

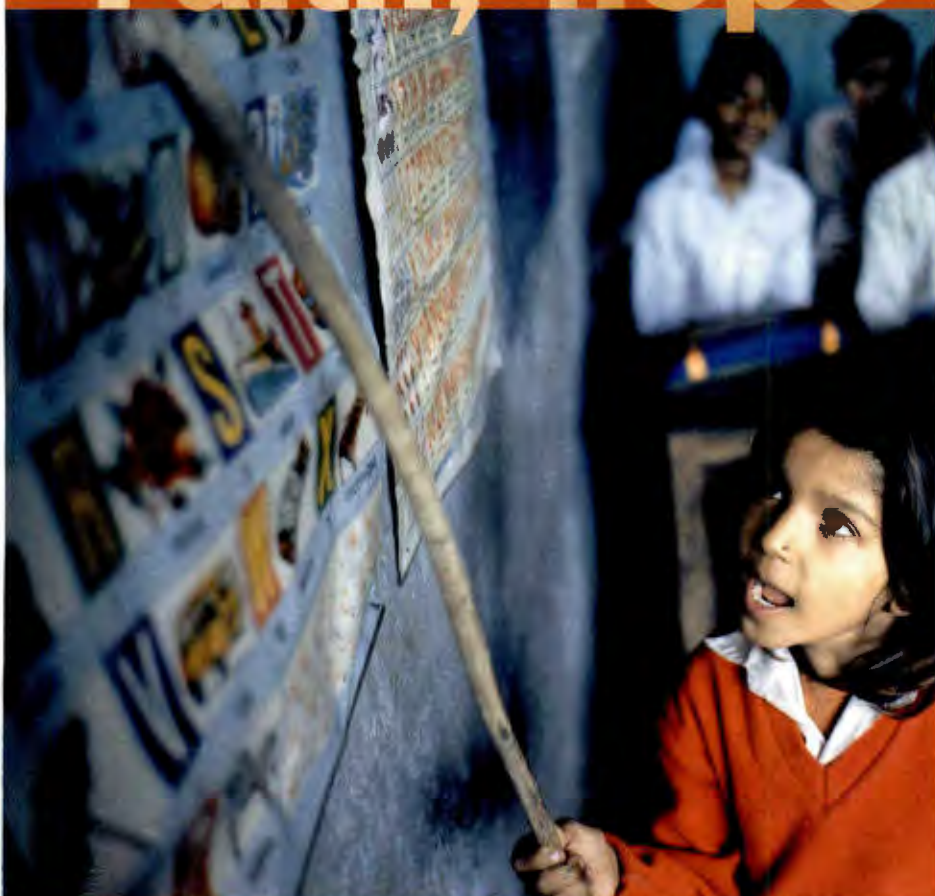
EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC ARTS
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGICAL
Vol 12, No 9, November 2001, 20. 30 (line) CST

m

es

Faith, hope or charity?



o

Non-government organisations
in action, from Penrith to Delhi.

EUREKA STREET ANNUAL DINNER 2002

with guests
Don Watson
historian, speech-writer and author of
Recollections of a Bleeding Heart:
Portrait of Paul Keating PM
and
Lowitja O'Donoghue
former Chair of the Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Commission

Monday 2 December 2002, 7pm for 7.30pm

Newman College
University of Melbourne
887 Swanston Street, Parkville

Cost: \$80 per head
FEST members and students: \$65 per head
RSVP: Friday 15 November 2002
Please note that seats are limited

Bookings tel: (03) 9427 7311
or email: reception@jespub.jesuit.org.au

LANGUAGE & POLITICS

EUREKA STREET book offer



Australian Religious Diary 2003

It's that time of the year again. So if you need to co-ordinate the school holiday visits interstate or remember the high days and holy days of friends, then this is the ideal diary for you.

Compact and beautifully designed, the *Australian Religious Diary* gives the major feasts and holy days from the Anglican and Uniting Churches, Ukrainian and Maronite Catholic Rites, Orthodox, Jewish and Muslim calendars. It also notes all state and most international holidays. And for the reflective there is a comprehensive list of liturgical readings for each day.

Thanks to David Lovell Publishing, *Eureka Street* has 10 copies of the *Australian Religious Diary* to give away. Just put your name and address on the back of an envelope and send to: Eureka Street November 2002 Book Offer, PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121. See page 8 for winners of the September 2002 Book Offer.





EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
VOLUME 12 NUMBER 9 NOVEMBER 2002

Publisher Andrew Hamilton sj
Editor Morag Fraser

November guest editor Peter Browne
Associate editor Kate Manton
Graphic designer Siobhan Jackson
General manager Mark Dowell
Marketing & advertising manager Kirsty Grant
Subscriptions Jessica Battersby
Editorial, production and administration assistants Juliette Hughes, Ben Hider, Susannah Buckley, Kate Hird, Steven Conte, Paul Fyfe sj, Geraldine Battersby, Irene Hunter
Cricket consultant Mark Irving
Contributing editors Adelaide: Greg O'Kelly sj; Perth: Dean Moore; Sydney: Edmund Campion & Gerard Windsor; Queensland: Peter Pierce
United Kingdom Denis Minns sj
Jesuit editorial board Peter L'Estrange sj, Andrew Bullen sj, Andrew Hamilton sj, Peter Steele sj, Bill Uren sj
Patrons Eureka Street gratefully acknowledges the support of C. and A. Carter; the trustees of the estate of Miss M. Condon; W.P. & M.W. Gurry

Eureka Street magazine, ISSN 1036-1758, Australia Post Print Post approved pp349181/00314, is published ten times a year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond VIC 3121 PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121 Tel: 03 9427 7311 Fax: 03 9428 4450 email: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au <http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/> Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by Andrew Hamilton sj, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond
Printed by Doran Printing 46 Industrial Drive, Braeside VIC 3195.
© Jesuit Publications 2002
Unsolicited manuscripts will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Requests for permission to reprint material from the magazine should be addressed in writing to the editor.

This month
Cover design by Siobhan Jackson
Cover photograph and photograph this page by Mathias Heng Graphics pp5, 10, 12, 13-15, 18, 23, 31, 39, 41, 43, 45 by Siobhan Jackson
Cartoon p8 by Dean Moore
Photographs pp19, 21 by Jason Lindsay
Photographs pp25-27 courtesy Helen McCue
Photographs pp28, 37 by Bill Thomas

COMMENT

- 4 *Andrew Hamilton* Large and small

SNAPSHOT

- 5 Comings and goings, signs of the times, talking it over, heroes and friends of asylum seekers.

LETTERS

- 6 *John Haughey, John Carmody*

THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC

- 8 *John Quiggin* Low-cost Kyoto
10 *Peter Spearritt* Big city blues
12 *Margaret Rice* Hooked

COLUMNS

- 7 **Capital Letter**
Jack Waterford Outflanked
9 **Archimedes**
Tim Thwaites Avoiding overkill
11 **Summa Theologiae**
James McEvoy Sense and spirituality
17 **By the Way**
Brian Matthews Word-mongering
50 **Watching Brief**
Juliette Hughes Soap flake

FEATURE

- 13 **No news wasn't good news**
Greg Barton reports on Indonesia.

BOOKS

- 38 **The short list**
Reviews of *Faith: Faith Bandler, Gentle Activist; Terror: A Meditation on the Meaning of September 11; My Forbidden Face: Growing Up Under the Taliban* and *The Naked Fish: An Autobiography of Belief*.
39 **Repetitive injuries**
Brett Evans reviews Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*.
41 **Tied to the gum tree**
Richard Johnstone samples a leaf or two from Ashley Hay's *Gum*.
43 **When is it wise?**
Pilita Clark reviews *Why Do People Hate America?* and *The Eagle's Shadow: Why America Fascinates and Infuriates the World*.
45 **Mozzies**
Terry Lane finds out what the buzz is about in *Mosquito: The Story of Man's Deadliest Foe*.



COVER STORY: NGO SPECIAL EDITION

- 19 **Local heroes**
What does 'aspirational voter' mean in Penrith? asks *David Burchell*.
22 **Social, and enterprising**
Can organisations be both? *Don Siemon* reports.
23 **Selling services**
Ann Nevile looks at the tensions between efficiency and service.
25 **Rural rebellion**
Peter Mares meets Rural Australians for Refugees.
28 **Entrepreneurial welfare: two views**
Nic Frances on the one hand, *Liz Curran* on the other.
30 **Are you free?**
Michael McGirr goes volunteering in the country.
32 **Caught in the middle**
Patrick Kilby on overseas aid.
36 **Where have all the activists gone?**
David Scott asks why social justice is off the agenda.

POETRY

- 42 *Peter Porter* Things We Tell Our Doctors, A Cat Jumps
47 *Juan Garrido Salgado* September 11, 1973

FLASH IN THE PAN

- 48 **Reviews of the films** *Red Dragon; The Road to Perdition; Nine Queens; Walking on Water* and *Sunshine State*.

SPECIFIC LEVITY

- 51 *Joan Nowotny* Cryptic crossword

Large and small

IN THE RHYTHMS of the great Christian feasts, November was for long an oddity. Whereas other feasts were regularly spaced, November begins with All Saints' Day, followed on the second of November by All Souls' Day. This November, the conjunction is particularly appropriate.

Feasts persist only because they gather into themselves deeper anxieties and sources of final reassurance. They are gates into the unseen world, alternately the object of dread and hope.

The feast of All Saints touches our anxieties about the value of what we have built, about the validity of what we commit our lives to, and about whether others will follow us in our passions and carry on our commitments. In remembering those who have built before us, the feast assures us that nothing will be lost of what they or we ourselves have built and that, for all the apparent incapacity of our building to weather the storms of culture and time, what is of value in it will endure.

The feast of All Souls enters our deeper anxieties about the worth of our personal lives and our relationships, and about the enduring value of the lives of those who have shaped us. The feast responds that nothing is lost of the lives of those who have lived, are living and will live, and that we do not die alone but die into a great company. Like the feast of All Saints it affirms hope in the face of the tidal recessions that make for discouragement.

Intersecting the parading and saddling of the horses for the Melbourne Cup, the feasts of All Souls' Day and All Saints' Day may seem marginal to the rhythms that govern our daily lives. But this year there are large things that make for discouragement that not even a winning Cup Double could dispel.

The bombing in Bali has brought to Australian homes grief for young sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. The death of the young, especially, makes us wonder whether any human life has final value. Bali will also lead many people to feel that they live insecurely in a hostile world. Insecurity often leads people to dismantle in a day the buildings of civility that have taken years to construct. We have already seen this in the widespread endorsement of action in Iraq for reasons which, if accepted as a general rule of international behaviour, could justify almost any attack by the strong on the weak. The readiness to overturn humane and rational conventions so laboriously established inevitably poses questions about the lasting value of anything that we build.

THESE ARE THE LARGE things that raise questions about the deeper value of our lives and commitments. But there are also smaller things, single human lives: the man who had sought asylum in Australia on the grounds that he would be killed, but was returned to Colombia and duly murdered; the man, tortured in Syria, put in solitary confinement and given shock treatment in Australian detention, who died after an operation for a tumour long left untreated. Their deaths, and the lack of compassion and outrage about their fate, make us ask if it matters whether they, or we ourselves, live or die, and whether anything should endure of the society that we build.

In the Catholic Church, too, Archbishop Pell has finished a time of waiting, having withdrawn himself from his responsibilities during an enquiry. His pain echoes the wider pain of those who have been abused within churches, and as a result found themselves withdrawn from engagement with society and with God. Such pain also makes us ask about the value of human lives and about the value of what is built in God's name in the churches.

This November is playtime for the demons of despair and doubt. In the face of these things, we are given the feasts of All Saints and All Souls to touch the wellsprings of our hope, and to celebrate with a touch of defiance. ■

Andrew Hamilton is *Eureka Street's* publisher.

EUREKA STREET

invites you
to celebrate the launch of this special
NGO & NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

November edition
with an address by

Phoebe Fraser
'Why would you do it?'

Phoebe Fraser is Principal Executive of Fundraising and Communications at Care Australia, and has worked as an emergency aid worker in many of the world's worst trouble spots.

6.30pm, Friday 1 November 2002

Alliance Française de Melbourne
17 Robe Street, St Kilda, Melbourne

Wine and cheese will be served. All welcome.

Entry is free or by donation. RSVP and enquiries to
Kirsty Grant: (03) 9427 7311 or kirsty@jespub.jesuit.org.au

Hale and farewell



This month we welcome Peter Browne as guest editor of our special edition examining the group that makes such a large, unsung though nonetheless controversial contribution to Australian life—the non-government and not-for-profit organisations.

Peter, who is currently working at the Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University, has extensive broadcasting, publishing and editorial experience. He has been editor of *Modern Times* (formerly *Australian Society*), commissioning editor at UNSW Press, and he is currently executive producer of Terry Lane's ABC Radio National program, *The National Interest*.

Kate Manton, who came to *Eureka Street* as assistant editor in January 1998, is collaborating with Peter Browne on this issue. Volume 12 number 9 will also, sadly, be Kate's last *Eureka Street*—in November she is moving into other areas of publishing. For five years she has been a great gift to *Eureka Street*—generous, prodigiously talented and formidably organised. We will miss her a great deal but farewell her in the assurance that in whatever field Kate works she will make her mark and significant contribution.

We see red



On the bicycle route from Jesuit Publications to Fitzroy, there is one notable hill which has traffic lights at the top. In this case, red lights are welcome because they give unfit cyclists a chance to catch breath and to rest their eyes on the advertising hoarding across the road. It depicts a flood marker, and announces that where we may see floodwater indicators, the folk from *The Australian Financial Review* see financial indicators.

