social and financial fabric of a city.

This sense of what makes for a healthy society is fed by deep religious sources, even in people with no formal religious adherence. The protest echoed precisely the style and the content of the prophetic tradition which has nourished Western political ideals.

The prophets of Israel were driven by God to make affronting and offensive gestures in order to show how precarious and empty was an apparently prosperous order. Hosea, for example, was told to marry a prostitute to demonstrate the infidelity at the heart of public life. Ezekiel was ordered to cook bread on human dung to show how unclean his society had become.

These gestures illuminated the human barrenness of a state which bought security and the prosperity of the few at the expense of the poor—the 'widows and orphans'. The prophets attacked an apparently rational economic and political order that was built on the acceptance of human suffering. Any God believed to approve of such a society was an idol.

This has been precisely the burden of criticism of the casino. It is not directed trivially against gambling, but against a political and financial construction of society which benefits the few, encourages the devastation of the vulnerable, and relies on the crumbs that fall from the gambling table to fund the public good.

If the opposition to such a social order is deeply held, it can be expected to express itself in direct protests against politicians who are increasingly believed incompetent to defend the basic public decencies. The growing sanctuary movement to defend the East Timorese asylum seekers may be a straw in the wind.

Certainly, the task of converting middle-class Melbourne to the Casino will be difficult. Many schools and social organisations planning to hold meetings in the Complex, for example, already face an uneasy constituency, and a boycott by committed members.

When the Casino has its tenth birthday party, it may be its investors who are discovered to be uncovered. ■

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



(from page 27) ceilings, chandeliers and antique furniture. Still no windows. Unlike The Sportsman, there would be no little old ladies stealing meat out of other people's sandwiches. Here were Arabs striding through courteous, confined England, robes billowing behind, pouring their oil money on the tables. The games were huge and the wealth was astounding. No quiet time for chats to the manager or jokes with the inspector. Every game was a high pressure game. Thousands of pounds laid down on every spin of the wheel, on every table. Here I heard stories about dealers who disappeared, presumably after collecting hefty tips on big pay-outs. (Tipping of dealers in England, as in Australia, is illegal.) Perhaps also they'd had enough of being a well-dressed bean counter, a slave to the addicts of excess.

Much to the management's surprise, I asked to be transferred back to The Sportsman. Back to quieter pastures and a slightly less surreal, less disturbing view of life. Still, after a year of dealing, I'd had enough. Enough of cycling home through snow at four in the morning (when no trains or buses ran), never having felt so cold or out of sync. with the rest of humanity. Enough of the money god, and people who could ignore a dying fellow in the interest of the next card. That happened at The Sportsman. A blackjack player had a heart attack and the other punters cried 'play on'.

For unskilled workers with a bit of nous it's a job with benefits. No doubt about it, there are opportunities. In England, as here, a good dealer can move up the ranks to become an inspector, pit boss, and even a manager, without having to wait an age. Merit is recognised and rewarded. And again, the unique nature of the job—the 'us' vs 'them' thinking, the unsociable hours of shift work—create a kind of club drive, a special community of belonging.

I FELT LIKE GOING UP TO A DEALER at the Crown Casino and reclaiming that commonality. But now I'm a punter, and the odds are against it. This as busy a gambling house as I've ever seen. (It's a Sunday night.) And without having various casinos that can cater for different status players and game preferences, here the one casino is divided into different sections. So, the Mahogany room, admittance by invitation only, and the Oak room where men must wear jackets. Even there though, the ambience is jarring. For unlike in the London casinos, here there are banks of poker machines in each area, all casting their tawdry sound into an ugly cacophony of klunks. But I knew there wasn't any glamour in this business. I bought a drink at the bar and sat down—here's the best part—at a window. A window overlooking the Yarra; clean-by-night, gently flowing, at her best. Much more the jewel in Melbourne's crown it seemed, at that moment. But why come to a casino to admire the back door? It was the cash flow that was besotting the crowds.

I went downstairs, looking for a quiet-ish game of roulette with a spare seat. I eventually found one and proceeded to spend my \$20 gambling money on a stack of chips. Never having bet on the game—or any other game for that matter—although certainly knowing enough about it, I played cautiously, spending in drips, and on outside bets mostly (with odds of two to one). At the end of my gambling hour I was \$20 richer! But I also took away a sense of the baseness of gambling.

I had forgotten. I had forgotten how incredibly rude and uncivil punters can be. The guy's got \$500 worth of chips in his hands; the ball's spinning and 'no more bets' has already been called. So what? This guy's playing two or three tables at a time and he's in a rush to lose. Don't worry about all the other punters in the way, just barge on through with your fist of cash. I remember them. And the single-mindedness, the possession of human hearts and minds that shrivels life's possibilities to the size of a chip.

And I recognised the contempt in the dealer's face, and understood again the nature of the work, the damage done in this business.

In the two and a half years that I lived in London, I can't recall casino gambling ever being newsworthy. So it surprises me, the degree of social concern that has kept Melbourne's casino so much in the public eye. I, for one, welcome this concern. ■

Sylvia Wharton is a Melbourne-based freelance editor and writer.



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Small business, big risk

IT'S WORTH MORE THAN JUST passing notice that it was the President of the Business Council of Australia, Stan Wallis, who criticised the government in the Budget aftermath for not using the opportunity to articulate strategic economic policy. This is the man whose report on the financial system emphasised the importance of fostering 'competitive neutrality' in the regulatory framework. In other words he loves his market raw. Yet here he is berating Howard and Costello for not doing what they were elected to do: govern.

Two days after Wallis aired his views, Howard promised that the Coalition will seek a mandate for tax reform at the next election (much needed but you fear what we might be offered). While it might be easy to get a rise from Canberra if you criticise it's accounting principles, it's not so easy to goad the Coalition to intervene in other areas. As well as imploring Howard to look at tax, Wallis also asked for a clearly stated vision for industry. With the demise of

ratio with, it is hoped, private money, creating a pool of capital around the \$200 million-dollar mark which would then be spread across a number of funds in the \$30-\$40 million-dollar range. Each fund will invest in a number of high-technology firms that have annual revenue under \$4 million. They will be required to have a minimum of 50 per cent of their investments in early stage and start-up funding.

This last condition recognises that these funds will be run by private sector managers and that non-government investors will be keen to make a good return—particularly as profits will be skewed in their favour. 90 per cent of any return above the repayment of the loan will go to private investors and 10 per cent will go back to the government. Not a bad little earner. This is the incentive to balance the risk that investors might want to avoid by diverting capital away from early stage development toward more secure investment.

The Minister for Industry, Science and Tourism, John Moore, believes that the SBIF will have a better chance of success than previous venture capital initiatives because of the addition of the profit-drive:

'... the investment decisions being made under the SBIF are based entirely on the independent decision-

making of private sector fund managers who are judging investments on the basis of potential commercial return,' Moore says. 'The decisions will not be made on the grounds of political imperative.'

Mr Moore suggests that the SBIF will attract the \$65 million it expects from the private sector as evidenced by over 100 expressions of interest in the scheme, even though they were only called for from this month onwards. The funds will have a 10 year limit so as to provide investors with a time-scale for returns, and their structure will be determined by the managers. All investment, John Moore says, will be in exchange for equity in the investee.

These funds, which are expected to have established themselves, invested and matured in about 3 to 5 years, are the core of John Moore's goal of kick-starting privately-driven venture capital.

It has all the marks of a good plan; in fact

it has overtones of the Victorian Economic Development Corporation which operated on similar principles. John Moore distances himself from such comparisons, as the VEDC, in his mind, was doomed to fail because of the absence of private sector involvement. Yet even he qualifies such remarks by pointing out that venture capital is an inherently risky business—private money can fail as easily as public money.

Peter Sheehan was the architect of the VEDC as head of John Cain's Department of Management and Budget. Despite that experience, he is still convinced that venture capital needs government attention.

You might expect him to be a supporter of publicly-controlled investment however his first preference is for naturally occurring private venture capital, particularly from our big companies. But as we have no such tradition in this country, he sees a rationale for government grant schemes. Their main advantage over John Moore's semi-private system is that the money is available for investment immediately, rather than at some time in the future.

'We're setting up new institutions,' Sheehan says. 'People are going to make proposals and bid, then they're going to get access to some money, and then they'll get their processes in place ... so it's sort of 18 months probably before we give any money to any struggling businesses.'

'At least they're doing something about it but it's hard to be sure how effective it will be—whether it will just be half a dozen groups that take a long while to do anything much or something really substantial comes out of it.'

John Moore admits that the SBIF is a bit of a punt over the long term. However what Peter Sheehan would have had the Government do is amend existing arrangements to provide some continuity.

'One of the things I would like to have seen is something we never do in Australia and that is building on our past experience. We have had a whole lot of disconnected attempts to solve the same problem.'

'Syndicated R & D, which didn't start out to be such, was operating as a reasonably effective venture capital program for certain sorts of firms. The problem was that costs were accelerating and there had to be a company to put the tax losses into from which the tax deductions could be sourced

'What these companies need is often not just money but management advice, nursing and hand-holding. The best overseas venture-capital companies are a very experienced mix of all that.' —Peter Sheehan

syndication, the retraction of tax concessions available for research and development, and the carving up of DIFF at the last budget, the business community was looking for something solid to take their place.

It is easy to suspect that the Government's only plan for industry is low inflation and industrial relations reform; however they are making an attempt to round the rock of industry policy that has wrecked many a scheme in the past: venture capital for high technology projects.

At the end of March, John Howard announced the establishment of the Small Business Innovation Fund (SBIF) in his small business statement. Modelled on the long standing Small Business Investment Company program in the U.S. and Israel's Yozma Fund, it will provide a mixture of private and public money for investment in commercially viable high-technology. The scheme will offer \$130 million on a 2:1

so it was restricted to companies that had tax losses—it was fairly complicated.

'What I would have done is had a scheme like syndication but put a cap on it [to stop costs spiralling] and make it competitive on a project by project basis.'

The one area where Sheehan feels the SBIF could fall short of the mark is in management skills. Both with the manage-

With the demise of syndication, the retraction of tax concessions available for research and development, and the carving up of DIFF at the last Budget, the business community was looking for something solid to take the place of those incentives.

ment of the funds themselves and the guiding and assistance given to the small companies invested in. This is a problem which he says is in part responsible for the failure of similar schemes in the past.

'What these companies need is often not just money but management advice, nursing and hand-holding. The best overseas venture-capital companies are a very experienced mix of all that. They're not fund managers in the normal sense, venture capitalists are a very different breed—they've got to be very close to their companies.'

'The critical issue there is whether the fund managers have the interests and expertise of genuine venture capital.'

This is a point picked up by the Opposition spokesman for Industry, Simon Crean. During Labor's time in government related problems afflicted schemes with a similar thrust, like the Management Investment Companies in the '80s, grants and syndication.

'What you really need is a stable of people who have a good understanding of the technology but also a good sense of marketing and sound business practice', Crean says.

'That's what we tried to do through things like the pooled development funds approach, getting them to specialise in certain areas and attract the management expertise. But what you kept running up against was that people with the great idea were reluctant to hand over equity and were wary of the exposure to debt.'

Simon Crean thinks that the SBIF is in itself a good thing, however it is not supported by other measures that have been cut since the change of government, which

he says has lost the R & D budget nearly a billion dollars. He is particularly disappointed with the end to syndication.

'They abolished syndication under the guise that it was a rort, but at no stage did they show where the rorts occurred.'

This being so, Crean would have been happy to promote the capping of syndication and other amendments as alternatives to the total restructure of industry R & D policy. Yet with change close to being a *fait accompli*—the bill is yet to pass—he says the Opposition will not oppose the scheme in principle and will include it in future policies, as long as the appropriate checks and balances are in place to ensure the money is invested as intended.

'What we're saying is that it doesn't go far enough ... I accept the need for certainty and that's the criticism we've been levelling at this government—it's the government that promised to keep all these programs then turned around and cut them.'

'But we won't be doing it [policy formulation] in a way that creates uncertainty, what we'll be doing is looking for a more diverse approach in the way we encourage R & D.'

What is novel about the SBIF scheme is its hybrid nature: a government venture-capital initiative that will be privately backed and run. John Moore's desire to have this program succeed and foster the venture capital industry we've never had is matched by his faith that the rigours of the market will give it every chance. But the history of its American parent, the Small Business Investment Company program, suggests that the market can be a terrible Indian-giver.

The SBIC began in 1959 born of fears that the Soviets' technology would get the jump on American know-how. It's central plank is soft loans from the government but its investment principles are the same. A bull market in the 60s saw the program thrive in a cash-ready environment, however a slump in the 70s and new rules governing the investment of retirement funds hit the pro-

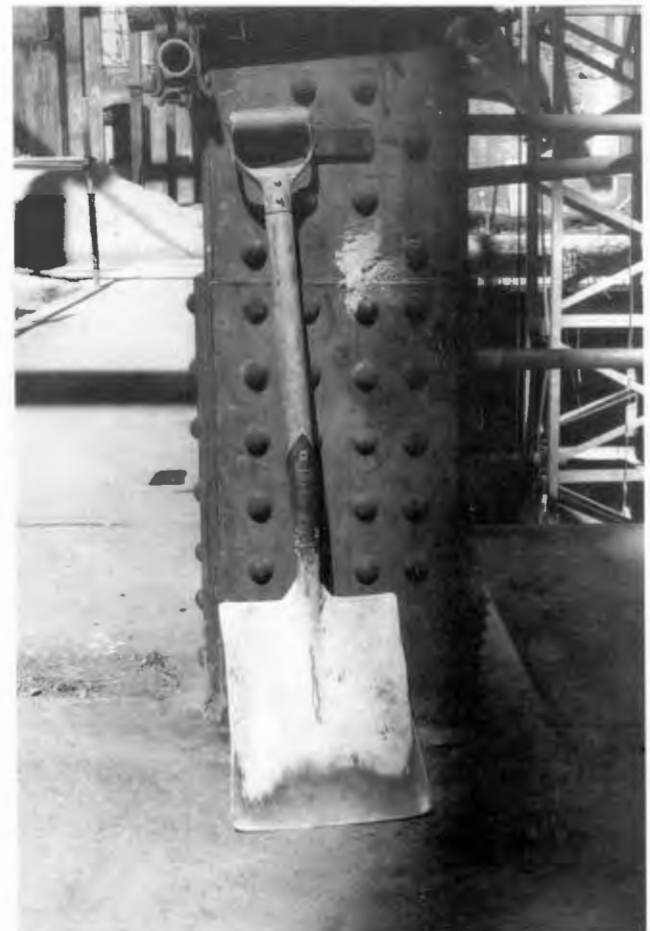
gram hard. Only \$10 million of new money was raised in 1975. The 1980s witnessed a similar cycle—growth followed by collapse. By 1991 the U.S. venture-capital market had lost about 60 per cent of the \$4 billion it had in 1987.

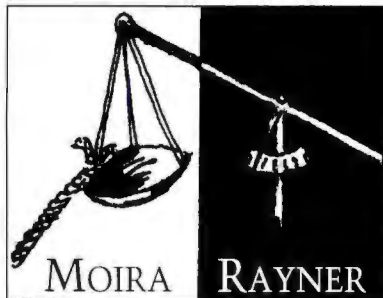
Given that the time-frame for the initial stage of the SBIF is three to five years, we are presented with an extended infancy. Indeed, the program could end up delinquent if the market is neglectful. In the U.S. experience, the SBIC scheme was well established and so recovered well from its hiccups. Such misfortunes over the next decade or so could kill off our version.

No one argues that we need to commercialise technology innovation. Talk of great ideas going overseas for the lack of local support has become as much a cultural assumption like cold pies and warm beer at the footy. The SBIF may be able help fill the void but it will need to be run well and receive full government support so that some of the risks pay off.

Perhaps what's needed is a strategic vision from Canberra. ■

Jon Greenaway is *Eureka Street's* assistant editor





Falls the shadow

IFIRST CAME TO KNOW Carmen Lawrence about ten years ago, when she chaired the Child Sexual Abuse Taskforce, in Perth, with me. I thought she was intelligent, informed, caring, and a visionary. She handled the subject, strong opinions and lively members (as I was), remarkably sensitively.

I was therefore surprised and disappointed, when in 1992, as WA premier, she supported abominable, punitive, juvenile sentencing laws because her government hoped to win a few votes in a very close election. I criticised her for it then, and have not changed my view now. I know that she would have known that punitive, mandatory prison sentences would not cut crime, nor deaths in high-speed police chases of stoned young car thieves. I know that she knew those laws flouted the special rights guaranteed by the convention on the Rights of the Child. It was a political choice. It didn't win the election, either. It started a bidding war for harsher 'law-and-order' among Perth's political tribes: today, 200 Western Australian children—mostly wretchedly deprived Aboriginal boys—face mandatory jail terms because they have been twice convicted under that law's successor. The WA Chief Justice, David Malcolm, recently deplored the lack of any progress in preventing children's crime. It will take decades to reintroduce some balance into that debate.

Now Lawrence has been charged with perjury—by WA police, not by the DPP, who chose to stand aloof. At issue is her state of mind about the tabling of the Easton petition (another bit of dirty politics).

In 1995, a *Bulletin* Morgan Poll 91 per cent of us said that we believed that politicians are not usually truthful; 66 per cent that they sometimes 'twist the truth to suit themselves'. But Lawrence should not be sacrificed on the altar of our contempt for all politicians.

Nor is Lawrence's position at all like Mal Colston's. Lawrence is neither grasping nor in possession of a hide like the Senator's. She is plainly filled with regret, not self-pity. She believes that she did not lie to parliament, and that is what she told the Marks Commission, knowing that it had been called to cripple her political career. She still believes that her recollection is

genuine. The only similarity between the two is the pursuit of the mob.

Our contempt for politicians is a sign of a crisis in faith in democracy. The citizens feel bullied, ignored, and deceived. They have a point.

Our democratic institutions have been quietly gutted over the last three decades. The formal structures and divisions of power, the institutions and the constitutional mantras about the checks and balances on power, are hollow. Parliament is supposed to rein in the excesses of the executive; the Ministers and public servants should apply parliament's laws and poli-



cies according to law as much as any individual; and account to the parliament between elections; and even the courts are supposed to be 'independent' courts, though they are under threat and under-funded. None function as we like to pretend, nor as our written constitutions say.

Governors do not rule, whether in the name of an Australian Queen, or at all: Prime Ministers, Premiers, Ministers and public servants do. They, not Parliament, determine legislative policy. The parliament does not even choose who will form that government: the political parties, who choose the candidates, set the platform, run

the campaigns, and (ultimately) set the government policy after the election, do, yet they are not mentioned in any Australian constitution, and are as unrepresentative, unregulated and non-consultative as parliaments themselves.

In parliament, the debates are mostly what Don Dunstan called, 'largely useless political rhetoric'. We seldom hear thoughtful debate about the public good. Decisions are made elsewhere, communicated loftily to the public by ministers and technocrats. Obstacles to the achievement of government will are deemed illegitimate, outside the 'mandate' of the three-or-four-yearly election results. Critics are silenced, watchdogs chained. The patches over the holes in government accountability—the ombudsmen and commissioners, statutory reviews and FOI—are all dependent on government favour for their survival.

The public knows it is out of the loop of democratic conversation. It is the resultant deep sense of disenfranchisement and exploitation that gives rise to the politics of hate. It is a seduction, eagerly embraced, to blame someone else—feminists, migrants, aboriginals, sinister international forces—for feeling bad. Manipulative politicians feed off this, portraying themselves as our champions, spokespersons for the 'silenced majority', pitting one resentful minority (the wage-paying middle class) against another (equally disadvantaged, or more). When John Howard said, in one of his 'headland' speeches in June 1995, that:

There is a frustrated mainstream in Australian today which sees government decisions increasingly driven by the noisy, self-interest clamour of powerful vested interest groups with scant regard for the national interest. Many Australian in the mainstream feel utterly powerless to complete with such groups.

—he appealed to our swelling resentment, as much as the Member for Oxley does, with her One Nation platform based on disdain for blacks and distrust for migrants. But they did not exclude 'us' from political conversation: the parties, the mandarins and the media have. Populist support for the erosion—or, in the case of



native title holders, extinction—of minority rights is built on this gut feeling of betrayal by sinister forces.

We are furious with Senator Colston, but we do not, I think, put Lawrence in the same company. Nor, as one paper suggested, is there any parallel with Brian Burke, another former WA premier who had problems with money. He got away with it, for a while, because parliament was not functioning. He became king, for a few years. WA Inc was accepted, because it was necessary to bypass the completely intransigent upper house of the WA parliament. The damaging consequences for public probity were vividly exposed by the Royal Commission into WA Inc, which Lawrence called. The Marks Royal Commission into Lawrence's memory, called by Richard Court, merely reminded us that it takes more than a retired judge to make an administrative Inquiry 'judicial', as in a court.

There are far worse deceptions than the retrospectively self-righteous or self-justificatory recollections of an un-minuted Cabinet discussion, or spending someone else's money on personal concerns. Why are there no 'royal commissions' into misleading statements to parliament about letters from foreign powers not being sent, or revelations of conflicts of interest by ministers, or into the flagrant lies told in election campaigns—not slashing the public service, not selling off public assets, not driving freeways through fragile national forest, about preserving legal aid, promoting human rights for people with disabilities and the aged, and even protecting the ABC?

The essential value of a civil society is what Ronald Dworkin called 'equal concern and respect for persons', a moral code. We sense that our parliamentary representatives lack moral standards, yet they reflect our own. Retribution by retrospective Inquisitions is no substitute for effective democratic government. It must be easier for governments to do the right thing, than the wrong.

When Carmen Lawrence goes to court her ALP colleagues will probably let her go alone, and hope she goes quietly. No doubt they will hope she is acquitted, but her career is stone dead now, anyway. I will stand beside her. We all should. The demon to be confounded is the corruption at the heart of our democracy, not in hers. ■

Moira Rayner is a lawyer and freelance journalist. 100252.3247@compuserve.com is her e-mail address.

T A whole lot of hot air

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S GREENHOUSE POLICY is a particular slap in the face for the nation's science community.

On the basis of a single contentious computer model developed at the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE), the Government argues that, as a major exporter of energy, Australia will be unduly disadvantaged by blanket targets to limit the emission of Greenhouse gases to the 1990 level by the year 2004. Europe, Japan and even the US have signalled a willingness to accede to these targets. And a recent paper from the Australia Institute argues that Australia is better placed to meet the targets than most OECD nations, because it has more slack to tighten in terms of energy efficiency and more options with regard to alternative sources of energy.

But so strident has been the bleating of Australia at the official world forums on climate change, that it has succeeded in having discussion of individual targets placed on the agenda for the next meeting in Kyoto in November. Archimedes suspects that agreement to discuss the issue is a prelude to Australia being pilloried. The plea to go easy on Australia as a special case must be particularly galling for the nation's scientists—the meteorologists and applied physicists who have contributed much to development of the Greenhouse case, the researchers who have helped to put Australia at the forefront of those using solar power and other forms of renewable energy, and all the applied scientists who are working at giving Australia a technological edge in world trade.

By arguing that Australia is deserving of special treatment, the Government is suggesting that Greenhouse is neither a serious nor urgent problem—a position which does nothing for our standing with our Pacific island neighbours. Many Australian scientists, such as those at the Co-operative Research Centre (CRC) for Southern Hemisphere Meteorology and the CSIRO Division of Atmospheric Physics, have worked hard to forge the case for Greenhouse, in part so that the country could have time to prepare for the impact of climate change.

Last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded for the first time that 'the balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate'. This assessment was put together by more than 200 contributing scientists from 40 countries. The corollary is that humans can actually do something about climate change—but not yet, says the Australian government. Many other researchers at universities, the CSIRO and at least three CRCs, are investing large amounts of time and money trying to develop ways of generating and using energy more efficiently and cleanly, and reducing emissions of Greenhouse gases. The view of the Australian Government shows little faith in their ability.

But what really staggers Archimedes is the lack of confidence in technologists implied by the policy. Even if you don't believe a word of what the greenies and conservationists say about the Greenhouse effect, the fact is that all the heavyweight economies in the developed world have decided to sign up for the Greenhouse targets, to invest in modern approaches to production, and in technologies which reduce Greenhouse emissions.

Special treatment on Greenhouse targets insulates Australian industry from competition just as surely as any tariff regime. The result will be that Australian (and New Zealand) industry will be caught in a time warp. Such a change in tack provides 'clever countries' with the opportunity to move in, to develop technology to promote change, to renovate industry for a new era. But that takes vision of the kind they support in 'clever countries'. In Australia the Federal Government is putting the hobbles back on industry. And the message to all those researchers who are working hard to give Australia a technological edge is catastrophic.

Yet we can compete—and at the very highest levels. Just recently, for instance, a group of Monash mechanical engineers working in collaboration with the CRC for Advanced Composite Structures developed the complex software and technology to use carbon fibre in commercial aircraft wings—the first time a composite material has been applied to the structural elements of passenger planes. The technology could well give Australian aerospace companies the edge in tendering for work manufacturing parts for the world's big aircraft manufacturers. And the spinoffs do not stop there—because the technology is applicable to the car and plastics industries.

What these researchers need is Government encouragement, not whingeing about how unfair life is. The country that was once generous, open and civilised, now comes across as mean, isolationist and just plain stupid. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

What the eye doesn't see

TWO OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST ENDURING PIECES of environmental legislation have been Victoria's *Land Conservation Council Act* and the New South Wales *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act*. The Liberal government of Henry Bolte introduced the first in 1970. The Labor government of Neville Wran introduced the second in 1979.

Now both are under threat by governments with the same brand-names, if very different contents. Jeff Kennett wants to abolish the Land Conservation Council which has overseen the expansion of national parks and reserves in Victoria from 4 per cent to 13 per cent of the State. Bob Carr is proposing the most significant amendments to New South Wales's planning legislation in almost 20 years. New Liberal and New Labor have equally little regard for their forebears' creations.

One of the similarities between these proposals is that they both will reduce public rights of participation which government made so much of in the 1970s but which are now decidedly out of fashion across the country. Over the last few years the rhetoric of 'participatory democracy' has almost entirely disappeared from public life as governments have increasingly emphasised the importance of efficiency and expediting decisions. At the same time the legislation enshrining public rights has been curtailed, particularly where these provisions created rights of substance.

This process has been all the more remarkable for occurring without any hard evidence that public or 'third-party' rights, as they are often known, have either been widely abused or caused significant delays. In fact, the few existing statistics suggest the opposite.

For example, less than 10 per cent of appeals under South Australia's *Planning Act* between 1982 and 1993 were brought by opponents of development—hardly a burden on the system. Moreover, 31 per cent of these appeals were of such substance that they resulted in the State's Planning Appeal Tribunal overturning the original decisions made by local councils, while the Tribunal modified the original decision in another 43.5 per cent of these appeals.

In other words, the Planning Tribunal saw merit in the third party's arguments in almost 75 per cent of cases.

For the Kennett government, however, rejection of public participation has become a matter of both style and substance. Emboldened by its complete control of both Houses of Parliament, it typically introduced the Bill abolishing the Land Conservation Council without any public notice, let alone

public discussion. Except for a few public servants, no-one knew that the Land Conservation Council was to be replaced by a new body, misleadingly called the Environment Conservation Council, as if it would have more regard for the environment than its predecessor.