Now cyclists, who habitually seek indicators that the surrounding cars intend to leave them alive, are less likely to ask how they can make a buck out of the flood than to wonder what might have happened to the poor cyclists and other human beings caught in it. At all events, they pray earnestly that when the time comes for them to cross the intersection, any chaps from the *Fin Review* coming the other way will not only recognise financial indicators, but will see traffic indicators showing red.

Talk of the times



Christmas is a time for generosity. It is also a time for enlightenment. Both aspects come together this year in the National Council of Churches Christmas Bowl appeal. The appeal will feature talks about topics of current interest in our region. They will be given in the second half of November in each of the states.

There are three speakers. Beth Ferris has worked with refugees and immigrants in Sweden and New York, before going to Geneva to the World Council of Churches. Matthew Wale has been a mediator in the conflict in the Solomon Islands, working for the Solomon Islands Christian Association Peace Committee. Bernard Sabella has worked for the Middle East Council of Churches with Palestinian refugees.

For details of talks, dates and venues, contact the National Council of Churches on 02 9299 2215, or email: christianworldservice@ncca.org.au.

Reluctant hero

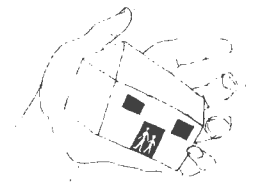


In mid-October, the desert emirate of Sharjah provided an unlikely setting for Steve Waugh to become the second test cricketer to be capped 150 times. In 1985

Waugh made an inauspicious debut in the Boxing Day test. The scrawny kid from Bankstown strode to the crease with an attitude (and a mullet) and scored 13 and 5. He has since made an indelible mark on Australian cricket. On the field 'Tugga' Waugh has been the most successful test captain ever by almost any standard.

Waugh's remarkable role off the field is also noteworthy. He is playing a significant role in the unionisation of international cricket in an industry that has traditionally exploited players of all hues. His unstinting work for a leper colony in Calcutta is for the most part unheralded in Australia. Largely at Waugh's instigation, the Australian team paid their respects at Gallipoli on the way to England for the most recent Ashes campaign. On the shores of Anzac Cove, Waugh remarked, 'People say we are heroes, but really we're not ... we are just men who play sport and get put on a bit of a pedestal. Realistically there are people far more deserving of accolades than us.' When Waugh retires Australia will lose both a fine player and a great leader.

Donate for a difference



If you are an asylum seeker about to be put out on to the street in Melbourne, your last and best hope will be the Asylum Seeker Project. It is an ecumenical group, sponsored by the Uniting Church, and over six years has managed somehow, with no government funds, to find accommodation and support for the most desperate of asylum seekers who have no money to pay for shelter.

It has now started Friends of the Asylum Seeker Project, which will allow people concerned for the welfare of asylum seekers to contribute financially, or to become directly involved with asylum seekers. In this case, donations can make a real difference.

If you are interested to know more, you can write to Grant Mitchell, at the Asylum Seeker Project, 2/579 Queensberry Street, North Melbourne VIC 3051. Or email him on asp@sub.net.au.

Force-freed

I was heartened by Bishop Geoffrey Robinson's hopeful article, 'Vatican II: From Pause to Forward' (*Eureka Street*, September 2002). But as a lay person my experience of Vatican II has been different from his.

I was born in Northern Ireland in 1933, so by the time Vatican II arrived I had long acquired the Catholic habit of accepting automatically any church teaching the instant one heard of it. It was this kind of Catholicism which then permitted me and millions like me to 'accept' all the documents of Vatican II without knowing what was in them.

This mass conversion was further facilitated by the church authorities who never mentioned what was in the documents from the pulpit (and thus signalled to us in the pews the church's estimate of the importance of these seminal documents for the laity). As for the liturgical changes, I think the hierarchy assumed that the laity, as usual, would do what they were told to do without presuming to wonder why they were now being told to do something rather different.

John Haughey
Carlton, VIC

Straight right

Print confers authority. A name and renown do so as well. It was with increasing perplexity, therefore, and eventual dismay that I read Edmund Campion's 'Long



Eureka Street welcomes letters from our readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters may be edited. Letters must be signed, and should include a contact phone number and the writer's name and address. Send to: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au or PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121

Divisions: Australia's Sectarian Histories' in the October issue of *Eureka Street*.

I'm not concerned here to canvass what being a Catholic means, though that was relevant to his argument—whether it's baptism, education or continuing practice of religion. Even so, it would be an appropriate question since politics was his point: one might ask, for instance, if 'Billy' Hughes remained a Labor man—after becoming a 'Rat'—simply because of his early life and activities?

Rather, I was puzzled, first, by Campion's perspective and then (more significantly) by his accuracy.

I was, frankly, nonplussed by the fact that such a perceptive social observer and commentator had not realised that five people of Catholic background (Greiner, Fahey, Collins, Chikarovsky and Brogden) had led the non-Labor side of NSW politics, given that this has happened over the last 20 years. I was even more surprised that, in this context, he did not remark upon the importance of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) and its predecessors in this process: the DLP allowed a staged shift in political allegiance—from the party of the workers

to the parties of money—by an increasingly educated, professionalised and affluent Catholic population.

The greatest shock came, though, when Campion wrote, 'I'd been used to saying that the year 1988 was significant in church history because it saw the first Catholic in the 20th century leading the non-Labor side of politics, Nick Greiner.' Can he *really* believe that? Apart from the fact that Greiner became leader of the NSW opposition in March 1983, has he forgotten Joe Lyons (a Labor defector) who became leader of the United Australia Party opposition in Canberra in May 1931 and, following the election, prime minister in the following December? After 70 years, that fact should have seeped in.

John Carmody
Roseville, NSW

Correction

In our October edition, it was stated that 'only ten per cent of asylum seekers in detention camps get an interview with the Refugee Tribunal'. This is not correct. Refugees in Australian detention camps are routinely interviewed by the tribunal as part of the refugee determination process. Of course, those asylum seekers in 'Pacific solution' camps on Nauru and in PNG do not have access to the tribunal.

September 2002 Book Offer Winners

S. Bush, Wagga Wagga, NSW; S. Houghton, Maffra, VIC; D. Ingle, Leongatha, VIC; Lourdes Hill College, Hawthorne, QLD; P.J. MacCarthy, Mt Claremont, WA; S. Manley, Kalorama, VIC; Marist Sisters, Burwood, VIC; R. Smith, Coburg East, VIC; H.M. Thomas, Nunawading, VIC.



He could be in school if his community wasn't impoverished

Caritas Australia helps some of the most marginalised communities around the globe by addressing the issues of poverty. Through long term development programs we enable people to take greater control of their lives.

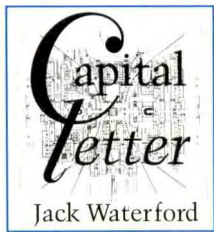
By remembering Caritas Australia in your Will, you are making a precious gift that brings lasting change.

Please call 1800 024 413 for more information.

www.caritas.org.au



Caritas Australia
The Catholic Agency for Overseas Aid and Development



Outflanked

IS IT THE SAME LABOR PARTY that is sitting fairly comfortably in office in all of the state and territory parliaments, yet doing so appallingly at the federal level?

If federal Labor, now apparently reformed, is to win at future elections, should it be emulating what Labor premiers and chief ministers have been doing with such apparent success? Or can its failure to date be attributed to doing just that?

Take a look around the states. Bob Carr, in NSW, believes that law and order, and pandering to community insecurity, are at the core of his success. He has doubled his state's prison population, without any discernible effect on the level of crime. He pays assiduous attention to the radio shock jocks and to the belief that no-one is safe walking around the streets.

His vigour drowns out the noise of crime and corruption within his own party. It ignores the fact that child welfare systems in his state are in virtual collapse. It also ignores the most obvious signs of alienation between traditional Labor voters and their old party. His presidential style, and the hopelessness, factionalism and disorganisation of his rivals means that he himself can avoid the Labor tag, just as his most successful predecessor, Neville Wran did. Bob Carr is successful not for being a Labor man, but for being a big personality in a Lilliput.

Such a winning formula was always bound to be exported. Now Victoria, facing an election before Carr, has adopted both the law-and-order trick and the focus on the personality of the leader. It's very much the same in Queensland, long the home of big-man politics (the model being Joh Bjelke-Petersen). And if anyone can find evidence of a distinctively Labor idea, particularly on anything to do with social matters, coming out of South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, Canberra or the Northern Territory, would they please report it to the relevant ALP state branch secretaries, so that remedial action can be taken.

What's dangerous about all this, from federal Labor's point of view, is that it means a progressive stripping away from the party of any real identification with constituencies, causes or broad approaches to issues. Factional power struggles aside, Labor long ago recognised that it could never win office simply by catering to its industrial base. So, instead, it thinks it can reach out to wider constituencies, identified by focus-group research on their aspirations, obsessions, and hopes and fears. Perception management becomes as important as policy.

Both John Howard and some of the would-be Labor saviours have identified the 'aspirational' classes of the outer suburbs as a key group which must be wooed. Such people, they argue, are less focused on old class politics—indeed they are often resentful about the welfare system and its beneficiaries. They are supposed to be far more focused on hip-pocket issues, not least the mortgage interest rate. Not only has Howard been

closer to their wavelength, but many traditional Labor ideas, particularly ones focused on Aboriginal, feminist, immigration, refugee and underclass issues, excite their anger.

The 'aspirational' classes are real enough, and the focus on individualism, self-improvement and self-reliance was in any event as much fostered by Labor during its 1980s–90s reign as it has been by John Howard. But their situation has other features, not least an increasing alienation from any sense of community, a decreasing association with any organised activity, and an increasing sense of siege and isolation from the world.

IT'S HARDLY AN EXCLUSIVELY Australian phenomenon. In Britain, the pundits speak of Basildon Man, living in one of England's barometer electorates. The Demos thinktank in London has spoken of a decreasing sense of community and collective identity, and of an increasing disengagement from the political process 'as politicians fail to reconcile their promises of better public service delivery with the experience of individual citizens whose lives are increasingly lived in the private realm'.

Old formal institutions, such as local councils, have become shells of their former selves and, when people interact with them, they view it as just another encounter with bureaucracy. Government obsession with efficiency has largely failed to improve the perception of public services.

These are hardly the perceptions calculated to make attractive a party which still professes a faith in what collective action can achieve. But they are the perceptions to which state Labor is pandering. In part through such pandering, the failure of state Labor parties to improve health, education and community services is not getting the attention it deserves. If mentioned at all, the failures are blamed on federal government—the level of government furthest from the scene, and the level which, thanks to Hawke, Keating and now Howard, is least equipped to make any difference on the ground.

The challenge facing federal Labor is not merely the corruption and complacency of party machinery happy to divide the spoils and patronage of state government. Labor also needs to make a case against the very sorts of administrations that the Labor state and territory governments represent.

Simon Crean had better get on with it. John Howard's family package, when it finally emerges, is likely to hem in Labor from both right and left—from the right in being more cunningly tuned to modern demographics and perceptions, yet appealingly traditional; from the left in representing state intervention of a sort that Labor has not articulated. ■

Jack Waterford is editor-in-chief of *The Canberra Times*.



THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC

Low-cost Kyoto

272 ECONOMISTS
MIGHTN'T BE WRONG

IN MID-AUGUST the Australia Institute released a statement signed by 272 academic economists, around a third of the country's entire profession, calling on the federal government to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Strangely, the statement went largely unreported in the Australian media.

Among other things, the 272 economists said that policy options to slow climate change are already available 'without harming employment or living standards in Australia'. Importantly, they stated that these options 'may in fact improve productivity in the long term'. The statement went on:

Economic instruments—such as carbon taxes or emissions trading—will be an important part of a comprehensive climate change policy. Revenue raised from carbon taxes or the sale of permits can be used to reduce taxes elsewhere in the economy.

The signatories included economists as diverse as Peter Dixon, John Hewson and John Neville. Bearing in mind that most surveys attract response rates of only around 40 per cent and that, for a variety of reasons, many academics are not prepared to sign public statements of this kind, this was a stunning response. Opponents of Kyoto promptly began soliciting signatures for a 'counter petition'. But at the time of writing (more than six weeks later) that petition had not been released, and it was rumoured that the list of signatories was embarrassingly short in both numbers and quality.

The only prominent economist who has opposed ratification of Kyoto is Professor Warwick McKibbin of the Australian National University. McKibbin's position reflects the fact that he is, along with American Peter Wilcoxon, the author of a competing greenhouse-reduction proposal which he hopes Australia will adopt. Since the US government has made it clear that

it will do nothing at all to mitigate global warming, and all other developed countries have ratified Kyoto or announced plans to do so, Australian ratification of Kyoto would effectively spell the end of the McKibbin–Wilcoxon plan.

Unlike McKibbin, most Australian opponents of Kyoto support the US 'business as usual' position. But as the scientific evidence in favour of the global-warming hypothesis has firmed, advocates of

'external', that is, felt by others. When externalities arise within a single jurisdiction the standard economic prescription is a tax (in this case, a 'carbon tax'). In more complex cases, the economists' solution is the creation of a limited set of tradeable 'emissions rights'.

The Kyoto agreement sets targets for emission reductions by individual countries but is agnostic about the policy approach used to reach them. Subsequent



inaction have found it increasingly difficult to persuade reputable economists to support them. It may seem surprising that the Australian economics profession strongly supports Kyoto, given the popular view of economists as narrow-minded bean counters. It is even more surprising in view of repeated protestations from the Howard government and others that ratification of Kyoto would be disastrous for the Australian economy.

In reality, Kyoto is a textbook economic response to what economists call an 'externality' problem. Fossil-fuel use or land-clearing by any one individual or country makes a sufficiently small difference to global warming that there is little reason for the individual or country concerned to take it into account. The effects are mostly

agreements at Bonn and Marrakesh laid the basis for a system of internationally tradeable emissions rights. Individual countries can meet their targets through regulation, carbon taxes or purchase of rights from other countries that have already met their targets. This approach is generally supported by economists, and even alternatives such as the McKibbin–Wilcoxon plan are only marginal variants.

Then there's the cost of implementing Kyoto, and of Australia's ratification. Numerous economic modellers have concluded that these costs are very small, but I will rely on the work of Warwick McKibbin, who can scarcely be accused of pro-Kyoto bias.

Assuming other countries seek to reduce their emissions, Australia will

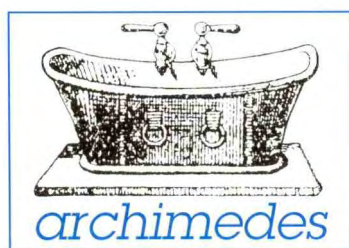
suffer some reduction in coal exports. McKibbin estimates that this will reduce GDP by around 0.5 per cent. But given that other countries have ratified, McKibbin estimates that, until about 2015, Australia is better off ratifying Kyoto and implementing emission-reduction measures than staying out.

The gain is reversed after that, and a complete estimate of net costs requires the calculation of a 'present value'. The idea of a present value is to reduce a series of future gains and losses to a single present-day value, which is the amount that would have to be invested (or borrowed) at a given rate of interest to yield an equivalent flow. McKibbin estimates that (if existing measures are taken into account) ratification will reduce the present value of income for the period 2000–2050 by 0.16 per cent. This is enough for McKibbin to justify his own opposition to Kyoto, but it's a trivial sum in the context of the global debate.

To get a feel for the magnitudes, it's useful to remember that 0.16 per cent of GDP is equal to two weeks' economic growth. In other words, suppose that we all took it easy for two weeks, say, to watch the Olympics. During those two weeks the economy kept producing the same level of output but there was no growth in productivity. Suppose that after the two weeks were finished the economy returned to the previous rate of growth, but that the growth missed in those two weeks was not regained. This would be roughly the impact that McKibbin is modelling. Actually, since there's no net impact before 2020, a closer parallel would be that nothing happened until 2020 and that we missed four weeks' growth then.

In current monetary terms, 0.16 per cent of GDP is around \$1 billion per year. By contrast, the Great Barrier Reef, which will almost certainly be severely damaged if global warming is not controlled, is estimated to contribute around \$2 billion a year in economic benefits alone, and the ecological costs of losing it are virtually incalculable.

There is, as always, a catch. Kyoto is a low-cost preliminary response to the global-warming problem, not a solution. If scientific evidence over the next few years confirms the mainstream view on global warming represented by the International Panel on Climate Change, substantially more serious action will be needed. Whereas the Kyoto targets require



Avoiding overkill

IN 1967–68, 2500 FARMS IN Britain reported foot-and-mouth disease (FMD). About half a million animals were killed to bring it under control. The outbreak last year was reported from only 2030 farms, but more than six-and-a-half million animals were slaughtered, costing the British economy over A\$35 billion. What went wrong? And what can Australia learn?

FMD is a viral disease of cloven-hoofed ruminants: cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, deer and water buffalo. It is highly contagious, resulting in listlessness and blisters around the feet and mouth. The virus does not affect humans or food safety and most animals recover. But FMD causes such severe production losses, in meat and milk, that any region with an outbreak is quarantined from world trade for at least six months, more likely years. That would be a major disaster for Australia with its A\$8 billion-a-year meat export industry.

Last year's UK outbreak got off to a bad start, according to Dr Paul Kitching, the director of Canada's National Centre for Foreign Animal Disease in Winnipeg. At the time he was department head of the exotic diseases laboratory at the Institute for Animal Health in Pirbright, England, as well as head of the world reference laboratory for FMD.

The disease was traced to a piggery near Newcastle, but by the time the authorities could swing into action it was being reported from the north to the south-west. It reached Scotland, Northern Ireland, France and Holland before being stopped. The timing could not have been worse politically—one month before a general election. Tony Blair turned to his scientific advisory committee. Not one member of that committee was a vet, but they had expertise in mathematical modelling; they asked four groups to project the course of the outbreak. The resulting models so concerned the government that it took responsibility for fighting the disease out of the hands of the Ministry of Agriculture and gave it to a centralised scientific committee without veterinary expertise.

This committee ruled that any animals with the disease must be slaughtered within 24 hours. However, the models were founded on at least four basic assumptions that were incorrect in veterinary terms. Also, 24 hours did not allow vets to test animals to confirm they really had FMD. Kitching estimates that about half the animals killed were probably not infected.

So how does this affect Australia? It's pretty clear, says Kitching, that mass slaughter of animals as the sole method of containing FMD is unacceptable politically and socially. The alternative is limited slaughtering combined with vaccination. But current vaccines occasionally infect animals and create virus carriers in the population.

That leaves Australia with two priorities: to have a plan of action for dealing with an FMD outbreak before it occurs, and to develop better vaccines. Australia may have to import live FMD virus (as Canada has just done)—most likely into the Australian Animal Health Laboratory in Geelong, one of the world's most secure bio-containment facilities. But before that can happen, Australia's farmers will need convincing of the merit and safety of doing so—not an easy task. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

most developed countries to hold emissions at 1990 levels, a serious response will require both substantial cuts in emissions from more developed countries and constraints on the emissions of less developed countries. Unlike Kyoto, this will have a discernible impact on material standards of living. But the alternative of doing nothing will have consequences too awful to contemplate, including species extinction on an unparalleled scale.

In essence, Kyoto is a low-cost agreement that sets up the mechanisms, such as emissions trading systems, that will be needed for any serious response to global warming. And it requires a preliminary show of good faith from the developed countries. In the unlikely event of new evidence showing that the global-warming problem has been overstated, or of the invention of a cheap and simple technological 'fix', we will have incurred a modest cost for no benefit. But if the problem is as bad as the International Panel says it is, or even worse, ratification of Kyoto will greatly reduce the costs of reaching a more comprehensive solution in the future.

—John Quiggin

Big city blues

THE 200-KILOMETRE CITY

HOW DOES A NEW chum come to grips with Brisbane? The ads tell us that Queensland is 'beautiful one day, perfect the next', but they have nothing to say about Brisbane. In fact one of the greatest difficulties confronting Brisbane is that southerners' perceptions of the entire state are dominated by the successful barrage of tourist advertising over the last three decades. Queensland has only 21 per cent of Australia's population, but 53 per cent of tourist accommodation. Does anything else actually happen here? Not according to the billboards on the way to Tullamarine airport.

I've lived most of my life in the Sydney/Canberra/Melbourne triangle, where developers have to take over much-loved convents or rehabilitate toxic sites to find the space to build apartments. In Brisbane they simply buy parcels of abandoned industrial land. But in attempting to come to grips with the development-at-any-cost regime of Joh Bjelke and the 'Smart State', new-economy push of Premier Beattie, I do

have some Queensland credentials, which helps.

Starting from Victoria, the assault on the north by the Labor-voting side of the family began with the opening of Spearritt's Federal Café in Cooktown in 1900. They never made much money there, or at bakeries in Bundaberg and Brisbane. Meanwhile, my Country Party ancestors took up land for next to nothing in south Burnett in the early 1900s and have never looked back. My maternal grandfather, who trained to be a farmer at Melbourne University's Dookie branch, went north to become a Ford dealer, farmer and finally a subdivider for southerners keen to retire at Buderim.

My knowledge of what has become the longest strip of urban development in Australia, the 200 kilometres from Noosa to the Tweed, is based on family holidays along that strip over the past 50 years. In the 1950s and '60s they were camping holidays; since the 1970s, when apartments replaced many of the camping grounds, they have been more urban. Miraculously, some of the camping grounds still remain, the only bit of egalitarian real estate left in coastal Queensland. The fibro cinemas of my youth are long since gone: in their place are some of Australia's most expensive apartments. During the winter months, Noosa becomes a veritable colony of Toorak, with real estate prices to match.

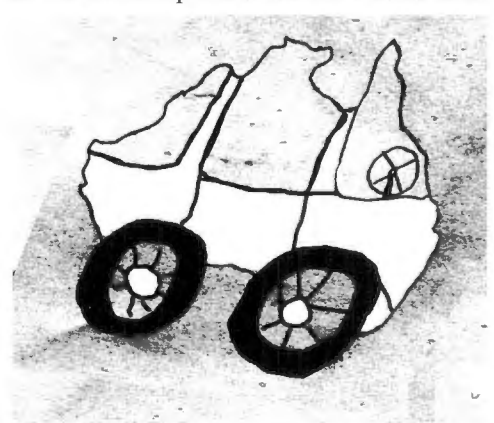
South East Queensland is proud to be the fastest growing urban area in Australia, with a 25 per cent population increase in the last decade. But there is trouble round the corner. The freeway system that services the growth, with the Gateway as its centrepiece, has helped turn this region into a 200-kilometre city.

Intriguingly, the Gateway bridge and freeway, opened in 1986, effectively take tourists and business people from the airport to the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast without the need to come into Brisbane. Both coasts have university campuses and increasingly diverse employment opportunities. Indeed, the Southport Campus of Griffith University will soon have more students than the university's foundation campus in Nathan, south-west of the Brisbane CBD.

Unlike Sydney, Brisbane is not separated from its north and south coasts by huge national parks. Imagine Sydney without the Ku-ring-gai Chase and Royal National Parks. Both Sydney and Melbourne have

more protected water catchment areas than our 200-kilometre city, where run-off from small rural allotments poses a huge risk in the near future.

Developers compete for prime residential parcels of land with freeway access. Even accommodation for aged people is built abutting freeways because the land is cheaper. For the time being, motorists enjoy quick travel times—at least outside peak hour. But the freeways cut across the landscape and encourage small hinterland towns to embrace suburban subdivisions in the township and small rural allotments



beyond. The costs of providing a safe and adequate water supply, health facilities and affordable energy to such haphazard subdivisions can be immense.

The scale of the transport crisis facing this region must not be underestimated. The recent Brisbane City Transport Plan shows that public transport usage has fallen from 11 per cent of all trips in 1976 to six per cent now. This region has become extraordinarily dependent on the private car, making it difficult for any political party to introduce the state petrol tax so urgently needed to fund both public transport and the road system. We inhabit a region where there will be strong population growth at both younger and older age levels. None of the former group and only a proportion of the latter can drive, let alone afford to maintain a car.

This 200-kilometre city desperately needs a mass transit system that links the major centres, without having to cater for the current sprawling development, which would inevitably make such a system uneconomic. Much more use should be made of the existing rail infrastructure, both within metro Brisbane and beyond, especially the Ipswich line, and new development should be encouraged within reach of the City Council's busway system.

Melbourne now has the eighth biggest tramway system in the world and is a much better city for it. Even brash Sydney, where the NRMA lobbied successfully to get rid of trams, has reintroduced light rail on some inner-city routes. Both of those cities have attempted to make amends for past mistakes by announcing (in Melbourne's case, just a few weeks ago) a renewed effort to concentrate new office, residential and commercial development around transport 'nodes'. Every major office centre in Sydney is on the rail system, and the majority of new apartments are within walking distance of rail. Only a handful of Brisbane's shopping malls have rail access, with other car-based centres allowed to develop well away from rail, necessitating continuing expenditure on car parks, busways and buses.

If the boosters of Brisbane, Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast want this to become a great metropolis, one day outstripping Melbourne and luring sustainable economic activity northwards, citizens have to start thinking now about how to fashion a 200-kilometre city which may well have to accommodate 3.4 million people within the next two decades. It is already housing 2.4 million people, 1.8 million in the immediate Brisbane area. The only large area of green space left to the north of the city—the pine plantations currently overseen by the Department of Primary Industries—could well be sold off for suburban development. Even now it is not too late to create a national park to protect all the Glasshouse Mountains, currently being encroached on by suburban subdivisions. What other medium-sized city in the world would compromise such a great natural asset right on its doorstep?

In the early 1980s opponents of the Bjelke-Petersen government's pro-development push coined the bumper sticker 'Sec Queensland before Joh sells it'. Today South East Queensland is still reeling from four decades of laissez-faire subdivision. The beaches, the bays, the rivers and the natural landscapes which make this such an attractive place for locals and tourists must not be compromised by haphazard suburban development. But this will require concerted action now by citizens and the many local governments and state government departments that preside over this region. As a comparative newcomer, I'll be watching with interest.

—Peter Spearritt



Sense and spirituality

IT'S A COMMON VIEW TODAY that the Western world has become a less religious place and that this decline has gathered pace over the last 50 years. To support this opinion, people point to declining church attendances as well as the findings of censuses and surveys which tell us that an increasing number of people state they have no religion, that New Age practices and Eastern religions are spreading, and that a growing number of people consider themselves Christian while they express beliefs that move outside Christian orthodoxy.

Some theologians and sociologists reflect on this decline, identifying scientific and technological change and the consumer revolution as the vehicles through which people have become bored with God, been lured into sinfulness, or have seen their former belief as illusion or superstition.

But does this general picture of decline really capture what is happening in our world? This is a crucial question for the church because the way in which the church responds to the question, even if the response is unarticulated, deeply shapes the way it proclaims the Gospel.