The great strength of the Land Conservation Council has been its investigative and participatory processes. Each time it has examined a different part of the public estate in Victoria, it has begun by preparing a detailed report describing the area under investigation. All members of the public have then had 60 days in which to contest the accuracy of this research report. The Conservation Council has then prepared a series of draft recommendations as to what should happen to the area. Members of the public have then had another two months to respond before the Council submitted its final recommendations to the government.

While this process has not put an end to public conflict over areas such as East Gippsland, it has both increased the amount of information in the public arena and provided a structure and context for public debate. As noted by a former chairman of the Council, David Scott, the Act has helped Victoria to resolve disputes over public land 'with less cost and conflict, and with a greater degree of certainty' than any other part of Australia.

This provision for public participation will now be quartered. Instead of members of the public twice having 60 days for comment—a period often necessary given the technical complexity of the issues involved—Kennett's Bill obliges the new Council to give members of the public just 30 days' notice that it will be preparing a new report.

This opportunity for public comment may take place in a vacuum as the Bill simply stipulates that members of the public be informed of the subject to be examined by the new Council. Once the Council has prepared its recommendations, they will have no right to respond.

So what did Victoria's Minister for Conservation and Land Management, Marie Tehan, mean when as part of introducing the new legislation she declared: 'No honourable member could fail to be aware of the very significant changes which have taken place ... in institutionalising the role of the community in the development of public policy'. 'Institutionalisation' suggests the embedding of public rights. Yet when the Kennett government first won office, it promptly curtailed third-party rights under Victoria's *Planning and Environment Act*.

While members of the public nominally retained their long-standing right to object and appeal against all development decisions, the government slashed the public's rights to be notified of development applications. In doing so, it effectively prevented them from objecting or appealing. What you do not know about, you cannot oppose.

What then did Tehan have in mind when she boasted about the institutionalisation of the community in the development of public policy? She gave two examples. One was Victoria's *Catchment and Land Protection Act* of 1994 which she described as providing 'for substantial and regionally-based community input into the management of land and water resources and advice to government'. The other was Victoria's *Coastal Management Act 1995* which, she boasted, will 'ensure that the community has a voice in determining policy for management of these environmentally sensitive areas'.

These Acts give members of the public no participatory rights at all. The only provisions to come close provide—when the State's new Coastal Council and Regional Coastal Boards prepare Victoria's Coastal Strategy and Action Plans—that they must consult any members of the public whose interests they consider likely to be affected. *But it is left to the Council and Boards to make this judgment.* While the Council and Boards are empowered to invite public comment on their draft strategy and plans, they are not obliged to do so.

Otherwise all the Catchment and Coastal Acts provide for is a plethora of Ministerial appointees to Victoria's Catchment and Coastal Councils and Regional Catchment and Coastal Boards. In each case, the Acts set out criteria for the composition of these bodies.

For example, the *Catchment Act* provides that in appointing its Council, the Minister must look for 'experience and knowledge of land protection, water resource management, primary industry, environmental protection and conservation and local government'. The *Coastal Act* similarly provides that up to 6 of the 11 members of its Council are to have experience in conservation, tourism, recreation, commerce and so forth. But such formulae are never capable of either stopping political patronage or ensuring a broad cross-section of public opinion, and there are already suggestions that the new

Councils and Boards are short on environmental concern and long on Liberal Party membership.

BECAUSE OF BOB CARR'S BARE MAJORITY in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly and lack of control of the Legislative Council, he could not afford to be as cavalier as Jeff Kennett when trying to modify the New South Wales *Environmental Planning Act*. Instead his government began by issuing a series of green papers for public discussion. Then it released a white paper and draft legislation for further comment. A Bill is expected soon.

What is most striking about the Labor government's proposals is that the existing legislation is notorious for the

inadequacy of its provisions for public participation. In marked contrast to *Victoria's Planning Act*, the *Environmental Planning Act* in New South Wales has always confined the public's rights to object and appeal to a narrow list of 'designated developments'. The result has been that members of the public are entitled to try to protect their local environment in the face of noxious industries such as abattoirs or concrete batching works but they have no rights when confronted by a new shopping centre or high-rise apartments even if the impact on their amenity is just as profound.

Far from repairing this deficiency, the Carr government proposes to reduce public rights even further by expanding the Minister for Planning's power to take charge of 'State significant development'. According to the government's white paper, the current mechanisms for dealing with projects of State significance are 'confusing for both the applicant and the

community'. But as noted by Sydney's Environmental Defender's Office, 'the draft Bill merely creates another two ways of dealing with a project of State significance—if anything, *adding* to the confusion'.

The key consequence of the new provisions is that the Minister will be able to approve proposals of State significance without public consultation or public inquiry even though the very scale of these proposals means that they will have a major impact on the public at large.

Many other aspects of the draft Bill are just as troubling. For example, the government is proposing to shift several crucial provisions of the Act—including those governing public notification of designated developments—to regulations which are as yet non-existent. Even when these regulations are made they will be much more vulnera-

ble to amendment than their statutory predecessors.

The government also wants to reduce the criteria that councils must consider when assessing development applications. But while the existing list of 31 criteria is manifestly excessive, their replacement with just five bland, generalised conditions is equally unwarranted and will make it much harder for members of the public to overturn development approvals in the courts. By repealing a raft of provisions requiring decision-makers to give reasons, the Bill will similarly make these decisions much less susceptible to public challenge.

While Kennett's Bill will almost certainly be enacted without amendment, the political situation in New South Wales means that Carr's proposal is more open to change. But if these proposals are implemented, members of the public will have even less opportunity to influence what happens to their environment. A system already biased towards developers will become even more so and the old adage, 'vote early, vote often', will gain new salience because once election day has passed, there will be few rights to be heard for another four years. ■

Tim Bonyhady is a member of the ANU's Urban Research Program. His books include *Places Worth Keeping: Conservationists, Politics and Law*.



Left out

ASK THE AVERAGE PERSON under thirty to name a hero of the Labor Left and the chances are that the answer will be Gough Whitlam—which is ironic, given that Whitlam is a member of the right wing of the party.

Those figures on the Left who did bestride the national political stage, such as Tom Uren and Jim Cairns, are now two generations removed from the front line. Not only has the political struggle since their day failed to throw up comparable contemporary figureheads, but the Left faction within the ALP is at a low ebb. What does it stand for, what is its vision? An opinion poll on such questions would see the don't-knows win a landslide victory. So, whatever happened to the Labor Left?

If there was ever a time for the Left to reassert itself, the aftermath of Labor's disastrous election result last year should have been it. With the Liberals slashing and burning across the public service, the ABC and the tertiary sector, and the ALP forced into a period of self-appraisal, there was a singular opportunity for the Left to fling down a challenge to the party's rightward trajectory. There were critics to be sure, but all were at pains to make it clear that no one was interested in declaring all-out factional war. Lindsay Tanner, MHR for Melbourne and one of the most intellectually assertive members of the Left's 1990s intake, entered the debate very early on, telling *The Australian* that no one should expect the Left to retreat to the barricades. That was the 1970s response and the 1990s Labor Left was a very different beast.

Such a sea change in the nature and self-perception of the Labor Left has taken place in remarkably short order. In 1980, Greg Crough, Ted Wheelwright and Ted Wilshire edited a Penguin paperback, *Australia and World Capitalism*, which brought together the ideas of various luminaries of a broad Left. It concluded with a reprint of a Labor Party pamphlet by Bob Connell which warned of a choice between socialism or barbarism. Within three years, many of the

contributors were happily aiding and abetting a Hawke government which, while maybe not barbaric, convincingly steered clear of anything most people would understand as socialist.

Here was the Left's dilemma in a nutshell. On the one hand it believed that fundamental change relied on parliamentary majorities and parliamentary action, on the other it was trapped within a parliamentary party where it did not have the numbers. In the Whitlam years it tried to ginger up the pace, and lost the Cairns deputy prime-ministership for its pains. In the 1980s, it decided to take a slower and more circuitous route. While a more combative wing of the Labor Left lived on in the party apparatus, increasingly centred around the leadership of Kim Carr in Victoria, the parliamentary Left took the Brian Howe road of gentle engagement.

Supporters of this approach would argue that it achieved its successes. Tanner puts it this way: 'The victories of the Labor Left are rarely perceived but our defeats are up in lights. For instance, Mabo. That didn't happen because the dominant forces like Keating decided we had to do something. The foundation on which that was built was a climate of opinion which had been driven mostly by the Left over many years which finally reached a point of dominance. The Access to Justice strategy—ten new legal centres across Australia, services for women, etcetera. The driving force with an Attorney-General on the Right was a junior minister on the Left.'

JENNY MACKLIN, WHO WORKED for Howe for five years before becoming MHR for the Victorian seat of Jagajaga in March 1996, also defends the record of engagement: 'The Left must engage and be part of the debates. If you don't get into the debates you have no influence whatsoever.' Now the shadow Minister for Social Security, Aged and Family Services, she points to the solid defence of Medicare and policy advances on dental services as evidence of the Left's impact under Hawke and Keating.

But the price of such victories was that the Left had to play its full part in a series of

measures that many of its supporters considered unfortunate, even shameful. John Langmore, who resigned last year as MHR for the ACT seat of Fraser, admits: 'Very few people in the Left challenged the economic framework of what happened—and the economic framework did great damage, as with high unemployment from 1989 to 1991. It wasn't necessary for Australia to lead the way into the recession or for it to be so severe but the Left ministers generally didn't challenge it. Some of us really tried. A small minority kept those issues alive and were victimised. I was kept out of the ministry by Keating quite explicitly.'

The Left's bid for mainstream credibility meant that it prosecuted much of the argument for the Accord within the union movement, even though it was to mean a sharp slump in real incomes for rank-and-file members. The Left played its full part in dismembering the Builders' Labourers' Federation and isolating the airline pilots' union—both punished for a militancy that embarrassed ALP strategists. As ministers, Gerry Hand presided over the vilification of the boat people and their internal exile to the holding camp at Port Hedland, Nick Bolkus deported Chinese boat people, refusing to accept Beijing's one-child policy as a form of persecution, and Brian Howe abolished the under-18 dole.

The Left's conscience twitched with Hawke's announcement that Australia would send frigates to join the war against Iraq in 1990-91. As Langmore puts it: 'Eight Left members abstained from voting in the House—you can get expelled for that. They took a big risk.' But Hawke could afford to be magnanimous. In virtually every other respect he had the Left where he wanted it. As Langmore admits, Brian Howe, the Left's caucus leader 'consciously decided that he would work within the parameters set by Keating and Treasury'.

The Left's decision to serve, dutifully, an ALP government that was trailblazing economic rationalism in this country was



not just a matter of expediency or caution. It reflected what is probably the Left's biggest long-term problem, its growing inability to carve out a specific and coherent ideological space within political life. When Tanner came into politics as a Labor student at Melbourne University in 1974, the battle lines between Left and Right within the labour movement were clearly drawn.

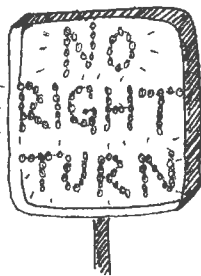
'In the 1970s politics in the labour movement was very heavily influenced by the Cold War. That Cold War framework didn't only extend to who you supported in Nicaragua. It had influences that permeated throughout the whole set of issues. Obviously uranium mining, and US bases. But even domestic and national issues would be influenced by people's support for or opposition to the AMWU [metalworkers' union], which just happened to be Communist Party influenced ... That battle's over. The end result is that whereas in the first half of the '80s you had a nice simple dividing line it's no longer the case.'

This rapprochement is clearly linked to two international phenomena, one being the collapse of Stalinism, the other the collapse of Keynesianism. For decades, even those on the Labor Left who abhorred and publicly criticised the one-party states in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe nurtured within their political psyche the idea that somehow, somewhere, there was something that could be politely called 'actually existing socialism'.

When the Wall tumbled down, so did the motivation of much of the Left—a small exception being those on the far Left who had argued throughout that socialism was not defined by state control but workers' democracy. Communist parties around the world died of a broken heart, and those who had looked to their intellectual lead were left bereft.

THE CPA USED TO BE the brains of the outfit in terms of the Left in Australia, because the Left of the ALP was invariably involved in numbers battles,' says Tanner. 'Its demise has been a problem, a serious problem. The Left has gone through a period where it's been essentially reactive.'

Just when they were at their most vulnerable, the Left discovered that their other main prop, Keynesian state intervention, was also becoming less respectable. *Australia and World Capitalism* opened with a statement that the future of mankind



'can no longer be left to...the so-called marketplace'. Today it is a rare creature in Labor's ranks who is prepared to assault trust in the market so bluntly. While a book like Will Hutton's *The State We're In*, which savaged the Thatcherite experience, might win admirers, its prescriptions are still securely within the bounds of the mixed economy. For the social democratic Left, a softening at the edges, a judicious use of government funding to complement the private sector, is about the most on offer.

Tanner, who is happy to call himself either a left social democrat or a democratic socialist, sums it up: 'The Left has gradually come to terms with the floating of the dollar, deregulation, reduction of protection. I'm essentially an internationalist by instinct. I was writing stuff critical of Wheelwright in the mid-'80s. The sort of view they put is now like a Briton in the 1830s ranting about what will we do against enclosures. The recipe of 20 years ago is no longer all that relevant. [But] the Left is still basically opposed to privatisation and instinctively to deregulation.'