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor thinks that we need to look beyond the notion of decline. He argues that explanations of secularisation in terms of loss or decline capture some dimensions of what is happening but are ultimately inadequate. They do not account for the large cultural shifts in self-understanding that mark this period and undergird the new place of religion and the way in which it has come to be understood.

Earlier this year, Taylor published *Varieties of Religion Today* (Harvard), a small book that summarises some of his extensive work on secularisation. He traces the changing place of religion over the past five centuries and argues that contemporary Western culture is coloured by 'expressive individualism', a movement that has its origins in the late 18th century but has become a mass phenomenon since the 1960s. The fundamental understanding at work in the expressivist outlook is, as Taylor puts it:

that each of us has his or her own way of realising one's own humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.

According to Taylor, faith finds a new place in expressivist culture. In this outlook my faith must not only be my choice, it must also 'speak to me; it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this'.

Of course, expressivist culture has spawned superficial spiritual expressions but it has also brought about at a cultural level an understanding of faith as personal commitment that has always been important to the Christian tradition. For theologians like Augustine and Karl Rahner, a person's faith brings together their whole self and expresses their way of being in the world. If this were not happening, it would raise the question of whether we are dealing with faith at all. ■

James McEvoy teaches at Catholic Theological College, Adelaide.

Hooked

GOVERNMENTS, CATHOLICS
AND GAMBLING

HOW MUCH DOES A soft spot for a flutter cripple the Catholic response to the increasing social problems arising from gambling in Australia?

Fr Peter Norden SJ, based in Melbourne and Policy Director of Jesuit Social Services Australia, has a theological explanation for the benign Catholic view: 'We see gambling as recreation and a positive pursuit, an exercise of freedom. This contrasts with the classic Protestant position that gambling is inherently evil because the income is gained through a game of chance, rather than the sweat of the brow.'

Whatever the influence of other religions, it is the Catholic position that has historically dominated our nation's approach to gambling. Unlike Americans, who inherited Puritan values from their forebears, we don't see gambling as a vice, unless in excess.

Professor Jan McMillen, Executive Director of the Australian Institute for Gambling Research (AIGR) based in Sydney, explains that until only recently, gambling was the shadowy twin of Australian welfare.

'We built our national icons, the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House, with lottery revenue, and many of our public hospitals and community projects have been funded through gambling,' she says.

Catholics embraced the ethos with gusto, playing Saturday night bingo, raising funds through lotteries and building Catholic clubs.

The Ashfield Catholic and Community Club in Sydney's inner west is a good example. It was formed to raise revenue for the local Catholic school in an era when there were no government subsidies for Catholic education. Today, the club does not fund schooling and has no obvious relationship with the Catholic Church, although it donates around \$70,000 per annum to the St Vincent de Paul Society and Mary MacKillop outreach programs. Other Catholic clubs make similar donations to Catholic charities. The Catholic Club Castlereagh Street's charities include St Mary's Cathedral, the Little Sisters of the Poor and St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney.

In the 1970s our society shook off its traditional association between gambling

and charity when several forms of gambling, such as TABs, were handed over to the private sector.

Today, each of the states manages gaming in slightly different ways. The ACT and NSW, then Queensland, are the states most saturated with poker machines. And gaming profits from poker machines have grown phenomenally in the last ten years.

AIGR research shows that the ACT has 219.9 poker machines per 10,000 adults, NSW 209.6 and Queensland 126.8. By 2000, poker machines in NSW hotels and clubs were turning over \$36.9 billion a year. And disturbingly, research done in



NSW and Victoria shows that the greatest proportion of poker machine revenue comes from households in areas that suffer the most financial and social disadvantage, on a range of measures.

The AIGR report, *Distribution and Social Consequences of Gaming Machines in Sydney Clubs*, illustrates this comprehensively. 'It isn't rocket science. Over a five-year period we simply took data on gaming and overlaid it with data on indicators of economic and social disadvantage,' Professor McMillen says.

The results were as striking as they were disturbing, challenging the traditional view that gambling is only problematic for the up to two per cent of individuals who gamble to excess, and their families.

Even the most cursory of glances through the NSW Department of Gaming and Racing's Gaming Analysis for August 2000 (the last one published) shows that the areas with the most poker machines line up with those with the biggest social problems. The five top-earning poker machine clubs, in order, were in Penrith, Belmore, Parramatta, Rooty Hill and Mount Pritchard, all areas that do it tough.

But also among the top 200 were five Catholic clubs operating at six sites: Liverpool Catholic Club, Campbelltown Catholic Club, Illawarra Catholic Club at Hurstville, Lidcome Catholic Workman's Club, Illawarra Catholic Club at Menai and Ashfield Catholic and Community Club. At these clubs, poker machines might typically provide 80 per cent of the club's revenue.

Aoife Duffy is a counsellor with Relationships Australia and specialises in gambling problems in the Logan/Ipswich area, a region of Queensland with an abundance of poker machines. She has not followed the academic studies but when I quote them she says they reinforce what those in the field know: 'There are too many poker machines in some areas and when there are too many poker machines they leach the wealth out of the community around them.'

'I don't know whether poker machines are purposely built in areas of disadvantage but I certainly see a pattern where there are a lot of machines in areas with very little alternative form of entertainment. Clients say to me that they can't go to places where there are no poker machines because there'd be nowhere to go.'

Working within the Catholic paradigm, Peter Norden says it is inappropriate to suggest restricting the freedom to gamble. 'You can't propose shutting clubs in disadvantaged areas,' he says. Instead, he believes that the venues, including the Catholic clubs, need to ensure that the freedom of patrons is not denied through, for example, lack of visible clocks, lack of access to natural lighting and too easy access to ATMs.

The role of government in rescuing its communities from gambling-related problems is currently compromised. Professor McMillen points out that as gambling was opened up in the 1970s, the Fraser government simultaneously cut spending on welfare to the states. The states then had to raise their own taxes and started collecting the 'sin taxes'—on alcohol, tobacco and gambling.

If today's poker machines deplete community resources instead of building them, the impact can only get worse. Predictions are that the amount of revenue from poker machines in Australia is set to rise, despite recent talk of restrictions. NSW Budget estimates show that gaming machine revenue alone will go up to \$907 million by 2004–2005—a dramatic increase on current figures.

—Margaret Rice

This month's contributors: **John Quiggin** is an Australian Research Council Senior Fellow based at the Australian National University and Queensland University of Technology; **Peter Spearritt** is Executive Director of the Brisbane Institute; **Margaret Rice** is a freelance journalist.

INDONESIA

No news wasn't good news

Indonesia dropped out of the headlines, but the crisis continued. **Greg Barton** reports.

FOR AUSTRALIANS 12 October 2002 has joined 11 September 2001 as a date whose horror will remain for a lifetime. Having come to terms with living in an age when the awful reality of a terrorist strike, beamed around the globe on real-time television, can exceed the fervid imaginings of Hollywood, we are being confronted once more. This time death has come into an especially loved corner of our own backyard. For countless ordinary, suburban Australians, Bali was a little bit of familiar paradise next door. But Bali is not Australia, it is part of Indonesia and it shares Indonesia's problems. And one of Indonesia's problems, as we now know all too well, is terrorism.

After a year of living uneventfully, Indonesia is once again living dangerously. As bad as 12 October was, it is all too likely that worse is yet to come. If President Megawati does not now show the hitherto unseen strength to act decisively, deftly and wisely, we are going to witness a return to instability and uncertainty.

Even before 12 October, attention within the political and military elite was shifting to the 2004 general elections. Nevertheless, Megawati had largely escaped the sort of hysterical scapegoating and even demonising that had marked the final year of the Wahid presidency. Many thought that she might yet prove to be the least worst option to 'lead' the government in the coming term. After all, few within the elite had any reason to feel that she was threatening their interests with reforms or major initiatives, and no political parties felt sufficiently confident about their strength to risk alienating her this early. The bombing in Bali changes all that. It is no longer sufficient to take a 'no news is good news' approach to managing Indonesia.

If Indonesia had rather dropped out of the news over the past 12 months it was hardly surprising. After all, in the five years since the Asian Economic Crisis first bore down on the hapless nation, a succession of incredible stories ensured

that Indonesia was a regular contender for front-page coverage. First came the dramatic denouement of the Suharto regime, with the heady days of new political parties, maverick campaigners and the first genuine elections in 44 years. Then there were the highs and lows of East Timor's referendum, the shock election of President Wahid and the quixotic years that followed as he pushed hopelessly for reform on a dozen fronts at once, ending unceremoniously, but peacefully, with a 'constitutional coup' that saw Megawati finally back in the palace that she had grown up in.

Under the ever-smiling but mostly silent Megawati Sukarnoputri, things had been very much less dramatic of late. But was no news good news? Supporters of the new administration would certainly claim so, and to be fair they have the figures to back up their claims. The rupiah has strengthened modestly and has stabilised at around 9000 to the US dollar, growth is steady at around three-and-a-half to four per cent—still only half the pre-crisis rate but tolerable in the short run—and the national debt is down to only 80 per cent of GDP, impossibly high but still 20 per cent better than it was 12 months ago.

It needs also to be said that, unlike her garrulous and bellicose predecessor, Megawati rarely made controversial statements and seldom made controversial decisions. Her cabinet line-up, which includes a number of credible technocrats, remained as it was the day that she first announced it. Unlike Wahid she had not made endless changes to her administration and she had not been caught up in running battles with parliamentarians, party leaders and military generals.

Credit also needs to be given to Megawati for the fact that on her watch several significant legislative reforms have been passed. During its annual session in August this year the Peoples' Consultative Assembly, looking to the 2004 general elections, agreed to move to the direct election of the president and vice-president, to guarantee the independence of the Electoral Commission, to end the appointment of

military and police representatives to the parliament, and to establish a Constitutional Court.

Alongside these structural reforms was the symbolically significant imprisonment of Tommy Suharto, *enfant terrible* of the New Order regime, and a guilty verdict against Akbar Tandjung, chairman of President Suharto's Golkar party and leader of the parliament. Even though it is impossible to verify whether Tommy is actually doing it tough on a prison island off the north coast of Java, and even though Akbar has defiantly stayed on as Speaker of parliament while appealing his conviction, there is

authoritarianism might be the price that had to be paid for nation-building and development. Institutions as senior as the World Bank were aware that at least 20 per cent of all money they lent was lost to corruption, but this was felt to be a level of 'leakage' that they could live with—provided that the nation continued to develop. Sadly, the reality of New Order Indonesia only became truly apparent after it was over. The regime, it is now clear, was not quite the efficient and effective machine for development that it had for so long been taken to be. In reality it was a rentier regime, or at least it had become so by the late

INDONESIA

finally a sense that the cronies of the former regime are not completely untouchable.

It might be argued, of course, that while these important developments came to fruition under President Megawati they were initiated under President Wahid. But at least Megawati, despite some earlier misgivings (she was none too keen on the idea of direct presidential elections, for example, nor was it at all clear that she would push the military from parliament), has stayed the course and contributed to an environment in which the reforms could occur.

IF THIS SOUNDS LIKE 'damning with faint praise' then there is a reason. Even before 12 October Indonesia was in deep trouble, but now the reality of just how troubled the nation is can no longer be so simply dismissed.

After three decades of authoritarian, military-backed rule, it stands in need of profound and far-reaching reforms, lest the current transition to democracy ends in economic and political stagnation. Indonesia might not necessarily end up as a 'failed state' like, say, Pakistan, but it is currently doing a good impression of being a 'messy state'. Unless it gets serious about systemic reform, genuine change of the sort that seemed almost certain four years ago might prove but a pipedream.

With annual economic growth at around eight per cent and Jakarta developing a skyline to rival Singapore's, Suharto's New Order Indonesia was widely admired and generously supported. The international community did have concerns about human-rights abuses and limits to freedoms but it was felt that

1980s when the technocrats were no longer centre stage. The first family and their cronies were guided less by a rational approach to economic development than by greed and opportunism expressed in the franchising of rent-seeking scams and monopolies, such as the disastrous profusion of private banks that tipped Indonesia over the edge in 1997.

Sadly, under Megawati there has been little sign of any real change in this pattern of behaviour. In fact, while it is impossible to prove, there are strong indications that Taufik Kiemas, Megawati's husband, is rapidly assembling a network of deals to rival those of the fabled Ibu Tien 'ten per cent' Suharto.

On its own, this corrupt tradition would be a serious obstacle to reform today. Unfortunately it is compounded by the presence of a dominant and thoroughly corrupted military. Although Suharto depended on the military to stay in power, he did not pay them for their service; instead, he licensed them to raise money whichever way they could. Since its genesis in the messy nationalist revolution against the Dutch, the Indonesian military has never been properly funded. Today, as it has for decades, it has to raise around 70 per cent of its operational funds itself. It used to be said that much of this money came from legitimate, or at least semi-legitimate, businesses like hospitality, forestry and mining. Recent studies have revealed, however, that almost all of the military's business foundations are now insolvent. Since the economic crisis, the main source of revenue appears to have been largely generated by criminal activity, deriving not so much from the brothels and casinos of Jakarta but from the troubled provinces of Aceh, West Papua and Maluku.

Today it would be a brave or foolhardy researcher who would venture into such regions to uncover the extent of the military's dirty business. So perhaps we have to accept that Megawati really does not understand just how very venal military corruption has become, and that it is her naturally conservative nationalist instincts that cause her to allow them such a significant voice in her cabinet and to have such unfettered control of outlying provinces.

To be fair to Megawati, those two other diabolic inheritances from the Suharto regime—a corrupt judiciary and legal apparatus and an inefficient, corrupt and self-serving bureaucracy that is truly Kafkaesque in its control of state affairs—leave all reformers with the impression that they are not so much battling upstream as swimming in treacle. And it would help no-one but her rivals if Megawati began to imitate Wahid and fight battles for reform on more fronts than she could possibly win. She would do well, all the same, to draw from the example of her erstwhile friend and seriously face up to the need for profound reform. Prior to 12 October, Indonesia's crisis evidently did not seem so acute to those at the top, but to deny that the country had deep problems was always to court disaster in the longer term. Now neither the international community nor her own rivals will be content to allow Megawati to be a do-nothing president.

Megawati must now either exercise power or suffer the humiliation of having power incrementally taken from her.

If the president's team is smart they will stand back and allow America to exert maximum pressure on the leadership of the Indonesian military to break all links with radical Islamist militia and reveal all that they know about their networks. This course of action presents the only hope for averting ongoing sectarian violence in Indonesia. If Megawati stumbles, even just for a few weeks, trouble is likely to erupt again, possibly even beginning with her beloved Bali, where Balinese anger at economic colonisation by Java has long been building up. And, of course, without swift and decisive action, the people behind 12 October are likely to strike again.

More trouble in Indonesia will see Megawati's old rivals coalesce and join forces against her. Akbar Tandjung might be down but he is by no means out. If he can retain the leadership of Golkar then it is highly likely that he will steer his party away from continuing its partnership with Megawati's PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle). It is very likely that the outspoken vice-president Hamzah, who leads the Islamist PPP (United Development Party)—Indonesia's fourth-largest party—will line up with Akbar and Golkar. As will Amien Rais, Speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly and leader of PAN (National Mandate Party), the fifth-largest party. PAN was conceived of as a moderate Muslim party but many moderates left the party when Amien con-

tinued to associate with radical Islamist issues and individuals. It is inevitable that a Golkar-PPP-PAN alliance would also attract the support of the smaller, extremist, Islamist parties.

Even if Megawati does act decisively, however, and allow pressure to be brought to bear on recalcitrant elements within the military, there is still a grave risk that this will only lead to an even worse situation developing in the medium term. Unless all parties struggling to deal with 12 October—including not just Megawati's administration but the US and Australia—think beyond the immediate problem of working with the Indonesian military to rein in radical Islamist militants, they risk returning an only partially reformed military to a position of dominance. And not only will a heavy-handed, militaristic approach to dealing with radical Islamism backfire in the longer term, it might also return to power the very people who created so many of Indonesia's problems in the first place.

To suggest Indonesia might see the rise of a 'Pervez Musharraf' in the short-to-medium term is probably a gross exaggeration. But we should not ignore the possibility of a 'Vladimir Putin'. ■

Greg Barton is the author of *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President* (UNSW Press, 2002).

Patrick White, Painter Manqué



Helen Verity Hewitt

Patrick White, Painter Manqué

PAINTINGS, PAINTERS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON HIS WRITING

Helen Verity Hewitt

'I always see most of what I write, and am, in fact, a painter manqué. All those Goyas—I feel I want to eat them, and bury my face in them, and sniff them up!'

Patrick White

It is a little-known fact that a vital source of inspiration for Patrick White was the art of painting. A writer whose creative imagination was intensely visual and sensual, White considered the medium of paint to be a more direct, whole means of expression than words. Much of his writing attempts to recreate and investigate effects attainable through paint, and in many of his characters White explores the painter's psyche.

This brilliantly original and revealing book is the first study of this potent source in White's life. It traces the influence of twentieth-century Australian artists, and of European modernist and romantic artists, in his life and work.

0-522-85032-4 • Hardback • \$49.95 • Miegunyah 2.41



MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY PRESS

www.mup.com.au

ABR

AUSTRALIAN BOOK REVIEW

NOVEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

Bernard Smith's New Memoir:
Peter Craven

Homer and the Holocaust
An Essay by Andrea Goldsmith

Religion and Justice: Raimond Gaita

Christopher Koch's Memoir:
Michael McGirr

Warnie and the Don: Brian Matthews

Subscribers save 20%

Subscribe now! \$63.50 for ten issues (incl. GST)
Ph: (03) 9429 6700 or E-mail: abr@vicnet.net.au
Also available at select bookstores and newsagents



International Women's Development Agency, an Australian-based non-profit organisation, enables real change for women and their communities through practical projects that directly address discrimination and poverty.

To learn more or to donate call **03 9650 5574**
email: community@iwda.org.au Donations are Tax-deductible
www.iwda.org.au

iwda
international
women's development
agency



ABN 19 242 959 685

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

ACU National

Bachelor of Arts (Theology)/ Bachelor of Social Work Canberra Campus (Signadou)

This four-year program is designed for school leavers and others interested in welfare ministry or pastoral work. The course will give students an education in theology that is oriented to the professional values of the social work profession, and in social work that identifies the range of values specific to religious traditions. The course will be offered within a framework of ecumenical dialogue.

Credit can be obtained for previous study in Theology. Graduates are eligible for membership of the Australian Association of Social Workers.

Entry into the program is through the Universities Admissions Centre (UAC). UAC Guides (with application form) are available from newsagents in the ACT and NSW, or via their Website www.uac.edu.au

TMPZ09904

The MELBOURNE Anglican

"Is the issue really Saddam Hussein and his arsenal [or] ... is the real agenda driving the Iraq issue 'oil' and who controls it?"

*Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne
Peter Watson*

"Do Africans have to embrace unquestioningly the western style of democracy? If not, what would be acceptable alternatives? How do we have a political system which is free from evil?"

Bishop Alexis Bilindabagabo of Rwanda

The Melbourne Anglican

1998 winner of the Gutenberg Award for Excellence in Religious Communication

Mention this ad for a free sample copy of TMA

Phone: (03) 9653 4221

or email: tma@melbourne.anglican.com.au



Word-mongering

I HEARD GEORGE W. BUSH quoted the other day on a TV newsbreak. I had set aside for a moment the various issues of *Nature*, *New Scientist* and the *Nietzsche News Monthly* that I was avidly devouring, in order to watch a session of the test match between Pakistan and Australia being played in Sri Lanka. At the tea interval there was a swift dose of international news, and that's when Dubya was quoted. He said that if we didn't watch out, the 'smoking gun could come in the form of a mushroom cloud'.

When the program returned to the cricket, special comments man Keith Stackpole said that Glenn McGrath had been working very hard on improving his bowling, a process which, he emphasised, 'had been well dialogued'. If the mental gymnastics occasioned by the idea of a smoking gun metamorphosing into a mushroom cloud were migraine territory, this dialoguing business was downright distracting, giving rise instantly to a little scenario that went like this:

Interviewer: Would it be fair to say you've been working very hard on your bowling, Glenn?

GM: That's true, mate, I have.

Int.: You've been working hard at it, then?

GM: Absolutely, really working, doing the hard yards.

Int.: So you're giving the old hard work a real belting at the moment.

GM: Yes, mate. I'm getting stuck right into hard work on the bowling front.

Int.: I see, so this would mean that you ...

I reckon if you could show that had happened, you could account Glenn McGrath's commitment to work as having been 'well dialogued'.

Dubya's smoking gun is a bit more difficult. I suppose a smoking gun could, at a pinch, present itself in the form of a mushroom cloud. I guess if you really wanted to get into the swing of things, a smoking gun could appear as a BMW 323i. But all in all, I think a smoking gun would be odds on to reveal itself as a smoking gun.

Stacky's 'dialogue' proposition might cause you to speculate that he favoured roughly the same kind of thought processes, the same innovative and maverick word associations as Dubya, but that would be a facile judgment. The test match between Pakistan and Australia was being played in Sri Lanka because, not to put too fine a point on it, there were too many smoking guns and rumours of smoking guns in Pakistan, the putative host country. So the teams fought it out at the P. Saravanamuttu Stadium in Colombo, a venue reasonably unfamiliar to both teams and to the commentators. If P. Saravanamuttu was a Sri Lankan burgher whose peerless record of public service concealed a life of colourful and exotic excess,

the commentators didn't know about it. In short, they lacked the fund of lore and story readily available at more famous ovals.

Cricket grounds, for example, always have *ends*. At Adelaide Oval there's the Cathedral End; at Lord's there's the Nursery End; at the Gabba there's the splendidly predatory Vulture Street End; at Sydney Cricket Ground there is the University of New South Wales End, if you believe former test fast bowler, now commentator, Geoff Lawson. It may be that an exaggerated loyalty to his alma mater induces Lawson to use this slightly clumsy formulation because his fellow commentators, less burdened by a scholarly past, seem to favour the Randwick End.

At the P. Saravanamuttu Stadium in Colombo, there is apparently no end to speak of. It's not that the lineaments of the oval disappear into a wavering, existential time warp at their extremities. It's just that there are no colourful identifying characteristics or possibilities at either or even at *one end* of the ground to lend it romance and have its nomenclature pass into lore.

I'M NOT SURE IF Sri Lankans are known for their no-nonsense approach to life and cricket grounds. As a matter of fact, they made scarcely *any* approach to the P. Saravanamuttu Stadium, let alone a no-nonsense one. There were 50 people at a liberal estimate to watch the game begin and 17 adults and 28 kids on ensuing days—almost certainly the same 17 and 28—rattling round in the stands and running the boundary.

Anyway, whatever may be the psychological truth of the Sri Lankan attitude, they call one end of the P. Saravanamuttu Stadium the Media End (because—well, you've guessed it) and the other end the Air Force Flats End. And this is where Stacky showed he was no sucker for Dubya's brand of kite-flying, pea-and-thimble-trick metaphor. On the contrary, he favoured a merciless limpidity.

The Air Force Flats End, he suggested, quite possibly derived its name from the large block of flats that could be seen towering beyond the stadium fence where, quite likely, there were air force personnel in residence, he added—nailing it down. Vision accompanying this observation showed air force singlets hanging out on lines strung across the Air Force Flats balconies and unmistakably *air force personnel* shadowy behind windows. In Dubya-speak, here was an airborne strike facility with clear and present singlets of mass production.

He might as well have said that. The first casualty of war may be truth, but the second is meaning because, as Orwell observed years ago, warmongers can't afford to *mean*—they can only incite. Give me Stacky any day. ■

Brian Matthews is a writer and academic.



However you define them and whichever way you measure them, non-government organisations (NGOs) play a vital but often overlooked role in the Australian community, and in our relations with the rest of the world.

This ‘third sector’ takes in an enormous range of activity, from the voluntary fire brigade in Michael McGirr’s home town of Gunning (see page 30) to the major overseas aid organisations contracted by the Australian government to deliver humanitarian relief (page 32). NGOs take up unpopular causes, catalyse communities and—sometimes controversially—perform welfare services on behalf of state and federal governments.

In this special edition of *Eureka Street*, edited by **Peter Browne** from the Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University, we look at the contribution of NGOs, the pressures and dilemmas many of them face, and what they tell us about the state of Australian society.

Above: A public housing estate in inner Melbourne. *Photograph by Bill Thomas.*

Local heroes

In Sydney's west, the over-heated debate over 'aspirational' voters masks a much more complex reality, reports **David Burchell**.

PENRITH, IN SYDNEY'S outer west, has changed dramatically over the past decade or so. Still a hard-nosed town of tradespeople and service workers, with a matter-of-fact outlook on the world, it's also unmistakably on a roll. In the city centre the shops are stocked to the rafters with the latest electrical and electronic gear, and on the town's southern outskirts the new Glenmore Park estate is being promoted with giant freeway billboards that make it sound like an Olde Worlde English village transported to the banks of the Nepean River. South Penrith, which straddles the flat territory between the city centre and the freeway, is the most obvious beneficiary of these good times. The houses are all cut from the same cloth, with their front windows in the same places, yet the driveways are lined with lovingly polished late-model family cars, tokens of prosperity which compensate for the almost complete absence of an integrated public transport network. The parks are neat and well maintained, if light on for facilities, and it is never difficult to find a parking space.

South Penrith Youth and Neighbourhood Services (SPYNS) operates out of a squat building in a quiet part of Penrith. On one side is a broad oval studded with occasional gums; on another what would nowadays be called the 'educational precinct' of Jamison High School and York Primary School, all '70s brown-brick buildings bordered by high wire fences. It's school holidays, and nothing is happening. Behind is the local child-care centre, and behind it again the Southlands Shopping Centre, a burgeoning collection of low-roofed, open-plan shops heralding the new-found affluence of the area.

This is 'aspirational' territory. In front of Southlands, a female security officer scans the occupants of parked cars for undesirables, and speaks in an official fashion into a walkie-talkie. About a kilometre due south, the M4 motorway sweeps urgently towards the bright lights of Sydney. The CBD is about 50 kilometres away as the crow flies—and the crow and the freeway would describe roughly equal paths.

Maree McDermott, SPYNS's manager, meets me at the door with friendly efficiency, and ushers me into the airy office that she shares with one of the centre's community workers. There are posters on the walls, and a vase sports a collection of Australian flags—the official, the Eureka and the Aboriginal. Fearing it might inhibit her from speaking freely, I'd left the borrowed tape recorder behind, and was relying on a notebook and my crabbed scrawl. I needn't have worried. She's only too happy to talk, and once her mind has adjusted from its workday focus she strings together long sequences of reflections about the job, the centre, the state of community services and, indeed, the times. She's well read in the field, and has a strong knowledge of current academic debates in community services; there's a lot of thinking going on in the sector that perhaps too rarely gets a public airing.