Langmore is prickly at accusations that the Left has lost the 'vision thing', pointing to his co-authored book, *Work For All: Full Employment in the Nineties*, its attacks on the 'economic fundamentalists' and its proposals for cuts to defence spending, a tax on foreign exchange transactions, and a modest increase in public spending in labour-intensive social services. Yet its starting point is still firmly grounded in the understanding that 'markets provide the framework for the economy, but they require the balancing influence of government regulation and of publicly funded community services and infrastructure to improve, not only equity, but also efficiency'. It's a far cry from socialism or barbarism.

So what is it that the Left can claim as its own? What values can it stake out and defend against its own inner-party rivals and the Coalition? For Macklin the Left 'still comes from a very strong social justice perspective—a perspective of building communities as opposed to user pays'. For Tanner the old class structures are in decay, the Cold War certainties are in the dustbin of history—what remains is 'the fundamental difference that lies at the core of all political discourse in our society—the group versus individualism'.

As positions go, neither are such bad or

difficult ones to defend. The Left's problem continues to be, however, translating that concept into practical politics. It needs to convince both current and former Labor voters that there is an alternative to the economic rationalist policies that drove so many of the low-paid and unemployed first into the arms of the Coalition and then on into the grasp of Pauline Hanson. Yet there have been no signs so far, more than a year into the Howard government, that the Left has something different to say.

Pauline Hanson's maiden speech was greeted by a deafening silence from the Labor benches, both back and front. As the debate on her position continues, the Labor Left has been no more willing to come out and risk upsetting potential voters with a defence of multiculturalism than has their leadership. It would seem there is no distinctive Left position on job losses at BHP or threats to union rights in Western Australia.

When the Liberals announced the sale of three airport leases in May, the Left was silent—it had supported such a move at the 1994 ALP conference in Hobart. Even more shocking was the support for vouchers for higher education expressed by Left shadow Minister Peter Baldwin. This writer remembers when vouchers were no more than a fond dream among the zealot wing of Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives.

Historically, the Left has always drawn its strength by standing against the stream, by risking offence to respectable opinion, and by supporting those workers or community groups that dare to struggle. The Left's leverage within the ALP has never come from well-crafted documents but from a willingness to be the voice of those who resist.

As Tanner points out, the prominence and political weight of the likes of Uren and Cairns came from the mass movement against the Vietnam War. If the Left turns its back on the protesters of today, it loses any ability to shift the debate. Yet that is the path down which it appears to be heading.

If Lindsay Tanner were to go back to Melbourne University today as the 18-year-old he once was, an 18-year-old who wanted to change the world, would he embrace the ALP? 'I probably wouldn't join. Why would I want to be in Labor?' That's the conundrum the Labor Left has to solve, or risk co-option and political extinction. ■

David Glanz is a freelance journalist.



Crumbs from high table

Finishing School for Blokes: College Life Exposed,

Peter Cameron, Allen & Unwin, 1997. ISBN 1 86448 134 X. RRP \$16.95.

THE SENIOR COMMON ROOM is bustling. Bright lights give the room the appearance of a stage set. I am trying to open a bottle of wine, as a large video camera behind my shoulder records the event. The corkscrew breaks off in the cork. I give up and let the Dean liberate the wine.

A crew from *Sixty Minutes* is filming a 'High Table' formal dinner for a program on Peter Cameron, the Principal of St Andrew's College, University of Sydney. Cameron, a Presbyterian minister, has been charged with heresy. The bell rings and we troop upstairs to the Dining Hall. Upstairs my academic gown brushes past a flimsily-erected lamp and brings it crashing to the floor. The students give a brief cheer. I didn't know I had such a talent for slapstick. Thanks to the camera crew there is an even-more-than-usual air of unreality surrounding the formal dinner.

I first met the Reverend Dr Peter Cameron before becoming a tutor-in-residence at St Andrew's College in 1992. He was engaging, and good at putting one at ease. He could even be described as charismatic; he seemed to promise so much.

He had attended the same school as James Bond (not Sean Connery) and had had three careers before leaving Scotland to become Principal at St Andrew's. He had been a solicitor, an academic, and a Presbyterian minister. He seemed both wholly suited to, and far too good for, St Andrew's College. To begin with, he was part of the Church; St Andrew's was—nominally at least—a Presbyterian college. As he showed me around the College that day he pointed out the portrait of Samuel Angus, Professor of New Testament at the College's Theological Hall (1914-44). 'He has pride of place', he said. Angus had also been accused of heresy (though he died before a trial began). This was at least 18 months before Peter's trial. Cameron was found guilty, and he subsequently resigned from his ministry. These experiences are detailed in *Heretic* (1994). In *Finishing School for Blokes* Cameron writes about the events which led to his second resignation, from St Andrew's College.

There are two main aspects to *Finishing School for Blokes*. The first (and most sensational exposé) is the behaviour of the students. The second, and real reason for Cameron's resignation, is the nature of the College Council and how it led to an argument over the college becoming co-educational.

The student 'culture' is described by Cameron as revolving around 'beer, chicks and footy'. Students engage in massive drinking binges and such delightful pursuits as spew competitions, the 'Walkabout' (being dropped in the bush and having to make your own way back), and the perpetuation of the seemingly-ineradicable 'fresher' system in which freshers are ritualistically degraded so that they may become 'humble' and therefore 'one of us'.

As Principal, Cameron took a lenient view on student behaviour. He is proud of not viewing students as the enemy or a necessary evil, as he claims most other college masters do. He argues that College isn't a cage, a Principal isn't a headmaster. But there is no *tertium quid* in Cameron's thinking about students and regulation. For instance, while agreeing that a 48-hour drinking binge is not a good thing, he believes the only way to avoid such behaviour is to have a dry college (an oxymoron, as he notes). But surely there is a middle way. One need not ban drinking to ensure students don't so heroically over-consume.

CAMERON BELIEVES THAT A non-interventionist policy with regard to students' behaviour is necessary for the experience of being at college:

The essential difference between the College and the University as it is now, is that in the College the students get an all-round education while in the University they learn about their subject. The two of course should not be incompatible, but they are incompatible if you are one of the nine-to-five students, and regard your lectures and seminars and exams as the only important thing in life and treat the College as simply a place to live.

This strikes me as disingenuous, and the reference to treating 'the College as simply a place to live' confusingly blurs the distinction first set up. In any case, Cameron's argument is undermined by his other comments about the College. Here, as elsewhere, he seems to be writing idealistically. Certainly the cultureless culture and the misogyny are not presented as parts of 'an all-round education'. And it is the Andrewsman who is later found to suffer from the unfortunate delusion that exams are the most important thing in a tertiary education.

It would be wrong, however, to think that Cameron wasn't interested in bettering the College. With the support of his Fellows he introduced prizes, broadened the SCR, and brought more postgraduates into the College. He also supported the tuition of the students. My own experience illustrates something about his character. In the two years I was at St Andrew's I had two students; the same two in both years. Luckily they were loyal. Luckily, also, Cameron was prepared to pay me for these tutorials (they could easily have been 'rationalised' out of existence).

This also says something about the students of St Andrew's. Not many students did English and fewer were interested in extra tuition. After tutorials, I would walk across the oval to our humble but anomalous flat in the 'Fellows' Lodge'. In winter a faint mist would rise from the oval while, high above, great lamps gave a bright, other-worldly illumination, allowing the rugby team to train. There was never a problem in getting students to sports training.

Cameron is not so much exposing the students (about which he is in two minds) but exposing the Council. Less exciting to the media is the *real* exposé of *Finishing School for Blokes*, that of the Council's behaviour and the lack of leadership allowed to the Principal. Central to this is the issue of co-education.

The Australian media have treated Cameron very well. He is seen as a defender of women's rights and a much-needed progressive, fighting against the blight of

religious fundamentalism. But there is something decidedly primitive about Cameron's feminism. He states on a number of occasions that he believes women are necessary in St Andrew's College not only for economic reasons but also because women are a 'civilising' influence. Of course, women *are* in St Andrew's. They are in the SCR (though they are not members of the SCR), they serve on the students' tables and in the kitchen, and a few women make their way across the oval many mornings.

Cameron is most telling in his attitude to women when discussing the women of the SCR. The presence of women in the Senior Common Room 'softens it, enlivens it, and justifies its existence, and their presence at the High Table infiltrates the consciousness of the undergraduate population and contributes towards their gradual civilisation. Women are a window onto a wider world'. Again, this seems strangely at odds with Cameron's comments elsewhere. Nothing, it seems, civilises the men's behaviour. It is not clear how the women are windows, since, as guests rather than members, they were not allowed a say in the running of the SCR, and they never gave papers in the SCR after-dinner talks (even though most had degrees, a number were undertaking research, and, in my time, one was an academic within the University). It seemed intriguing, too, how before Open Day my wife was rostered for flower arranging. She had never expressed an interest in flowers.

But perhaps I am being disingenuous now. The College's Act disallowed women members at any level of the College, and as Cameron states, it took him three years to see the light. Still, it is odd that it took so long, especially when Cameron writes that he felt uneasy in the first months of his tenure. But inability to act is also seen in Cameron's attitude to the Australian Club which he joined because he says that it is a tradition for the Principal of St Andrew's to be a member. I'm not sure that all Principals were members, but nevertheless, why would someone who found their attitude so repulsive (no women, no Asians) not simply

cease to frequent the place? Similarly, if Cameron was keen to shift the balance of power from Bursar and Council to Principal and Fellows why did he abolish the Fellows' Committee? (There may be a good reason; the issue isn't raised in his book).

The issue of co-education is the issue over which Cameron falls out with the Council (a body of men wholly concerned, according to Cameron, with making the Principal a figurehead). Certainly the Council sounds appallingly narrow-minded and shoddily behaved (it makes sense, says Cameron, they are ex-Andrews men). Even the economic argument doesn't move the many businessmen on the Council into accepting women into the college.

However, the basic contradiction of *Finishing School for Blokes* is that St Andrew's is



presented as both an aberration and representative of Australia generally, representative of the ill-defined 'Australian disease' (characterised by provincialism, materialism, the tall-poppy syndrome, and the other usual suspects). How is it possible for St Andrew's to be both out of step in its attitude to women and be representative? This leads us to Cameron's last and, unfortunately, weakest chapter. It may be that Cameron's experiences at St Andrew's do tell us something about the society which allows such a college to exist, but Cameron's brush strokes are so broad, and his generalisations so sweeping, that he seems simply to deal in stereotypes.

A member of the SCR once referred to Cameron as the 'man-in-the-street's idea of an intellectual'. This is unnecessarily bitter, but one can see something of what may have led him to such an extreme epithet in the last chapter of *Finishing School for*

Blokes. This chapter relies not only on questionable generalisations but also is also something of a jeremiad, something which may pass for intellectualism in some minds. Both these aspects seem to suggest an anti-Australian bias. For instance, 'the stereotyped attitudes of the Australian male towards women were never far beneath the surface, and drink removed the veneer of civilisation very quickly'. And the Scottish are bellicose and tight-fisted.

The lack of real help given by Cameron's supporters within the Church and the College is put down to a 'spinelessness' based on a lack of 'moral fibre'. This Cameron sees as simply reflecting the herd instinct which is endemic in Australia. Similarly, the existence of St Andrew's and 'elite' clubs such as the Australian Club makes a 'nonsense' of the supposed egalitarianism of Australia. One can see Cameron's point, but I am not convinced. Both the Presbyterian Church and the College are 'minority' institutions. It is possible that the bitter divisiveness and politicking which Cameron encountered is an indication not of hegemony but of loss of power. It may be that the old guard's intense fighting over institutions such as St Andrew's is simply an indication of its further marginalization in wider Australian society.

IN ANY CASE, IN ADDITION to its many faults, Australia is a highly self-critical society and one with a tradition of progressiveness. Isn't Cameron being a little one-eyed to ignore the social policy which (at least until very recently) was far more progressive than that of Britain? Similarly, it is not enough simply to highlight the Australian tradition of misogynistic mateship. Australian women gained the vote before British women, and more recently anti-discrimination legislation was not only enacted but widely supported. St Andrew's is not Australia.

But on all sides, St Andrew's encourages intensity of feeling. Perhaps it is this intensity—as well as the anachronistic paraphernalia and jingoism—which makes institutions such as St Andrew's so unreal. No doubt St Andrew's will still lay claim to producing politicians and sportsmen, but it will not hold the position it once—even recently—did. When I used to walk across the oval during term after teaching my two students, as well as the rugby players under the lights there was a group of keen medievalists. They weren't from St

Andrew's. They wore chain-mail and staged fights with swords, axes and clubs. I don't know who was the more anachronistic. Certainly there was something unreal about the scene. At one end of the oval large men were charging into each other and chasing a ball. Under the trees, a more ancient sport was being parodied. But unlike the rugby players the medievalists had a woman in their team. She wasn't a damsel in distress and she was no civilising influence.

Though not written 'out of revenge', *Finishing School for Blokes* does have its angry and even bitter moments. Perhaps

ironically, each chapter is prefaced by a quotation from that famous revenge tragedy, *Hamlet*. It's hard to know which part Cameron thought he played in all of this, but I wonder if there is anything to be learnt from the resigned tone of the captain who, on his way to battle, says 'We go to gain a little patch of ground,/That hath in it no profit but the name'.

David McCooney was a tutor-in-residence at St Andrew's College, 1992-93. He now lectures in literary studies at Deakin University.

BOOKS: 2

JAMES GRIFFIN

Someone of stature

T.P. Boland, *Thomas Carr, Archbishop of Melbourne, University of Queensland Press, 1997. ISBN 07022944X RRP \$39.95*

ALITTLE OVER 100 YEARS ago Archbishop Thomas Carr set up in the forecourt of St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, not some Pellegrini representation, with triune shamrocks and slithering snakes, of his probably composite national saint, but a statue of the Liberator, Daniel O'Connell, the lay achiever of Catholic Emancipation in 1829.

It seemed to be a statement of the need for and appreciation of lay activity in defence of religious freedom and the social values of the Church. By contrast Sydney's St Mary's Basilica is guarded by two biretta-ed and soutaned, roly-poly prelates, Cardinal Moran and Archbishop Kelly. The clericalism of that see followed suit.

Now I am hearing that O'Connell's statue may be translated to a less symbolic site and his place taken by a presumably majestic if gaunt one of Daniel Mannix. Although Mannix relished the limelight and enjoyed sitting for portraits and photographs, I wonder if he would have wished to displace O'Connell, even in the political interests of the National Civic Council which the Liberator would have shunned. No one can demur at Mannix being there but surely there are space and ample pigeons for both. To remind us that Mannix had a more level-headed, constructive predecessor who made the Melbourne Church 'an integral part of Melbourne's life' is one reason for welcoming this splendid biography as most timely.

Carr (1839-1917) was a landlord's not a tenant-farmer's son, and a middle child in a family of twelve (four of whom became nuns), not the imperious eldest of a domineering, ambitious mother. An easy man, he retained 'grace of motion and symmetry of bearing' as a result of expert horsemanship even when he expanded to



nearly 140 kg. He did not avoid stone fences and was a crack shot. He swam in the nude in Ireland where De Tocqueville said it was possible even for women to do so because of 'the extraordinary purity of the Irish'. Eyebrows were raised when he did this in Melbourne. He played tennis and, while other bishops looked on, rolled up his lawn sleeves to bat against the 'respectful bowling' of some convent girls. He enjoyed his copious meals but was temperate with liquor and kept the canonical fasts. On tour in Europe he visited spas and in the USA travelled in a plush Pullman carriage with drawing room. He relished comfort.

However, in Melbourne Carr lived in the cathedral presbytery, not in a palace. He had a bolt-hole over the cathedral sacristy to which he retired to study and write. He was gregarious but dignified, a man with real friends, laymen among them. He dined at Government House, attended public functions and numbered vice-regal representatives such as the Earl of Hopetoun (Governor of Victoria 1889-95; first Governor-General of Australia 1901-02) among those friends. But he was not overbearing with servants; in Ireland on domestic calls he would insist on his coachman dining at the same table.

Like Mannix, Carr had not wanted to come to Australia. No doubt his hope was to succeed to the archbishopric of Tuam, near his native Galway. However, while his patriotism did not flag in Australia, he was careful with visiting Irish delegates canvassing for support against Westminster and 'did not allow Irish politics to shape the life or establish the image of his Church in Victoria'.

Carr had entered Maynooth Seminary in 1856 and was ordained in 1866. After some years as a priest in his native diocese he was appointed in 1874 professor of dogmatic theology and in 1880 vice-president of Maynooth. He published extensively on canon law and, as editor, revived the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*. In 1884 he became bishop of Galway, where he was noted for his concern for social welfare and education. In September 1886 he was appointed to Melbourne. He left Ireland in late January and, travelling via Rome, where he received the pallium from Leo XIII, finally reached Melbourne on 11 June. A bouquet of shamrocks travelled with him to be presented on arrival. One of the pleasures of Boland's book is the leisurely way it depicts a leisurely hierarchy.

More than this are the insights a laymen gets into the processes and quiddities of

clerical culture, mostly serious but some quite droll. Carr neither pursued innovation nor was a drag on progress. He was a meticulous planner and had clear priorities. Primary education came before secondary as he firmly told the Christian Brothers, while Newman College was founded only at the end of his regime—and with a large private bequest. He kept even the Jesuits in what he thought was their proper place, genial though he was. He was always ‘courteous, considered and accurate’.

Carr set high standards for his clergy but did not lack compassion. He had no trouble from William O’Brien who had ‘fought his way through Sydney and Goulburn before reaching Melbourne’. O’Brien had tangled with his bishop over the distribution of Easter Dues and was transferred. He refused to go to the new parish ‘because he found the housekeeper irresistible’! His bishop ‘thought he had heard them all but had no answer to that’. O’Brien finally imbibed ‘the wrong spirits at the annual spiritual Retreat’ and had to head south. However, Carr could himself write out a priest’s

resignation for a grave sin *contra pudicitiam et temperantiam* but would not actually mention sexual sin or drunkenness.

‘Marvellous Melbourne’ was an appropriate place not just for Carr’s diplomatic talents but for his cogent and courteous polemics. He entered public controversy not through *obiter dicta* from aloof pulpits or ecclesial platforms which brooked no dissent, but holdly in the press and public debate. He also wrote elegant apologetics. His *Lectures and Replies*, published in 1907 by the Australian Catholic Truth Society was voluminous. However, whether, in retrospect, combating Protestant heresy and the Bible in State Schools rather than creeping Australian secularism consumed too much energy, is an issue which Boland faces.

Boland deals justly with the increase in sectarianism and the foundation of the Australian Catholic Federation in the years before the First World War. And deftly with the arrival of Mannix and his aggravation of anti-Catholicism and the subsequent embitterment over the Easter Rising.

His penultimate chapter is entitled *Via*

Crucis to highlight not just Carr’s last illness but also the vicious controversies that clouded this irenic man’s last years. Oral tradition in Melbourne had Carr waking in anguish each Monday morning before perusing the newspapers to see what his pugnacious coadjutor had said the day before.

Mannix capped St Patrick’s with spires in late 1939 but Carr had completed the body of the Cathedral in 1897. The centenary is a fitting year for Fr Boland to eclipse even his biography of Archbishop Duhig and restore Carr to his rightful place in Melbourne’s episcopal pantheon.

The research has been astonishing, ranging from such obvious places as the Melbourne, Dublin, Galway and Roman College archives to those of the Little Sisters of the Poor in suburban Northcote to leg work in Galway and Melbourne. In fact, it involuntarily makes out a case for a third statue in St Patrick’s forecourt. ■

James Griffin is an historian. He wrote the entry on Archbishop Daniel Mannix in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol 10.

BOOKS: 3

PETER CRAVEN

Irish dark glasses

The Psalm Killer. Chris Petit, Pan Macmillan, 1997. ISBN 0333 695 968 RRP \$24.95

Reading in the Dark. Seamus Deane, Jonathan Cape, 1996. ISBN 0224 044 052 RRP \$29.95

IRELAND, FOR GOD KNOWS HOW LONG, has provided the English speaking world with some of its brighter literary lights. It is so much a cliché that the Irish are the only national group who dominate the first eleven of modernism that we tend to forget the older, less dodgy, truth—long ago enunciated by Northrop Frye—that from Ben Jonson to Harold Pinter the major dramatists of the English stage (just think of them: Congreve, Sheridan, Shaw, Wilde, Synge, O’Casey, Beckett) have either kissed the blarney or resiled from that stony touch into something better.

In fiction and poetry things have been different but not less distinguished. How could they be, in a century in which Joyce has called the tune, where experimentation or the resistance to experimentation was concerned and where Yeats was so clearly, as Hugh Kenner put it, the poet most parallel to Shakespeare: the acknowledged master of the old, who goes on in his later work,

alive to Pound and Eliot but doing otherwise, to renovate himself and play the modernists at his own grandiloquent version of their game, all the richer for being leaner than he was. Heaney may not be Yeats but he has something like the same combination of common touch and high standing. And Beckett and Flann O’Brien, though they are not Joyce, will compare with any others who have come after them. And so it goes on with the Colm Tóibíns and the John Banvilles.

That is one Ireland, the Ireland of literary achievement, the Ireland of which Samuel Beckett spoke when, in an invocation of darker realities and historical preconditions he said, ‘It was the English. They bugged us into glory’.

But if the English bugged the Irish into literary glory and Beckett, choosing his words, in French, did not allow the verb to pass as dead metaphor, there is also the long rape of the country as a whole, and in its

parts, from outside and from within, which forms the terrible matter of Ireland that is perforce part of anyone’s myth of contemporary history.

It might seem odd to any contemplative Martian that the Troubles that haunt Joyce like a prophecy—all that talk about Parnell as a ‘dead king’, Bloom’s words in the face of the Citizen, ‘I’m talking about love. I mean the opposite of hatred’—and which are given their edge of triumphalism as well as tragedy in Yeats’ evocation of ‘terrible beauty’, are still there to blight the people of Northern Ireland and worry those in Dublin while causing the odd moment of chaos and catastrophe in the Britain Tony Blair has inherited, raising great hopes in this area as in so many others.

If Blair somehow lays to rest the angry ghost of the Irish question, the images of hatred and clamour will not go away, but they will be relegated to the mythopœia of books. Not that they have failed to have

their literary shadow. The two, very different books under review—the one unputdownable trash of a high order, the other literary ‘fiction’ of a careful and meditative kind which nevertheless arrogates to itself, gradually and forcefully, the *frisson* and the horror of a memoir that plays on the apprehension of nasty truths—are both cases in point. Seamus Deane’s *Reading in the Dark* is the work of a poet and an *engagé* literary critic, a Catholic from Northern Derry who has carved out a reputation for himself, in the South, as that improbable thing—a professor who uses his revisions of Irish history as part of the Struggle. I remember hearing a story in some beerspot of literary Melbourne, that he had introduced an Australian with an interest in Ireland to certain chaps high up in the IRA, and one can only assume, true or not, that he’s the kind of bloke such things are whispered about.

READING IN THE DARK is the kind of book that someone with politics in his blood would write even if it is, in part, written against the grain of the costs that politics might have extracted. It’s a book that burns slow, and it made some people think it should win the last Booker. Chris Petit’s *The Psalm Killer* is a different kind of Northern Irish nightmare, a tale of a serial killer run amok in the Belfast of the ‘80s. It is one of those extended pieces of trash writing that is of novel size and has a novelistic depth of detail—and, indeed, which is likely to be as compelling to the mob who understand literary fiction as it is to the larger crowd who like a breakneck good read. It has bestseller written all over it and deserves the acclamation. So here we have two books that anatomise the horror of Ireland in the interests, respective and related, of art and entertainment. What they amount to may even illuminate the thrill of horror they share.

The Psalm Killer is the work of Chris Petit, whom readers may have come across in *The Guardian*. It is an attempt to bring together the mechanisms of the high-grade thriller—rather after the style of Thomas Harris—and a documentary vista of the most terrible and inscrutable aspects of the conflict in Northern Ireland. If the book never has the effortless and spacious design of *The Red Dragon* and *The Silence of the Lambs* (and therefore, paradoxically, never achieves quite the same absolute fit between ‘far-out’ psychological credibility and breathless tension) it does in fact top the master when it comes to documentary background and a sense of what quotidian

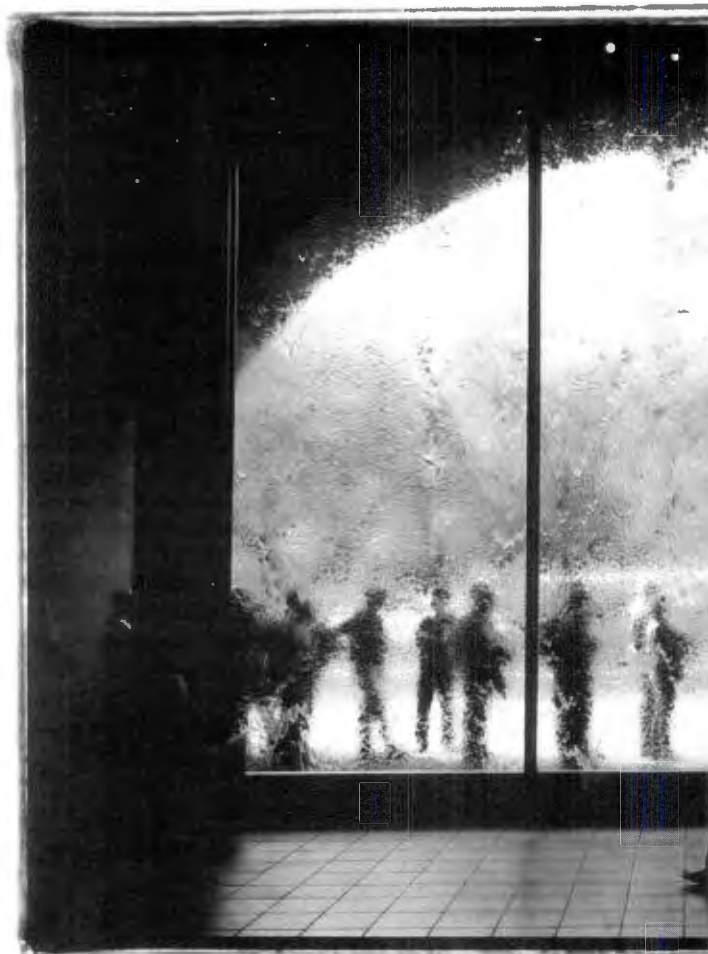
horrors might underlie a ‘psycho’ nightmare.

The Psalm Killer is the story of a set of killings, of a graphic and brutal kind, involving mutilation, dismemberment, you-name-it, which take place in Belfast in the 1980’s and which appear to have a connection with a set of quotations from the psalms which appears in newspaper advertisements and which seem in turn to relate to some numerological or arithmetical schema.

The crimes are ghastly and they attract the attention of Detective Inspector Cross, a Catholic Englishman who works for the Royal Ulster Constabulary and is married (none too happily) to a woman who is the true-blue daughter of a Protestant upper middle class family, prejudiced according to caste and religion but ambiguously and charmingly so. In the course of his duties he becomes more and more emotionally involved with a young policewoman called Westerby who has even greater intuitive penetration into the mind of the killer than Cross does. In fact you seem to see Petit toying with the idea of making Cross the empathic twin, the sane double, of the murderer but although there are certain generalised affinities it is Westerby who gets inside the killer and the rapport between the two detectives is very sympathetic and persuasive for the reader and makes the burden of this book more bearable by giving it a counterbalancing romance and sexual tension.