It's not so much that she's constrained from speaking out, she explains; the problem is getting someone to listen to the complaints. Small organisations like SPYNS aren't media-friendly, and they often find it difficult to get the ear of peak bodies. Occasionally, direct complaints to government bodies get results. Recently, for instance, SPYNS rejected a government contract document on the grounds

that it tied them to unreasonable undertakings in advance. The department was miffed. (Apparently they asked: just who *are* these people?) But eventually it caved in. More often, though, the people she's complaining to are merely foot soldiers from the Department of Community Services (DOCS), the most tumultuous, fissionary and complained-about public agency in NSW. They just shrug their



Maree McDermott from South Penrith Youth and Neighbourhood Services.

shoulders wearily and say: that's how it is. Let's get on with filling in the forms.

DOCS is at once South Penrith Youth and Neighbourhood Services' major patron and its major bugbear. Between 85 and 90 per cent of SPYNS's funding comes from the department, largely in the form of special-purpose grants for a collection of projects in community development, youth services and Indigenous community-building. The only other significant source of funds, the local council, contributes mainly by supporting the physical structures out of which SPYNS's various local community groups operate. On the face of it, SPYNS is thriving. Over the six years Maree has been working here, the staff roster has risen from about four to nine, management structures and processes

have been upgraded, and the number of funded programs has increased in leaps and bounds. And yet Maree's own perception—one shared by others in similar positions, I suspect—is of a sector in crisis, and indeed of a wider social malaise in public infrastructure and community funding.

Most of that funding—about \$400,000 in all—is tied to specific projects, and yet the staff must be paid as if from a central pot. The projects are generally funded for a single year, at which point SPYNS is expected to provide details and statistics on outputs and outcomes which, presumably, often don't become meaningful until several years down the track. It often takes at least 18 months of research and preparation to get services and structures into place for new programs—by which time the allocated money has run out and the reports are past due. Maree is happy enough to talk the new language of 'capacity-building', 'compacts' and 'social capital', if that's what's required for the funding applications. But she points out that what's being denoted by these grand-sounding terms is a series of struggling short-term projects staffed by small groups of volunteers who are involved in constructing communities as much as servicing them.

And so from Maree's vantage point government seems like a series of lonely towers whose occupants squint anxiously down at the chaotic cityscape below. Drawing upon other new languages, she describes government departments as 'silos' that fail to communicate with one another, and laments their compulsion to replicate their own internal divisions in the jurisdictions they administer. Why, she asks, can't they approach services on an area-wide basis, rather than on the basis of department-specific functions and programs?

Then there's the fact that community-services funding is clearly well down the order of priorities for government funding. When department budgets have been squeezed, annual allocations have simply not been adjusted for inflation, sometimes for years on end. NSW community workers are the lowest-paid in the country, and this is changing only slowly. When the federal government spectacularly withdrew funding for the area, claiming it was exclusively a state concern, it seemed community services might collapse entirely. And the public-liability

insurance problem, so well publicised by other, more visible groups, here still lies unresolved.

Like that of many others in the sector, Maree's ambivalence about government is complicated further by the ethos of community development that moulds her drive and enthusiasm. She's committed to the public funding of community services, and wishes people would just pay their taxes and be done with it, rather than trying to fund public services on the cheap. At the same time, she likes to invoke that venerable ideal of a self-governed local community sustained by a band of hardy volunteers.

The SPYNS management committee's orientation kit shows the same ambiguity. It declares as a key value the 'underlying belief that people have a human right to a certain standard of living and fair and equitable access to all of society's resources'. And at the same time it defines community development as being 'about community involvement and participation, local democracy and grassroots action'. Historically, of course, these two ideals have been less than peaceable bedfellows. In the hands of political parties and governments, the first has occupied the lofty redoubts of citizenship and nationhood. The second, in the hands of volunteers and local activists, has often involved defending 'the community' against the world. In a sense, paid community workers are at the confluence of these contrasting currents, where the waters of 'the public' and 'the community' meet.

AND YET THE political reality of centres like these is more complicated than the stereotype of a love-hate affair with government communicates. It's more in the order of a romantic triangle. For Maree, as for the managers of other small non-government organisations (NGOs) across the country, the most dangerous adversaries are actually supposed allies in the community sector's Big End of Town. As Maree observes—apparently dispassionately but with submerged anger and conviction—the big social-policy-focused charitable institutions have become the main predators of the smaller NGOs. And no wonder: to borrow from the language of TV nature documentaries, they're admirably fitted to the task. Policy-makers warm to them because they have the resources and know-how to file expert applications, maintain large budgets professionally,

and deliver 'outcomes' according to tight schedules. Again, since they dominate the peak bodies like the Australian Council of Social Service and its NSW affiliate, the Council of Social Service of New South Wales, they're capable of making themselves heard more loudly than the smaller bodies (or, alternatively, of imposing a veil of silence). Finally, since they rely upon large and well-established networks of volunteers driven by urgent spiritual imperatives, they offer startling value for money for government funds. And now that community-services contracts are increasingly being put out to competitive tendering, these advantages really show.

By contrast, small NGOs labour under a sequence of disadvantages. Because funding is tight, there's little room for retraining or for upgrading skills, except on an informal basis. Because centres are small and job descriptions often porous, there's no clear career path or security of employment. And they lack the infrastructure—as well as, sometimes, the expertise—to plan ahead and manage finances expertly. When I mention the age-old problem of conflicts between boards and staff in small volunteer-based organisations, Maree allows her professional demeanour to slip a fraction. Things are fine now, she says, but when she arrived relations with the management committee were decidedly tense. What fixed things up? New structures, she says—and a restructuring of the board. Now the committee is small and focused, and relations are highly collegial. Yet I wonder how many other small community development centres would have had the nous and the know-how to resolve the problem.

And yet it's hard to imagine either DOCS itself, or the large charitable groups which swell and grow off its dispensations, attempting the kind of fine-grained, almost microscopic, identification of local issues, problems and grievances that is the bread and butter of a centre like SPYNS. Take SPYNS's work with the town's numerous if relatively low-profile Indigenous residents. Several years ago a few prominent local Aboriginal figures were brought together to plan a series of projects under SPYNS's auspices. Currently there are school-holiday programs and playgroups for local kids, cultural camping trips to Aboriginal communities out west, an elders group, a family drop-in centre and a Koori dance group. Maree

is particularly proud of the last initiative: she reports on how the Koori kids' chins rise, and their eyes make contact, after the morale boost of a traditional dance session. But the projects are not without tension. The Aboriginal leaders devise the activities, but SPYNS provides the essential logistical, administrative and budgetary support. And this kind of joint black-white management—particularly with this division of labour—doesn't always sit comfortably with current doctrine among Aboriginal activists. A charitable effort, no matter how well resourced, would likely founder in the face of such delicate interplay.

UNTIL RECENTLY it was compulsory for Sydney journalists to describe Penrith as part of 'Sydney's West', an entity luridly envisaged as a broad suburban desert of social deprivation and isolation. Nowadays, since the sudden emergence of the 'aspirational' class, the media lens has taken a swift jump cut from the have-nots to the haves, and critical commentators have taken to lamenting the arrival of 'gated communities' and the loss of old-fashioned community solidarity. Maree is noncommittal about this somewhat overheated debate. The South Penrith she sees in her work is not a single monolithic community, thriving or otherwise, so much as a loose collection of individuals, families and local networks, all of which—insofar as she is likely to encounter them—involve people who are in some greater or lesser degree of trouble, whether with money, addiction, spousal behaviour or the law.

From this vantage point the problems of deprivation and the benefits of prosperity are sometimes difficult to distinguish. Young people in Penrith have never had anywhere much to go on a Saturday night. They may have more money now, but there are still a decidedly limited range of sources of amusement. Yet the money still gets spent. Penrith city has never had much in the way of a bustling public space, other than the specific-purpose clubs and institutions—sporting, business, cultural—which attract the civic-minded instincts of the local burghers. The institutions have got bigger: the football team's licensed club, Panthers, is now the largest in the Sydney region, almost a suburb in its own right. But the pattern is unchanged. Developers of the Glenmore Park estate were required by planning

regulations ('Section 94') to include well-appointed community amenities and a community centre. But without an established network of local activists there's no DOCS project-funding, and hence no staff, and the smart new buildings lie empty.

The explosion of car ownership has solved the tyranny of distance for some, but it has also helped concentrate businesses into the few large shopping centres. As a result, older folks, with lower levels of car ownership, are reduced to shopping from the high-priced corner store. And for young people the parking lot at Panthers has to substitute for the bright lights inside, which are alcohol-heavy and largely out of bounds for minors. The result is that 'the community' is actually a kind of tectonic plate riven by multiple fault lines. One person's civic-mindedness is another's exclusion. One person's hang-



In South Penrith, 'The Tables' playground 'sits abandoned, stripped of its chairs and swings and, apparently, of neighbourhood goodwill'.

out is another's cause of anxiety. One person's public space is another's urban (or suburban) blight.

To illustrate these tensions, Maree directs my attention through the window to a small playground area behind the centre, between the shopping centre and the child-care centre, and opposite the high school. I hadn't noticed it before. From a distance it's easy to miss—just a couple of shelters, an apparently unfinished swing set and a small climbing set. Yet, poised between the back of Southlands and the high school, in an area designed for shoppers and almost devoid of activities for young people, it occupies a position of undeniable strategic importance. And for the past few years The Tables (as the locals call it) has been the focus of what Maree (wearing her social-democratic hat now) terms a battle over public space.

In the early 1990s, Penrith City Council installed an assortment of playground

equipment, tables and chairs, and barbecue shelters in this unprepossessing space, formally known as the South Penrith Reserve. Over the years that followed, the equipment was neglected, and gradually it became rundown and vandalised. During the same period the area became a popular meeting place for the local students, who liked to gather there in groups before and after school to chew the fat. These gatherings in turn aroused the anxiety and suspicion of local shopkeepers and shoppers, who came to believe that the students were responsible for the vandalism, and moreover that the park was a hang-out for drug addicts and other undesirables. Locals approached the council, requesting that the shelters and seating be removed to discourage young people from using the space. The council called a public meeting, at which the view was popularly expressed (in the words of SPYNS's project report) that the young people were 'the problem', and that 'the problem' could be solved by moving them along.

At this point SPYNS intervened, using DOCS funds to set up an 'action research' project on the issue. A steering committee was established to manage the project, while a broader working party attempted to draw in all the local stakeholders, from the shopping-centre management and security to local young people and Jamison High School's SRC. There were community barbecues and informal public-opinion surveys. Research was undertaken on the history and ownership of the reserve, the council's audit reports on community safety and youth issues, and local planning documents and crime statistics. Finally, proposals were drafted and discussed at length with Southlands management.

At the end of this lengthy and involved process, however, the centre's management filed a development application with the council that 'solved' the problem by the simple expedient of—you guessed it—extending the car park. Since then the shopping centre has changed hands, and both proposals—SPYNS's and the centre's—seem to have entered an administrative limbo, despite SPYNS's best efforts. In the meantime, The Tables sits abandoned, stripped of its chairs and swings and, apparently, of neighbourhood goodwill.

After the chat with Maree, I drive back around the block to the Southlands

car park, and park in front of the security guard. The car's a respectable one, and she doesn't give me a second look. I wander through the small, thriving shopping centre (two butchers, a spartan but growing deli, a bustling franchised liquor store, and so on) and head out back. And then, turning participant-observer for the moment, I affect to take a stroll through The Tables. There is, of course, nothing to stroll around. The two awnings cover nothing but dirt, and the swing

set is indeed bereft of swings. The modest climbing apparatus has more than its fair share of graffiti. Three or four young adults attempt to lounge on stumps that once were fittings, and chat. They noticeably stiffen as I approach, as if anticipating something. Altering course, I take the path around the edge of the 'playground', head back through the shops, and out to the car park once more. The occupants of the car next to mine seem to have settled in for the afternoon: the doors are open

and the stereo is on, low but insistent. The security guard is looking twitchy. I search for the keys. Then, like everyone else around here who's got somewhere to go, I'm back on wheels. ■

David Burchell teaches in the School of Humanities at the University of Western Sydney. He is co-editor, with Andrew Leigh, of *The Prince's New Clothes: Why Do Australians Dislike Their Politicians?*, UNSW Press, 2002.

ngo

Social, and enterprising

FOODBANK VICTORIA is in the business of food—getting, storing and handing on impressively large volumes to a wide range of emergency accommodation and relief organisations. It adds millions of dollars to the capacity of these organisations to provide food for people in desperate circumstances.

'Social enterprise' seems a very appropriate label for Foodbank Victoria. It is an offshoot of the Council to Homeless Persons, a long-standing peak body of homelessness organisations. But Foodbank works because of the contributions of businesses—food suppliers and retailers—and their staff, substantial numbers of whom volunteer. Its operations use the skills of storemen and packers, not social workers. In these very obvious ways it bridges the gap between the traditional terrains of private enterprise and social service.

Despite some blurring, social-service organisations still differ from businesses in the sort of work they do (providing health, education and community services, particularly to people with little purchasing power). The people running the organisations do not end up with the profits. Not surprisingly, they get their income from governments, and from donations or investments, rather than from the individual customers. And the public does

not view social-service organisations and businesses in the same light.

These organisations generally have different histories and origins, too. Many were constituted as charities and many continue to have a religious connection. Others were set up to provide services in localities where there were none. Some arose to meet need within a slice of the population who were missing out, organising around a community of interest or identity rather than geography. Only recently have organisations started to develop primarily around income opportunities.

If business enterprises largely inhabit one sphere, and social-service organisations another, then social enterprises such as Foodbank cross over. They are set up to achieve goals linked to a public or community service, yet they operate in an area of activity normally seen as purely the domain of business. They mobilise skills, knowledge and people generally belonging to the realm of private enterprise (some donated, some employed). And they can recover some or all of their costs through charges because they produce savings for the community-service beneficiaries.