In its darker aspect this thriller is nightmarish indeed because we are placed inside the mind of one Candlestick, a man who has had the best sex of his life with a woman after they coldbloodedly murdered one of his acquaintances; he is a man who has worked as a double agent in North Ireland, committing atrocities for the Protestants on behalf of the Catholics some of whom in turn are being run by whichever branch of British intelligence wants to discredit one or the other. He is an Englishman too and the crippled North is the tottering realm through which he wanders as a Sadeian paladin, tearing flesh and taking life with a maximum accompaniment of terror, for the cold thrill and things still more murky.

The author appears to have done a good deal of research into the details of which



Through a glass darkly: the water wall at the National

terrorist organisations seemed to be fighting for X cause when they were in fact working on behalf of Y and he succeeds, first of all, in investing his action with a nearly incredible intricacy and then, quite simply—with the backing of citation and cross referencing at the back of the book—in convincing you that such things not only must have happened but that in particular cases, that form the persuasive and treacherous background to *The Psalm Killer*, they did happen.

To combine this with a flesh-creeping ‘made-up’ horror story, from the deepest pit of *noir*, which has just enough psychological reality to make the hunt quiver with the illusion of humanity, is to demonstrate formidable powers as an entertainer who is serious enough not to shun the mask of a moralist.

THE PSALM KILLER IS A dazzling and exciting piece of writing which, like Thomas Harris at one end of the street and the weightier episodes of *The Bill* at the other, leaves you grimy with the taint of possibilities and realities evoked while you were passing time. This is the level of



Gallery of Victoria. Photograph by Bill Thomas.

'trash' writing which is in danger of trespassing into the area of art and therefore, a bit perilously, of asking to be judged by the standards of art, which are tougher and require an unrelenting air of reality or its transfiguration.

None of which is to deny that *The Psalm Killer* has faults. Sometimes, in keeping with the dominant *verismo* there is a bewildering multiplicity of characters often insufficiently attached to the action to compel the reader's recognition. The writing in its functional unemphatic way is better in slabs than it is at achieving the novelist's trick of indelibility and of exactly co-ordinating character to action.

There is also the *dénouement* and its coda. In the 'climax' to the hunt for Candlestick he has kidnapped a child and it takes all of Westerby's power of empathy to unravel what might get to him.

This section of the book arguably unpacks a complex and appalling political reality too much in terms of psychology but it is brilliantly co-ordinated with the action of the novel. Part of Petit's point is also no doubt symbolic. In creating a monster like Candlestick who is heard, through flash-

back, as an experiencing voice long before we can put a face to him, he wants to show a certain kind of political intervention in Northern Ireland as equivalent to the formation of the sensibility of a psychopath.

That's okay, but the Iago-like voice that rips and tortures, with great coolness, throughout the diary-like notations of the 1970s section is a self-possessed enigma, whereas his ultimate berserk persona is as a kind of demonic presence which is rendered explicable only by the 'myth' of child abuse. In this respect *The Psalm Killer* adheres to the classic model in its representation of the killer, the one used by Harris in *The Red Dragon*, where there is a fictional mercy in the understanding of the serial killer's makeup, even though it is a necessity of the plot that he be a walking embodiment of evil.

There's also the question of the coda that forms the actual ending and makes rather elegant sense of something that happens early on. It's one of those tricks, which works but shouldn't and therefore is rather dazzling in a book of this kind, even if it does push *The Psalm*

Killer even further in the direction of the lower fiends.

I read *The Psalm Killer* belatedly, many weeks after I received a tip about it from someone in publishing. It seems to me one of the best thrillers of the last few years, not least because of the way it is constantly striving to modify the stereotypes of the genre into something more human and more historically coherent. It is one of those books that takes up the form of the yarn in order to say something more or less serious and it does so with great electricity and excitement. Although it is a book that should be diminished by the history it takes as its backdrop, Chris Petit wins the right to the exploitation implicit in his enterprise by the power with which, within the confines of the thriller form, he sets about imagining the atrocities he plays on and which he seems to have meticulously rehearsed.

It's possible, of course, to say it couldn't have happened quite like that, but *The Psalm Killer* is not, I think, open to the charge that could be brought against Demidenko, of literary self-abuse in the presence of the sorrow and pity of history.

Not quite. Petit is too modest in his aims—this is in the last analysis just a thriller—and too responsible in his use of the historical objects he finds. What is appalling about the political manoeuvring, as opposed to the torture in which it found expression, is that it is all too believable.

Credibility and veracity are also at the centre of Seamus Deane's far more artful exercise in the byways and interstices of memory and fiction, *Reading in the Dark*. Seamus Deane plays, hauntingly and teasingly, with the great modernist ploy (monolithically exploited in Joyce and Proust) of apparent self-revelation. The technique of *Reading in the Dark* is, for quite some time, that of lyrical memoir. A voice is making patterns from the traditional forms of recollection: the chapters are short as a poet's chapters might be and they seem, despite their eloquence—which is not incompatible with the persona of a poet professor—to leave spaces for the kinds of things which cannot be known because what the author chooses to enunciate is the truth.

IN FACT *READING IN THE DARK* is a very artful disruption of the lyrical memoir form. Macbeth speaks of the fiend that lies like truth and Seamus Deane is set on the kind of equivocation that makes the reader wonder where truth and fiction begin and end. If *Reading in the Dark* is not the product of the author's childhood, then Seamus Deane, certainly does handstands to lure us into thinking otherwise, sometimes through the deliberate amateurishness of the narrative. On the other hand, if this story of misprision and sorrow and rancour, with the background of the Republican tradition in the North of Ireland and the horrors of treacheries enacted and punished wrongly, is not based on family experience (as the narrative constantly, as it would, portends) then the fiction is masterful in the way it absorbs the exact forms with which the self seeks to shape its own experience and the experience of those who have formed it. No doubt, as with Proust and Joyce, the 'truth' is somewhere between the two but it's worth noting that the form of *Reading in the Dark* is at the furthest remove from these two. What this urgent, black, political recollection of growing up in the '40s and '50s reminds us of is the documentary mode of fictionalised-memoir-cum-essay of V. S. Naipaul and Drusilla Modjeska.

The story is simple though the exfoliations and entanglements engendered make *Reading in the Dark* one of the most complexly

spun short narratives since Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*. The uncle of the narrator has died, or disappeared without trace to America, and this gap has a disquieting effect on the life of a small boy, on his spirit-drawn mother and his brooding-hot-around-the-collar father. As the narration develops we learn further 'facts'. First that the uncle was in reality executed by his Republican comrades and then, that this horror, known by the father and the mother (whom the uncle had courted) is a source of both shame and desolation. There is also another figure who seems to double with some of the features of the uncle's life, like a variant in mythology. And the uncle was in fact put to death on the orders of the author's grandfather, the father of his mother but these orders were fallacious: they executed the wrong man.

All of this is revealed—partially, piecemeal, agonisingly—as if the logic that underlay the agnostic Deane's literary ordeal was in fact that of the Jansenist confession of the scrupulous Irish Catholic who has to keep returning to worry his troubled conscience as someone might worry a sore, because the sense of unease is total and the belief in mercy faltering. In Deane's terms such scrupulosity works brilliantly because it does bring its dark revelations (and they are the only glass the narrator has) and they also work to suggest the misprisions and partial knowledges by which history, in an intimate and familial way, comes to be known in a small Catholic community, reduced to 'shame' about its own Republican past and persecuted for it as well.

Reading in the Dark is a political book, fierce in its sense of wrongs done and done to other's harm, but it is the diary of a soul through which this fractured mirror of Ireland is effected. Deane manages to domesticate the obsessiveness of the protagonist's vision and relate it to the complex reticence of each member of his family while also painting an elaborately brilliant portrait of the society of his childhood in a few flashes of colour.

There is, for example, a brilliant and urbane portrait of a priestly (presumably Jesuit) schoolmaster which is as mad, and as intimately mad, as any comparable portrait in Joyce. It is this kind of thing, as much as the endlessly masticated meat of family guilt and shame, that makes this apparently mousey volume look like a great book. It begins with images of the narrator's mother as haunted, and it is one of those rare books which deserve the description 'haunting'. It does one thing quite extraordinarily: it

creates a sense of the past that appears, on the face of it, obsessive and limited, and manages at the same time to indicate the flows and varieties of how time moves so that one's sense of it, in retrospect, is of a book that dramatises the complexity of piecing together a sense of the past even though, at any point in the narrative, this is achieved through proffering the limitations of the child's point of view or the occluded nature of what some adult puts in his face.

SEAMUS DEANE'S *READING IN the Dark* is, of course, a meditation on its own action, a self-reflexive book, if you like, by a literary theorist with the standard self-consciousness who has nevertheless the brains and the heart to dramatises his sense of how a novel is constructed by giving what might be a merely cerebral line of speculation the form of a blood-and-guts apprehension. At every point the narrator is fishing ('angling in the lake of darkness') for a self which sees itself or which *reads* itself as an enigma that can only be decoded by the family tragedy that constitutes its own parts of sorrow and pity and hence of history.

I suspect the vision that underlies *Reading in the Dark* is as *marxisant* as it is residually Catholic. But the author's sense of the matter of history is complexly mediated and that mediation is a matter of painful reflection for the significant remnant of a society which can only be dramatically grasped as a microcosm through the literally experienced memories of the family.

Reading in the Dark is a more measured, though not less compelling, achievement than *The Psalm Killer*.

It is some kind of masterpiece likely to live as literature, but it is significant that here too, in the most lauded piece of prose to come out of Northern Ireland in recent memory, the dominant images are of treachery and double-dealing and of execution as reprisal.

Both books are set in the past, they both take history as the ground of their being. In the case of *The Psalm Killer* history exists on two planes, first the dark chapter of Northern Ireland's 'Terror' in the 1970s and then the 'present' of the 1980s in which the hunt for the serial killer is set. In *Reading in the Dark* the action is set in the '40s and '50s in which the narrator seeks the truth about a past twenty or thirty years older—a return to the Ireland of a 'terrible beauty' which exists now as a running sore of hurt which is integral to the developing self of a writer who can never see himself as separate from the reader of the truth of history.

History may be freedom. History may be servitude. The old words of T.S. Eliot have some relevance to these two vibrant books, one popular and one literary, that try to trace something from the darkness of Irish history. Each of them is invigorated by the sorrows they attend on. Each of them has turned the servitude (in fact the enslavement) of history into some kind of freedom. ■

Peter Craven writes the 'Second Thoughts' column for the *Sunday Age*.

Retread Retread Retread Retread

Winning to lose

T **No Contest: The Case Against Competition**, Alfie Kohn, Houghton Mifflin, New York 1986; revised and extended 1992. ISBN 0 395 63125 4

THIS IS NOT A NEW BOOK, even the second edition is now five years old. I only discovered it recently, however, and it left me wanting to rush out and tell everyone about it. The book is especially relevant now when, for example, the fetish of competition is even being invoked to undermine the Victorian Auditor-General.

There are three ways of tackling most tasks: competitively, where my success depends on your failure; independently, where my success does not affect yours,

and co-operatively, where our success (or failure) is mutual. The gospel of the day is that competition produces the best results, and Kohn examines the evidence for this belief. He finds none. In countless research studies, in business, education, scientific research, sport, almost without exception competition turns out to hinder rather than promote achievement.

This is understandable once we separate two different things that are usually conflated under competitive conditions.

One is achieving a goal, doing a good job. The other is beating others. This is a distraction. As Kohn puts it 'How can we do our best when we are spending our energies trying to make others lose—and fearing that they will make us lose?'

It is often claimed that competitiveness is an inherent part of human nature. Kohn devotes a chapter to the examination of this belief; again, it is not supported by the evidence. The mere fact that there are non-competitive societies should be sufficient proof. Competition is learnt, not inherent. We expose our children to comparisons with others from the time that they can walk. Soon they will be exposed to the competitive structures of our society.

'First we are systematically socialised to compete—and to want to compete—and then the results are cited as evidence of competition's inevitability.'

HAVING SHOWN THAT WE are not unavoidably competitive, Kohn feels compelled to conclude that we are not unavoidably anything. But is there a possibility that humans are inherently altruistic? This important question, underlying ethical and religious traditions, is relegated to a footnote.

The psychological effects of competition are profound; it produces anxiety—both about losing and about winning, conformity, and a tendency to classify everything on an either/or, good/bad scale. Highly competitive people have low self-esteem; even the winners have to keep winning to bolster their fragile self-esteem. (Kohn admits that to claim that our top heroes are driven by low self-esteem may be seen as an 'incendiary' statement.) Competition promotes aggression and militates against feelings of community. War is competition taken to the extreme. Kohn quotes Eisenhower as saying: 'The true mission of American sports is to prepare young people for war', a modern version of Wellington's famous saying that the battle of Waterloo was



Parallel enterprises: photograph by Bill Thomas.

won on the playing fields of Harrow and Eton.

Co-operative activities, on the other hand, tend to make people accept one another, with all their differences. This has been shown most dramatically in the field of education. Here co-operative learning is an accepted approach—albeit in danger of being treated as an occasional gimmick ('today we are going to work in teams') rather than a philosophy underlying all teaching. Experiments show remarkable changes in behaviour and attitudes of children who have been exposed to co-operative activities at school. When their work is not put on a scale of best to worst they no longer see each other as threats and become more accepting. Some proponents of co-operative learning see the improvement in relationships as even more important than the improvement in learning.

How can we move to a more co-operative and less competitive society? Kohn distinguishes between *intentional* and *structural* competition. Intentional competition results from our attitudes and the desire to be number one. It is the learnt attitude of constant comparison with others and can only be reduced by firstly becoming fully aware of it in ourselves and secondly by trying to shield our children from it.

Structural competition is forced on us

by the structures that our society has established, in which there can only be one winner; what Kohn calls 'mutually exclusive goal attainment'. These systems demand that we struggle to win, and they bring the temptation to try to win at any cost. The competitive structure of our society is the underlying cause of such apparently diverse effects as 'campaign illegalities, scientific fraud, corporate trickery, and the use of steroids in college sport'. To move away from these structures to a more co-operative world thus requires a basic change in structure. This brings the discussion into fellowship with the problems of other social change and social justice movements. One of the barriers to change is the long-standing American tradition of ignoring the structural causes of social and individual problems—a tradition surely equally common in Australia.

Few will agree with all Kohn says about sport, in fact it will be sacrilege to many. But this is a book that should be read and discussed as widely as possible.

Incidentally, I came across the book because it is referred to in another important and under-used book: Ted Trainer's *The Conserver Society* (Zed Books, 1995). ■

Robin Arnold is a freelance reviewer

The string pullers



GEOFFREY RUSH WAS NOT ONLY a winner of a prestigious performing arts award this year; it was he who bestowed the Sidney Myer Performing Arts Awards on their recipients at a ceremony in Melbourne in March, before jetting off to Hollywood to collect his Oscar. The Individual award this year went to the master puppeteer Peter Wilson, and a richly deserved award it was for a man who has been at the forefront of innovation in his artform for 21 years.

Born in Perth, Wilson trained first in accountancy and later in mime and modern dance. On moving to Melbourne in 1975, Wilson took classes at the Australian College of Entertainers with William Zappa before fluking a job with the Parry Marshall Puppet Theatre (thanks to a 'Puppeteer Wanted' ad at the CES!). He has been involved in puppetry ever since.

The following year, he teamed up with Ken Evans, Andrew Hansen, Helen Rickards, Maeve Vella and Christine Woodcock to found Handspan Theatre Company in Melbourne. The avowed aims of Handspan were to get away from the then standard practices in puppetry—including the use of puppets to represent humans and animals in a more or less naturalistic way in often pre-recorded dialogue-based scripts. Handspan wanted—to quote one of its founders Maeve Vella—'to emphasise visual imagery and action and [to explore] puppetry as a medium for metaphor, parody, fantasy and spectacle.'

Handspan was one of the first companies to combine traditional booth-stage puppets with visible manipulators in the Japanese *bunraku* style and to combine live actors with puppets and their manipula-

tors. From the outset, Handspan saw its role as playing to adults and youth audiences as well as children and has since played in orthodox theatres, cabarets, schools and in the open air in many parts of Australia and abroad.

Wilson was also involved with the inauguration of another new Melbourne company (Polyglot Puppet Theatre) in 1978, touring pre-schools and primary schools with plays in many languages. On the move again, Wilson joined the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre in Hobart in 1979; the founding director of this company turned out to be another Peter Wilson—confusion reigned!

One of the turning points in Wilson's career was his work in 1984 on the extraordinary Handspan production of *Cho Cho San*, a music theatre adaptation by Daniel Keene of the *Madame Butterfly* story, with actors, singers and several different kinds of puppetry.

Wilson landed the plum role of the Butterfly manipulator, which was worked in full *bunraku* style. It saw him fully costumed and in full view as an obviously solid (and male) human body working the ever-so-delicate but life-sized (female) Butterfly puppet, articulating her limbs and head by short rods via his hands and mouth respectively. He didn't only *manipulate* Butterfly: he *was* Butterfly. The Playbox Theatre remount in 1987 (and the extensive subsequent tour) exposed the production and Wilson's exquisitely sensitive performance to a wide audience nationally and (later still) internationally.

In the interim, he underwent further training, as a member of Philippe Genty's first *stage* or training workshop in France; Wilson found this 'an extraordinary experience and an opportunity for affirmation of a lot of things [he] was not sure about'. Another interesting experience was his work as Director of Puppetry and Head Puppeteer for the ABC/ACTF *Lift Off* children's TV series in 1991 and 1992.

In 1993, Wilson took over as artistic director of Company Skylark in Canberra. Skylark was founded in 1984, essentially as a children's puppet company, and a very good one it was. Wilson has substantially changed the company's style and profile. Its present work is aimed at adults (with large-scale new mainstage productions like *Inside Dry Water* in 1994-95 and *Mum's the Word* in 1995) and children (with new mainstage work such as *Wake Baby*, premièred in Canberra last year and touring extensively this year, and an old favourite *Charlotte's Web*, which Wilson originally directed for the company in 1989 but which has more recently been seen in a remount directed by Christine Anketell). There is also a commitment to training, to new work and to national and international touring.

Wilson sees children's work as crucial to his company's profile, including the small-scale schools-touring productions

with which Skylark began, while conceding that the art of puppetry has the capacity to transcend age barriers; 'there's something about the work that just knocks age away', he says. He is also passionate about having the opportunity and enough funding to give new work (which takes a prodigious amount of time to make and to get up to performance level) the chance to develop over more than one production. Nearly all of the major works with which he has been associated over the years have been fine-tuned or reworked after their première seasons and have benefited greatly from their second lives.

HIGHLIGHTS OF WILSON'S CAREER as a puppeteer include work for adults and children. In the former category, one of his most memorable projects was the spectacular 1983 production by Nigel Triffitt for Handspan of *Secrets*, which took the use of puppets in visual theatre into previously uncharted territory and whose tours took its artists all over the world. The Ariette Taylor adaptation for Handspan of Picasso's *Four Little Girls* (premiered in 1988 and remounted and toured in 1994) was another project which stretched the form and his own mastery of it. Another of the Handspan works for which I especially remember Wilson's extremely dextrous and sensitive manipulation was *Smalls* (with Michele Spooner and others in 1986). This was a collection of smallish-scale, small-cast puppet playlets, and my most vivid memory of it is of a piece in which a little boy-puppet was shown the world—with all its joys and perils—by its white-clad creators and manipulators (see photograph right).

Watching this kind of work, one focuses so tightly on the figure itself that one visually 'tunes out' its manipulators. But such is the Handspan style developed by Wilson and his colleagues, that every now and then one is visually drawn back to the manipulators and reminded of their size. It is in moments like the one when Wilson and Spooner managed to catch their little protégé just in the nick of time to prevent him from falling off the edge of a cliff—a cliff to whose edge they, of course, as his manipulators/parents had led him in the first place!—that one becomes acutely aware of the puppeteer's phenomenal skills and of their active role in the drama being enacted before us.

More recent adult puppetry productions for Skylark include *Inside Dry Water*, a play inspired by Arthur Boyd's Bush Bride paintings, which killed off the misogynist

old colonial Punch and Judy once and for all and which toured very extensively in 1995, and the partly autobiographical *Mum's the Word*, a haunting piece about adopting and relinquishing children which had its only season so far at the 1995 National Festival of Australian Theatre in Canberra.

Among Wilson's proudest achievements in puppetry for young people was a Handspan show in 1991 called *The Reading Boy*, which was actually the second full-scale mainstage children's show he directed himself but his first collaboration with the veteran playwright John Romeril. This charming piece blended live actors with puppets of different kinds and of varying sizes, dealing with a young boy who is an avid reader whose favourite book gets lost at the rubbish dump; he is aided in its retrieval by a friendly crow, a puppet worked *Bunraku*-style.

A more recent young people's production for Skylark is *Wake Baby*, directed by Nigel Jamieson, which was seen in Melbourne as part of the Moomba Children's Theatre Festival and is touring at the moment. Wilson's best bit in this show is manipulating (via short rods from behind a brilliantly focused curtain of light) a piece of thick white rope about a metre long. This can be seen as the central character's pet animal (some have seen it as a dog or a cat), or as a more abstract

'character' who is by turns friendly and threatening, like a worm or even a serpent or even as just a highly imaginative bit of rope! Wilson is presently working on another collaboration with Romeril for Melbourne's Playbox Theatre in co-production with Company Skylark. This is the Japanese playwright Chikamatsu's *Love Suicides*, opening in Canberra in October and at the Malthouse on 9 November.

Speaking at the Myer awards, Wilson said 'In puppetry you have to give up your ego; people are not coming to see you. They're coming to see the puppets. That's what makes awards like this so great.' True enough; we don't know it's him working the piece of rope in *Wake Baby*, for example, but we're aware of his supreme skill. But, watching him—with his lithe dancer's body and trademark black moustache and tiny beard—work the little baby in *Smalls* or the elaborate Butterfly in *Cho Cho San* is to watch a master craftsman at work. ■

Geoffrey Milne is head of theatre and drama at La Trobe University.

The master puppeteer: Peter Wilson, below, in Smalls—Positive Equals, with fellow puppeteer, Michele Spooner.

Above left: The Skylark company with Boyd puppets, in Inside dry water, and Sofia Gibson, with an invisible Peter Wilson in Wake Baby, for Skylark, 1997.



FLASH IN THE PAN



The play's the thing

Hamlet (director's cut), dir. Kenneth Branagh (independent). The promise of the whole text of *Hamlet* is seductive: rarely do we see the full play, even on stage, because it's such a huge task for director and performers if it is not to become even more a task for the audience. And the challenge to the lead actor is to fulfil all the depth and complexity of the part with his full vigour.

Branagh's direction has ensured the first demand is met for his *Hamlet*. There are no tediousnesses at all—the pace fairly cracks along—and the sumptuous 70mm cinematography keeps you looking around happily while you soak up the action, which is set around the 1880s. And he is able to encourage fantastic performances from his cast. So I feel rather churlish to be cavilling, as I must, at Branagh's Prince.

Perhaps he knows his lines *too* well—he says he has already performed the role '200 to 300 times'. And from time to time it shows as he blatantly anticipates cues and rips through speeches like a G & S patter singer. At times he mugs shamelessly and rarely seems to be reaching into his own depths; there's no personal danger here for him: he's always well within the boundaries of his admirable craft. Which are, admittedly huge, but still—he's never *really* contemplating suicide: his fine light baritone rises and falls with total control as he declaims the verse with the most astonishing articulation, but ...

Am I a philistine to prefer Mel Gibson's admittedly flawed reading? Gibson's delivery turned all to prose, but it was edgy and believable sometimes, risky at all times, and something raw and good was there, if

you ignored big mistakes like Glenn Close.

No such mistakes were made by Branagh in his casting. He had a free hand, so here you'll see the best Polonius imaginable, played by Richard Briers, a brilliant Claudius and Gertrude (Derek Jacobi and Julie Christie) and generally extraordinary performances in all parts, with no nonsense about race or accent, none of which matter a jot in this production.

One of the best things of all about the film is its insistence on the broader politics of the play, which gives a satisfying inevitability to the carnage at the end. But see it soon because the full version will be replaced quickly by an abridged one.

—Juliette Hughes

Tough love

Margaret's Museum, dir. Mort Ransen (independent). People do ugly things to beautiful places. This film is set within a mining culture in Nova Scotia where life is so tough that the locals seldom notice the beauty of the place where they live. It takes the arrival of the giant Neil Currie (Clive Russell) and his pipes, to start emotions stirring at every level of the MacNeil family and beyond. Currie looks like a layabout drunk but the MacNeils' grandfather (Peter Boretski), whose lungs have been crippled by coal dust, wants him to play his beguiling music. Catherine MacNeil (Kate Nelligan) has been deeply embittered by the loss of a son and a husband in the mine; the whole town lives with this tension. Catherine doesn't want her daughter, Margaret (Helena Bonham Carter), to have anything to do with Currie. If Margaret were playing true to form, she wouldn't either. She has inherited her mother's wariness.

But this is a romance and Currie and Margaret fall in love. He builds her a house from the scrap materials thrown out by the mine. The house stands in contrast to the neat lines and small windows which characterise every other house in the locality. The bedroom is perched on top, overlooking the water, surrounded on five sides by discarded windows. It is here, in this haven of light and air, that Margaret confronts Currie—she will not have any children unless they can pay to feed them. That

means he will have to go down the mine.

The many narrative threads in *Margaret's Museum* weave in and out of each other with great dexterity. But it is above all a wonderful character piece in which dry wit and grim determination make just enough brightness to relieve the dark reality it represents. The film is based on stories by Sheldon Currie, whose name is unfamiliar, but with luck there will be a movie tie-in edition of his work for those of us who want to follow this story to its source.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Pasta masters

Big Night dir. Campbell Scott/Stanley Tucci (independent). A good meal is always greater than the sum of its parts: the ingredients come together and create a taste that surpasses their individual qualities. It is this theme that guides this ensemble piece—a collaborative effort behind the camera as well as in front of it—to a resolution for which every character is responsible. Very little is out of place in this film.

Primo and Secondo are brothers who have emigrated from Italy to New Jersey in the 1950s to start a restaurant. Primo, as the chef, reveres good food and regards fine cuisine as sacred as much as he loathes the 'criminal' tastes of their lowbrow clientèle. Secondo is more pragmatic—willing to

EUREKA STREET FILM COMPETITION

Here's the ultimate swordfight between Basil Rathbone's nasty Guy of Gisbourne and Errol Flynn's Robin. We reckon it's worth a caption, so if you think of a good one send it in for the \$30 prize.

The winner of the April competition was Bruce Pescod of Camberwell, VIC who thought Sophia Loren might have been thinking:

'I must remember to type the Senator's claim as paternity leave instead of travel allowance.'



compromise on quality if it means more customers. He's a little bit like Pascal, the successful restaurateur-cum-showman from across the road. To help his struggling friends out, Pascal offers to bring a big-time jazz muso to their place for dinner. In his honour the finest of meals is prepared and everybody plays their part in its preparation, its consumption and its, at times, uncomfortable digestion.