A range of specialist organisations have developed to provide IT, media, marketing, legal and financial services,

though rarely on such a scale as in the case of food.

The social enterprise offers a slightly different vehicle for people engaged in business to contribute directly from their knowledge and expertise to the social good. As an intermediary, the social enterprise is not in real competition with the donor's own business, but neither is it doing something unfamiliar. Volunteers can bring real skills from their workplaces, not just their time as unpaid, unskilled labour. Donors understand where the money is going.

Enterprises like Foodbank may, however, face peculiar dilemmas flowing both from the expectations of donors and from the expectations of the community-service agencies with which they work. Governance and management are unlikely to be simple.

And the role of these organisations should not be overstated. The energies and benefits they unleash can be considerable. But they will complement, rather than replace, other forms of philanthropic engagement. And they exist to support community-service activity, not to transform it. ■

Don Siemon is a policy adviser on social security and low incomes for ACOSS.

Selling services

Governments fund non-government organisations to provide social services. But as they tighten contracts and demand more accountability, are they killing the goose that lays the golden egg? **Ann Nevile** reports.

IN A RECENT column in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Ross Gittins observed that 'even our charities have been commercialised—these days, most sell their services to governments'. But non-government organisations—or NGOs, as they're routinely called—have always 'sold their services' to governments. What has changed over the last decade is the extent to which governments use NGOs to provide services previously provided by government departments, and the level of control governments now assert over NGO activities. Contracting out social-welfare functions to NGOs is cheaper: organisations committed to advancing the interests of the disadvantaged in society often supplement inadequate government funding with money or other resources of their own. And contracting out sits well with the current fashion in public administration for smaller government. While governments' increasing use of NGOs to provide social-welfare services does not, in itself, change the way NGOs operate, the increasing level of control exerted by governments over non-government service providers does.

In the past, governments gave NGOs a grant that supported the work of the organisation as a whole. These days, governments specify the type of service they require and, to a large extent, how that service will be provided, and then monitor NGOs to make sure they comply. Governments and NGOs agree that governments have a legitimate right to check on how taxpayers' money is being spent, but this increase in accountability has come at a cost. The increasing level of control, often exerted through detailed and very specific contracts, affects the way NGOs operate



and the extent to which agencies are prepared to comment publicly about the services they provide.

As governments become more prescriptive in their requirements, preparing a funding submission becomes much more time-consuming for NGOs. These days, service providers have to think carefully about their service delivery, the link between the service provided and service outcomes, the cost of delivering the service, and how to define and apportion those costs. They also need to consider the proposed legal arrangements. Detailed planning can translate into more effective programs, but for small organisations the time devoted to this sort of work is time not spent on providing services. Occasionally, the only way small, local organisations can cope is to close the door for a week or two while the tender or funding submission is written.

Increased reporting requirements also increase agencies' administrative costs. For example, every six months, agencies that manage Work for the Dole projects have to prepare for three different monitoring visits by the relevant federal

government department, one of which is a site visit by departmental officers. The department can also undertake further site visits if it wishes. Once again, the consequence is that more staff time is devoted to administrative work and less to providing the service. If a service is funded by different arms of government, reporting costs are multiplied because of the program-specific nature of data collection and reporting requirements. One medium- to large-sized welfare agency I spoke to when I was researching this issue estimated that each year it had to provide 'something like 60 separate audits to various government departments'. Not surprisingly, the general manager described this situation as 'a bit of a nightmare for our finance people'.

AT THE SAME TIME as administrative outlays have increased, it has become more difficult for agencies to fund these costs. When governments provided block grants, this money could be used to support staff such as the CEO, accountants or finance officers whose work is not confined to a single program, as well as staff involved in delivering a specific service. Governments are now more focused on outcomes and so fund specific programs. While there may be a category covering administrative overheads in a tender, at times, government departments have informally advised agencies that the amount of money allocated to administrative overheads is too high and they would like to see that component of the budget reduced and more allocated to service-delivery functions.

As government funding is increasingly dispersed through very specific and

detailed contracts, NGOs find themselves operating in an increasingly complex financial and legal environment. Goodwill is no longer sufficient. Many NGOs find it difficult to recruit to their boards and management committees people who are able to operate in a commercial business environment, yet who understand the caring charitable dynamic.

As a result, it is now more costly and difficult to operate in the social-welfare sector. Not surprisingly, many smaller community organisations struggle to survive. Some give up. Others seek mergers with larger organisations. Others form consortium partnerships with like-minded organisations.

The impact of such changes on local communities varies. For many working in the social-welfare sector it is almost an article of faith that small, local organisations are better than larger organisations operating over a wide geographic area. In my research I found examples of resentment and distress about local organisations being taken over by larger metropolitan agencies with no links to the local community. But I also found examples where the take-over of a locally run service was described by members of the local community as 'the best thing that ever happened'. As one person told me, the local service was 'more community-oriented than it's ever been'.

The changing environment for NGOs is not the only consequence of a change in funding mechanisms. As governments become more prescriptive about the programs they fund, or who is eligible to receive assistance under such programs, agencies may be faced with a difficult choice about whether to provide assistance to those in need even if they do not meet the very specific eligibility criteria. When one agency, for example, was receiving funding for a gambling rehabilitation program for poker-machine addicts, people with other forms of gambling addictions approached the agency for help. The agency was reluctant to turn these people away just because they did not fit the specific eligibility criteria for that rehabilitation program. But the agency was also aware of its contractual obligations. In the end the agency resolved the dilemma by offering assistance and then lobbying the government for a change in policy to allow overt assistance.

But not all agencies have the resources

for lobbying. And policy change, if it happens at all, occurs very slowly, leaving agencies providing services in ways they would rather not. The Work for the Dole program is a good example of this. Many agencies that sponsor Work for the Dole projects or act as Community Work Coordinators believe there are other more effective ways of helping the unemployed. If funding were provided with no strings attached, they say, they would deliver different sorts of labour-market programs.

But agencies do have a choice. They can decide—as the Brotherhood of St Laurence did in the case of Work for the Dole—not to become involved in programs that they believe are (at best) ineffective. Many other agencies decide to continue working 'within the system' because they want to provide the best possible outcomes for their clients within existing resource and program-design constraints.

CHOOSING to provide a specific service, even if the agency believes there are more effective ways of assisting those in need, is a decision agencies make with their eyes wide open. But agency practice can be affected in less obvious ways. The broad reform agenda in public administration emphasises the efficient spending of public funds and advocates particular mechanisms to achieve that goal, including competitive tendering and performance reporting. When government payments are linked to particular performance outcomes, agencies will respond to these incentives. At first glance, payments linked to specified outcomes may seem appropriate and desirable, but such payments can create perverse incentives leading to less than ideal outcomes. For example, payments to agencies that provide intensive assistance to the long-term unemployed are divided into lump sums paid when specified 'employment outcomes' are achieved. Some agencies respond by concentrating on those clients most likely to achieve the specified outcomes and generate income for the agency.

Loss of autonomy, and in particular a reluctance to criticise the government, is often cited as a second, major consequence of increased government control. Clearly, though, increasing government control over NGO activities has not stifled all public debate. Governments continue to

support advocacy organisations to some extent, and those organisations, together with service providers who feel advocacy is part of their mission, continue to speak out about government policies and the impact of such policies on the marginalised and disadvantaged in society. But smaller, local community organisations that do not belong to a national network or an established religious body are reluctant to talk about their work without prior approval from the relevant government department, even when government approval is not an explicit contractual requirement.

Public debate about government policy is important if services are to improve. Inter-agency debate and discussion are equally important. The change in funding mechanisms over the last decade—particularly the introduction of competitive tendering—has made many organisations reluctant to share information with potential competitors. Agencies are worried that 'if I share this idea and [another agency] picks it up ... then they might win, which means I might lose and I have to sack my staff'. Inter-agency learning and problem-solving are also diminished if the number of agencies operating in a particular area decreases, as happens when services are bundled together before being put out to tender. Before South Australia tendered out its alternate care program, for example, there were eight or nine different agencies providing alternate care services. After the tendering process there was only one organisation providing the service, so the possibility of dynamic interchange between different service providers was gone.

Increasing government control has brought about significant increases in accountability, but it is also making it harder for NGOs to operate in a flexible, responsive and innovative manner. Governments need to be careful that they do not stifle the very characteristics that give NGOs their comparative advantage. ■

Ann Nevile specialises in social policy and teaches at the National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University. All quotes are taken from interviews with staff of social welfare NGOs, reported in Ann Nevile, *Competing Interests: Competition Policy in the Welfare Sector*, The Australia Institute, 1999.

Rural rebellion

One year ago the first public meeting of Rural Australians for Refugees was held in Bowral. Now the movement links 50 groups across the country.

Peter Mares investigates the activism in our country towns.



Sign at a Rural Australians for Refugees street stall, Bowral.

WHEN PAUL CARRICK saw the first reports of the 'kids overboard' story on television he was furious. 'I found it very hard to believe and I felt my blood pressure going through the roof,' he says. The student-activist-turned-corporate-manager-turned-greenie-farmer decided it was time to return to the political fray. 'If we don't act on an issue like this,' asks Carrick, 'then what does it mean to be "progressive"? What does it mean to be a "social democrat"?''

The question was, what to do? Since he stepped away from managing STA Travel in 1998, Carrick and his family have lived in the Greta Valley, a seasonally inundated

flood plain east of Wangaratta in central Victoria. As well as running cattle, they have been recreating wetlands and have planted more than 10,000 trees. While Carrick knew some locals shared his environmental concerns, he was not so sure that he would find allies on the issue of refugees. The point was driven home when some neighbours joined the family for dinner and railed against 'Muslims' who throw their children in the water.

Carrick's first instinct was to go to the local branch of the ALP, the party for whom he had handed out how-to-vote cards at every election since the age of 14. 'They were awful,' he says of the party

and its response. Then, a couple of weeks later, he saw a report on SBS TV about a public meeting held in Bowral in NSW, by a new group calling itself Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR). He had his model for action.

In the wake of the *Tampa* there has been an unprecedented level of public activity on the issue of asylum seekers and refugees. Thousands of Australians have written to broadcaster Phillip Adams to sign up for a 'civil disobedience register', expressing their willingness to break the law and provide sanctuary to asylum seekers who escape from detention. Malcolm Fraser and other members of the

'elite', Adams among them, have founded a national organisation called A Just Australia, which has been joined by a diverse range of luminaries including sporting heroes John Newcombe and Greg Chappell, larrikin advertising guru John Singleton, university chancellor John Yu and former ALP president Barry Jones.

Lawyers working pro bono have launched an array of legal challenges to the government's detention regime and the 'Pacific solution'. They also offer free legal advice to detainees. Radical activists have blockaded Immigration Department offices and organised bus tours to the remote detention centres, camping outside the wire and even assisting with escapes. Volunteers have organised soccer teams for young refugees. Bosses have campaigned for Afghan employees on

the 2001 Paul Cullen Award by AUST-CARE for her 'extraordinary sacrifices for the benefit of the world's refugees'. She has been working with refugees for 20 years, although most of her work has been outside Australia, particularly with Palestinians living in refugee camps in Lebanon. Originally she worked for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA, which has had responsibility for displaced Palestinians since it was established in 1949. She quit that job after the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in 1982, disgusted that the UN had failed in its mandate to protect refugees. She came back to Australia and threw her energy into creating the trade-union aid agency, APHEDA (Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad); she became founding director

rednecks. The organisation tapped into a constituency that McCue describes as 'basically middle-class and middle-aged' and made up predominantly of women. 'It reminds me of the CWA,' she says.

The three women began with education on the street: a stall outside the supermarket on a Saturday morning collecting signatures for a public statement in the local newspaper. McCue was not new to this kind of thing. In 1997, along with other locals involved with ANTaR (Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation) she had kicked off the National Sorry Book with a public meeting in Bowral addressed by Mick Dodson. 'We knew we could mobilise people,' she says. Nevertheless, she was not sure just how many people would turn up to their first public meeting and, just in case, they roped off half the



Left and right: Rural Australians for Refugees street stall, Bowral. Centre: Rural Australians for Refugees inaugural meeting, 7 November 2001 (Helen McCue is second from the right).

temporary protection visas to be allowed to stay in Australia. Professional bodies—including an alliance of all the major medical associations—have called for a change in government policy. Hundreds of concerned individuals have begun visiting detention centres or corresponding with detainees. The opposition to current policy cuts across party lines and involves people from a wide range of social groups and ethnic backgrounds.

BUT PERHAPS MOST remarkable of all is the spread of the movement in country towns, banded together under the banner of Rural Australians for Refugees.

RAR began just one year ago and already boasts groups in 50 towns around Australia. The sudden growth in the network is the product of many people's energy, but one person who played a crucial role in getting it all started was Helen McCue. A nurse with a PhD in political science, Helen McCue was awarded

of the agency and worked there for ten years.

In mid-July 2001, this dynamo met for lunch with two friends, writers Anne Coombs and Susan Varga, who also live near the town of Bowral in the southern highlands of NSW. 'I felt that I could not be involved in refugee issues overseas and ignore what was happening in Australia,' says Helen McCue. Rather than throw in their lot with city-based action groups, the women decided to work locally.

'We felt that there was a constituency in the rural sector who did not have a voice. Country towns have historically accepted migrants and migrants have been of great value to country towns. Look at Albury-Wodonga, or Shepparton or Coober Pedy,' she says. 'We felt that rural towns could provide an opportunity for refugees to settle. There is a history of that in Australia and we felt we could do it again.' They also wanted to break the stereotype of the bush as the hold-out of racists and

rows in the 450-seat town hall so that the audience would not look too sparse. They need not have worried. In the end, the hall filled to overflowing. The local paper put the attendance at 500 people.