In this film performances are the key. Tony Shalhoub and Stanley Tucci as Primo and Secondo are stylish and measured, Ian Holm and Isabella Rossellini as Pascal and his wandering wife Gabriella give the film drive, and Minnie Driver plays Secondo's girlfriend Phyllis with knowing innocence. The final scene is uncluttered and simple, yet nicely crafted—a little bit like a good pasta sauce.

—Jon Greenaway

Model history

Beaumarchais, dir. Edouard Molinaro (independent). Molinaro (*La Cage Aux Folles* 1978) has attempted a light comic treatment of the life of Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, inventor, businessman, arms dealer, musician, spy and librettist of *The Barber of Seville* and *The Marriage of Figaro*. Based on Sacha Guitry's unstaged play *Beaumarchais*, it races from 1770 Paris through a bewildering series of settings: theatres, dressing rooms, ballrooms, palaces, Louis XV's private office, on board ship, in London, in America, in a courtroom, in Louis XVI's private office, mob scenes, bedroom scenes, in prison cells, in carriages ...

What becomes all too obvious after a few minutes is that the same thirty or so very attractive young extras are going to appear in every one of the many crowd scenes throughout the feature. It becomes a minor obsession to single out an indelibly 1990s' model-agency mien smeared with mud under a mob cap or gazing limpidly from behind a jewelled fan.

Fabrice Luchini, as Beaumarchais, would have been more comfortable in *La Cage Aux Folles*, one feels, as a drily discreet doorman or head waiter who could have ushered main characters out of any nightclub with panache and sympathy. What his affectless charm can not support is a persona that could bargain insolently with kings for the future of the American revolution, while using scurrilous pamphlets and plays to incite the Paris mob to riot. Luchini's Beaumarchais is rushed through so many historical tableaux that he only

has time to register a smirk or a raised eyebrow. The other actors just manage to register their presences. Fun history for schoolboys.

—Lucille Hughes

Love and...

True Love and Chaos dir. Stavros Andonis Efthymio (independent). This film has some of the most important ingredients for a road movie: lots of highway, an old Ford, guns, drugs, billiard balls, mystery men and psychos. With all this to work with, we should get a classic tale of a trip from Melbourne to Perth. What we have instead is an at times touching exploration of emotional turmoil. It's good on the true love but doesn't pay up on the chaos.

Mimi (Miranda Otto) is driving from Melbourne to Perth to see her estranged Mother. Her boyfriend Hanif (Navcen Andrews) is reluctant at first but then is very keen to get away, with his hapless friend Dean (Noah Taylor) in tow. Along the way they bump into the enigmatic Morris (Hugo Weaving) a bearded, shaman-like musician. As the four negotiate their feelings, which become more confused with each mile they travel, Dean's dangerous brother is in pursuit of a package that they're carrying in the boot. By the time they get to Perth things hot up.

This is a follow-up by the team that put together the boon *Love and Other Catastrophes*, and is marked by some classy moments, many of them provided by Hugo Weaving, who, as Morris gives the stand-out performance. No highlights come from Ben Mendelsohn—he denies the unstable Jerry even the hint of menace. For my liking, the ending was forced, but it certainly throws up a surprise. If you liked *Love and Other Catastrophes* you can take this on trust.

—Jon Greenaway

Clunkers

Swingers dir. Doug Liman (independent). If you'd like to know what single LA guys are up to after dark, *Swingers* just might be the flick for you. If you can imagine mixing *Love and other Catastrophes* with *Seinfeld* in a highball glass, you'd get a taste of *Swingers*. But like an oddly mixed cocktail, you drink it quick and forget it smartly too.

When Mike (Jon Favreau) splits up with his long-time girlfriend his mates

drag him into their committed bachelor ways. They try teaching him the finer arts of the pick-up line, of extracting phone numbers from 'beautiful babies,'[sic]. No amount of coaching however will convince Mike to wait the required number of days to secure his catch. But his friends, especially Trent (Vince Vaughn), are committed to upping his bachelor status and continue to include him in the ultimate compliment category—'Mike you're money, you're really, really money.'

This is a film about LA men, the immature, nintendo-playing types who just can't commit to anything longer than a shot of Tequila. It's a film about how they talk to their best friends, to women and why.

Being a young woman I can't vouch for the authenticity of its voice, but I can guarantee the odd genuine laugh and poignant moment. But the poignant too often slips into the puerile. Nothing could be much more nauseating than the LA parties and nite-club entertainment (not to mention the pick-up lines). But I guess if you're bored with all that you can always jump in the car with Mike and Trent, and scoot down to Las Vegas, where even if you lose all your cash you'll be 'money, really money.'

—Siobhan Jackson

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WATCHING
BRIEF



JULIETTE HUGHES

Kerry On Broadcasting

ONE OF MY BEST FRIENDS (as one says when trying to acquit oneself of a charge of wanton and unjustified prejudice) is called Kerry. Named for the

proud Irish county of his thoroughly Mick forebears, he is an artist who makes a crust picture-framing and he barracks for Geelong—a real Battlers' town.

I feel that he should get all the unemployed and working poor, struggling in our lovely best-practice-enterprise-bargaining-market, to each give him \$10 so he could bid for Fairfax, and give the other Kerries a run for their money. (Or perhaps we could add another Rupert in the interests of balance, but although my next-door neighbour has a cat called Rupert, I've seen him interfering editorially with a mynah bird lately. Rearranged its material something shocking.)

The two Kerries had a bit of a field day on their TV stations in May, putting their points of view about The Putative Fairfax Bid. While Kerry Stokes appeared to be arguing that the present state of media ownership was okay at merely the concentration required to form carbon into diamond ('If it ain't broke don't fix it', said our homespun semi-billionaire), our other Kerry (the full bill.) was proposing, through his son, a concentration of media power only rivalled in density by a neutron star.

Paul McDermott alerted me to this curious concatenation of Kerries and media ownership in his wholly admirable *Good News Week* in the second week of May. *GNW* has been a sleeper for a while, but people are now realising that good political satire is back with us at last after a painful and dreary absence, as the *D-Generation* declined through *Fast Forward* to *Full Frontal* on Seven, dwindling to jejune send-ups of commercials and thinnest farce. You only have to watch *Frontline* to see why it happened. Just try to imagine *that* one going to the commercial stations: its life expectancy would be less than a soldier's on the Western Front. It finished during May with a flourish, following the lead of *Fawlty Towers* and *Ab-fab*, leaving us wanting more. Roll on the video releases.

McDermott is sharp enough to cut himself, and his commentary on the political scene has a fluency that matches Clive James', but without James' respect of persons. It's not to be missed on Friday nights, because it's too rare a thing these days to have your breath taken away by sheer brilliance, in a way that recalls the days of *Python* or *Not the Nine O'clock News*, or the *Big Gig* at its best. It works as a very loosely organised game show, with two teams of celebrities vying with each other to give witty and correct answers to questions based on recent events.

There was an interesting by-play in the program in question that all but upstaged the game itself: Rod Quantock, that passionate (as opposed to economic) rationalist, was in one team, and Mikey Robbins was in the other, which happened to include Kate Fischer, presenter of cartoons (on Nine) and friend of James Packer (son of the owner of Nine). Kate had come up in the

conversation between (Nine's) Ray Martin and the Packer scion, when brave Ray invited young Mr Packer to propose to her, onscreen, (on Nine).

There were obviously some things even a media baronet won't do to further his public image, so Ray had to help things along with a little judicious encouragement. He couldn't *believe* the young master hadn't done a television interview before. No, honestly, he wasn't just saying it.

I confess that I only saw these vignettes through the medium of the utterly essential *Media Watch*. I don't often watch *A Current Affair*. It gives me hives.

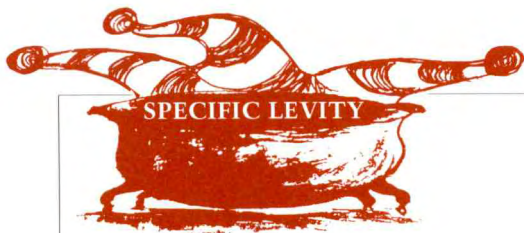
Anyway, when the Fairfax bid came up on *GNW*, it was in the section where the team have to identify a video clip of a recent story, which in this case was the Fairfax journos' strike. Quantock was inspired by it to a fine jeremiad, anathematising 'that bastard', Kerry Packer, and lamenting the ABC's current state of extreme malnutrition. I don't know if he realised at first that Ms Fischer was there when he did it. But Robbins and McDermott made sure we did—their JJJ teamwork was seamless. Fischer was not pleased, and displayed some real temper later in the game over the awarding of a point, which was, just maybe, displaced anger over the Quantock speech. Robbins responded to her tantrum with a mock warning: 'Jimbo, if you think your *dad's* scary...!' At the time she'd looked firmly into the camera and said 'They're *really* nice guys, you know; *really* nice guys.' She wasn't joking at all.

IT WAS FASCINATING THEN, to see on *Media Watch's* extracts from *A Current Affair* on May 19, how secure James Packer was on his father's network. After yet another Dorothy Dixier from Ray Martin, Packer Jnr said that it was important to have a viable Australian media organisation, echoing something that John Howard had said about a week previously. Stuart Littlemore showed a number of clips of Packer Snr addressing the 1991 Senate media inquiry concerning his attitude to editorial interference (he's for it), and ownership of Fairfax (the idea pleases him because he'd like to own a former rival's empire).

Add to that a wimpish post-Wendt *Witness*, a tame post-Jill Singer *Today Tonight* and nothing resembling current affairs on Ten, and it's easy to see why we have to worry about the prospect of Young James getting Fairfax in his Christmas stocking: the only way we'll get any independent news and commentary at all will be through watching the ABC, that large, if starved, Australian media organisation that seems to have escaped the notice of Messrs Howard and Packer.

In fact, the ABC is soon going to be the *only* media outlet of any size giving independent commentary. And if you're still interested in *reading* independent commentary, then you'll just have to keep on doing what you're doing right now this second. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance reviewer.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 54, June 1997

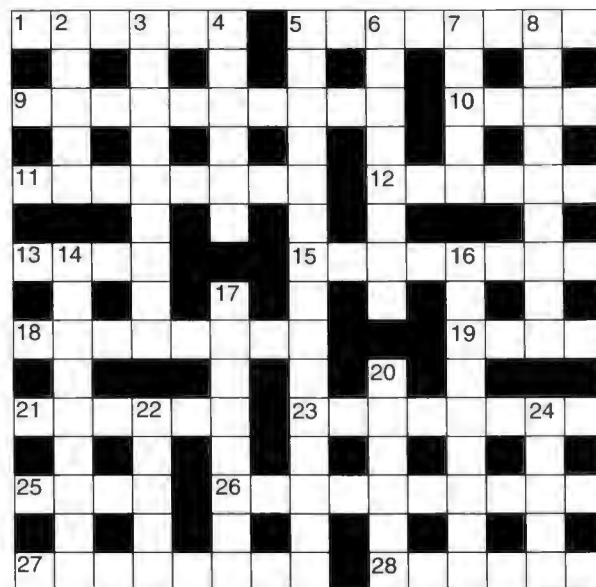
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

1. Senior journalist in charge starts to send out decrees. (6)
- 5,11 & 25. June has her celebration of 'winter Christmas' on the 21st. Others prefer the 22nd, if the description fits. (8,3,2,3,4)
9. Agreeable to do damage on debt reminders? That's hardly congenial! (10)
10. Fitting feeling for 5-across etc. and also for 5-down! (4)
11. See 5-across.
12. The heart of liturgy is on trial, perhaps, in this ceremonial (6)
13. On bail, could escape to this resort. (4)
15. Ray leaves the aristocracy in turmoil. What irony! (8)
18. A Roman farewell to unusual rain. Could send you to sleep. (8)
19. What you can pull if you want to impress. (4)
21. Politically softer, left in the rain? (6)
23. A mixture of food and beer could give a premonition of trouble. (8)
25. See 5-across.
26. In favour of examination in spite of giving signs to the contrary. (10)
27. What the postmaster does when he gives his seal of approval to something. (6,2)
28. The mogul is not coy about his wealth. (6)

DOWN

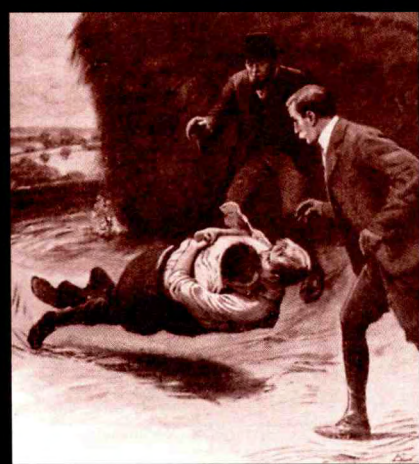
2. 'Queen and huntress chaste and fair' as celebrated by the poets and forsaken by Prince, perhaps! (5)
3. This sort of photograph shows that I come round post. Could it have been super-imposed? (9)
4. Eastern situation without right wing, perhaps, for this chamber. (6)
5. Sort of conditions possible on 5-across, including aspects of 21 and 10-across. Exhibitors include Jack. (7,3,5)
6. Heartless boast and curt rewrite create obstacle. (8)
7. Act it out without expression. (5)
8. A volley of shots mixed with a tin rattle contribute, surprisingly, to a redemptive outcome. (9)
14. Demotion to a lower level. (9)
16. Running madly, actor and I caught cab with agility. (9)
17. 2-down, in short, with odd spurts of energy, causes interference. (8)
20. R.I.P. set in stone possibly by the vicar. (6)
22. Repeat monotonously with bits of loose thread. (5)
24. Depart after loud cacophony made by wild dog. (5)



Solution to Crossword no. 53, May 1997



I say chaps, you can both have a read!



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on what's
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