The meeting was held on the evening of Monday 5 November 2001—five days before the federal election. All the local candidates were invited to attend and give their views on the refugee issue. The Democrats, the Greens and Labor responded; the Coalition parties stayed away. The meeting received national media coverage, although only SBS reported on it for television. According to McCue, the single most effective medium for spreading the message was the rural affairs program *Bush Telegraph* on ABC Radio National—'because people in the bush listen to that'. The next key element in their communication strategy was the internet. The RAR website had been organised in advance and news of the public meeting prompted a flood of emails from around the country:

'So many people wrote to us saying, "Oh we're so glad to hear you speaking on behalf of rural Australia, what can we do?"' They encouraged people to organise RAR groups in their own rural towns, and gave them a checklist of things to do to get up and running.

Paul Carrick took up the challenge in Wangaratta. 'I put up an ad in a café in town where likely suspects gather,' he says, 'and I sent emails to a few people who I thought might be sympathetic.' Four people turned up to the first meeting. Next time it was six, then 12. 'Gradually we built up a nucleus,' he says. The *Wangaratta Chronicle* got wind of their meetings and wanted to do an interview. Carrick told the paper that he had invited Malcolm Fraser to address a public meeting (neglecting to mention how, in his stu-

Australia's refugee intake to 24,000 a year.

With more than 100 financial members, Wangaratta RAR continues to meet regularly. An education group is busy trying to get all the local schools involved in a youth forum on refugee issues and to organise a 'friendly' with a refugee soccer team. The detention group provides support to people held in immigration detention by sending them phone cards or setting them up with Australian pen pals. The group has also developed a 'welcome' postcard, in six different languages, as a way of expressing solidarity with refugees and asylum seekers. Satellite RAR groups have sprung up in nearby towns like Bright and Benalla.

Elsewhere, in places like Mudgee and Cootamundra, RAR groups focus on providing practical support and hospitality

to support the families for up to two years.

Phillip Adams has compared the flush of activity on the refugee issue to the anti-Vietnam War movement. Is it an appropriate comparison? 'Absolutely,' says Helen McCue. 'The objective in the Vietnam War protest was to bring the troops home. To end the war. You could work towards that. For us, the key issue is that the detention centres have to close. The slogan is "End mandatory detention!" That is the critical moral issue and that is an achievable goal. Detention should be replaced by reception centres for health and security screening, followed by release into the community.'

Paul Carrick, whose brother was selected for the draft, remembers the anti-Vietnam War days well. Yet, much as he would like to share the enthusiasm of Adams and McCue, Carrick is more sceptical. 'I don't think for a minute that it is approaching the anti-Vietnam War movement,' he says. 'Not even vaguely.' He sees a danger that the movement could eventually run out of puff, particularly in the face of continued intransigence by the government and a lack of alternative leadership from the ALP.

I put it to Helen McCue that a more appropriate comparison than the Vietnam moratorium may prove to be the push for reconciliation, which reached a high point with the walk over Sydney Harbour Bridge, but has since stalled. 'Still, we can't go back on Aboriginal rights issues now,' she counters. And she points out that although the reconciliation movement had its elements of grassroots activism, it was driven by the National Reconciliation Council, which the government has since disbanded. 'The difference is that this refugee movement is led by people at the grassroots. It is a 100 per cent people's movement. What has happened is that all sectors of civil society have been mobilised on this issue. It is as if our eyes have been opened. Once people have been made aware like this you cannot go back.' ■

Peter Mares is a journalist with ABC Radio Australia's *Asia Pacific* program and a visiting fellow at the Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University. His book *Borderline: Australia's Response to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Wake of the Tampa* is published by UNSW Press. The RAR website is at www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org



dent days, he used to graffiti anti-Fraser slogans around Perth). The story made the front page and 20 people showed up to the next RAR planning meeting.

In the end, Malcolm Fraser could not make it to 'Wang', but the meeting went ahead anyway. Carrick thought the group would be doing well if more than 100 people came. The turnout was triple that number. 'We found a groundswell of people who were disenchanted with government policy and so pissed off with Labor. For many of us, it was therapeutic just to meet.'

The Wangaratta meeting adopted the ten-point action plan developed by Helen McCue and her colleagues in Bowral. The four most important points of the action plan are the acceptance of all asylum seekers on to Australia's shores in accordance with the UN Refugee Convention, the closure of the detention camps in their present form, the abolition of the temporary protection visas and the doubling of

to refugees who have been released from detention on temporary protection visas. Other RAR groups, like the one in Townsville, organised protest marches to mark 'Tampa Day' in late August.

Many RAR groups are lobbying local councils to declare themselves as 'Welcome Towns', which publicly oppose the system of mandatory detention for asylum seekers who arrive in Australia without a visa. Already endorsed by the Bega Valley Shire Council in NSW, the Welcome Town scheme deliberately echoes the Good Neighbour Movement set up to assist new migrants in the 1950s and 1960s, and is intended to demonstrate the viability of replacing detention with a system of community release. A Welcome Town will offer to sponsor families of asylum seekers by providing 'emotional and material support' while their applications for protection visas are processed. After the asylum seekers are accepted into the community, the Welcome Town will con-

Entrepreneurial welfare: two views

'Social entrepreneurs' can help disadvantaged communities find their own solutions, according to **Nic Frances** ...

I AM RELUCTANT to talk about social entrepreneurship, or social enterprise, without clearly stating that with 660,000 unemployed in this country the problems we face are obviously structural economic-management problems. How is it possible that Australia's economic performance is regularly hailed as 'miraculous and world-beating', but we can have nearly a million children living in families with no adult in the workforce?

We need structural responses led by government to redress Australia's growing social and economic divide. It will take strong leadership and a committed alliance between sectors and organisations to push for those responses from our policy-makers.

But there is no doubt that even if we were to halve the unemployment rate there would still be certain communities around the country who would not significantly benefit. The organisation I work with, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, sits right across the road from one such community. Atherton Gardens is a public housing estate with four huge high rises (20 per cent of them empty at any one time), a community of 1400 people and a range of all the social issues you'd expect in an area of high unemployment, cultural mix and disadvantage.

At Atherton Gardens we offer about 60 different types of services and we currently have 14 different programs operating on the estate. The interesting thing is that, until quite recently, the people involved in those programs have not come together and asked, 'What is our vision for the way we are going to work on this estate? Could we be doing it differently *together*? Could we be spending

this money better?' The Brotherhood has not joined with other welfare agencies to ask these questions and, until recently, we have not asked the community.

There is a real need for a new approach to communities like Atherton Gardens, one that involves reclaiming the financial support, resources and skills currently being poured into the community from outside. It is vital that we find ways to hear these communities' voices, and support them in creating their own sustainable solutions; that we offer promise for the future and some help to change the situation these communities face.

To operate effectively in a welfare organisation like ours, you need to be a social entrepreneur in all aspects of the work. Social entrepreneurs do not fit easily into the existing structures and relationships between government and welfare organisations; rather than being caught up in the existing momentum, they look at these relationships in a fresh way. Old challenges, as much as new challenges, demand new ways of thinking and operating.

In my work in the social sector I am always amazed at the inability of government departments—local, state or federal—to engage locally and to join, build or add value to exciting initiatives. In government you find some of the brightest and most able people—passionate about these causes. So why, at the end of the day, is it so hard to get those people around the same table? My sense is

that bureaucrats see themselves as gatekeepers, as custodians, keeping funding money safe from the abuse of those in the community. They do not see their role as helping us, the people on the ground, to break the rules.

Each welfare organisation, too, is looking after its own. This may seem an odd observation, but in an important sense organisations are compelled to do this. It goes with managing the organisation and is integral to the generation and maintenance of funding. In general, when welfare organisations deal with government, not only are we not talking to each other, but in many cases our funding regime leads to our actively withholding information from each other—to give ourselves a 'competitive edge'.

Social entrepreneurs can change these relationships. We should not assume that simply because we manage an organisation we're producing worthwhile outcomes for the community. To do that means changing the way government is involved; a constructive way to achieve this is to work *with* and work *around*.

So, how do you create a new kind of ownership for a community like Atherton Gardens? How do you help people see their community for its potential and not for its problems? There is nothing more compelling than having a job or a stake in their community to bring out people's sense of ownership and power. Social entrepreneurs are important as catalysts



who can look at a community and see opportunities where others see problems. They can then gather people from the communities to take advantage of those opportunities. They can create sustainable responses that do not rely on government funding or the goodwill of charities, but are based on the community's willingness and passions. Of course, social entrepreneurship is not the only solution; being

entrepreneurial doesn't mean that you won't also need particular and directed welfare services.

But I know that it is not good enough for the Brotherhood of St Laurence to sit opposite a community with 95 per cent unemployment, year after year, paying its staff who live in wealthier areas to come in and deliver services to a community that isn't fundamentally changing and

improving. We must find new models of engagement that are more empowering and honouring of the community. We must have keener ears to listen. And have gentle hands and feet to tread on this new ground, to rediscover how we become servant, not 'saviour'. ■

Nic Frances is Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

I ... but we need to be careful not to import the wrong values, argues **Liz Curran**.

FIRST HEARD THE term 'social entrepreneur' in 1997 when a colleague of mine, a Chair of Prison Chaplaincy for many decades, attended a corrections seminar run by a private prison. His occupation was described on his name tag as 'Social Entrepreneur'. He refused to wear the name tag because he objected to the presumption that his involvement in chaplaincy had an entrepreneurial intent. Some five years later, the terminology of 'social entrepreneur' has crept into philanthropic circles. The term has been embraced by Noel Pearson, Nic Frances, Tony Abbott and Cheryl Kernot. But before such a concept is endorsed, it needs to be unpacked.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the word 'entrepreneur' as a 'person who undertakes an enterprise or business with the chance of profit or loss, the person in effective control of a commercial undertaking' and a person who 'undertakes entertainments'. John Ralston Saul's dictionary definitions of management/corporate-speak comically highlight the misconceptions and dangers of allowing language to be co-opted without clarity and accuracy about its meaning and how it is applied.

Language is an extremely powerful tool. When you change language or accept new language it can change your ideas, vision or ideals and can build up a new untested philosophy. We have seen this with recent promotion of notions like 'mutual obligation', which contain much discussion about the obligations to society of the person on low social security benefits, but little about the reciprocal obligations of government and those who have power and resources. With the current spin placed on it by politicians and the media, 'mutual obligation' makes it easier to blame individual people for

their personal circumstances without recognising the systemic causes of injustice. We need to discuss concepts like 'social entrepreneurship' to ensure that meanings and assumptions are transparent, informed by experience, and have sound underpinnings.

It is often assumed—even within community organisations—that because the community sector does not operate on commercial terms it must be inefficient. Very little evidence exists to back up this assertion, and the sector's role in building 'social capital' is seldom factored into such an analysis. Perhaps, on occasions, the sector is inefficient, and it is always a challenge to work towards better responses. Ongoing reviews and evaluations are certainly necessary, but we need to remember that the human-services sector works with complex social problems, which makes it difficult to compartmentalise and streamline. The sector also garners a huge amount of voluntary input and commitment, saving taxpayers millions of dollars.

Used carelessly, terms like 'social entrepreneur' have the potential to diminish those involved in social-service delivery. They can come to be seen only as self-interested members of an 'industry' seeking new partnerships to increase injections of money, rather than as an essential component of civil society. The community sector needs to be more vigilant and clear about the language used to describe what it does. It needs to claim and own its function and role in society and its important contribution.

Unfettered market forces, competition and quantitative 'benchmarking' are often inappropriate frameworks for community services as they can lead to social fragmentation. Certainly, efficiency and performance have improved in some

community organisations, but in the process there can also be an unseen social cost if care is not taken. When linked to social justice and human-service delivery, the term 'entrepreneur' can lead to misunderstandings about the very basis upon which those working in the field undertake that work. Their role is to increase social cohesion and offer a commitment to the betterment of society, ensuring that all citizens—especially the marginalised—can access and exercise their full rights of citizenship. To do this they often need to challenge power and those in authority. There is no reason why government, businesses and the community sector shouldn't work in full and respectful partnerships that address systemic and individual disadvantage. But they all need to be in for the long haul and recognise that the field has knowledge and expertise that should be respected and valued. The stakes for our community are too high for these to be discarded.

The community sector is not merely about providing charity on a basis which may seem desirable to a business enterprise. The prevention and avoidance of inequities is also an aim. If we uncritically accept the ideas of social entrepreneurship, we risk underplaying or undervaluing the role the community sector plays in social change and community cohesion. What must not be lost is the capacity for independent advocacy. What must be retained is a focus—not just on service delivery but on systemic solutions to problems. This may not be attractive to many 'social entrepreneurs'. ■

Liz Curran is a Lecturer in Law and Legal Studies at La Trobe University. She is also a consultant to Catholic Social Services Victoria.

Are you free?

Rural communities like Gunning run on voluntary labour, according to **Michael McGirr**.

JOHN MCDERMOTT describes himself as a pennyfarthingologist. At the beginning of August, he sat high in the saddle of a penny farthing as he rode along the highway that passes near the small town where I live. He had ridden from Uluru and was heading towards Sydney.

John was trying to raise money for research into multiple sclerosis (MS). He was inspired to undertake such a difficult journey because a friend of his has MS and is confined to a wheelchair. John chose to begin at Uluru because he wanted to draw attention to the core of the problem with MS, namely that its causes are not properly understood. The idea of the penny farthing was to highlight the difficulties people with MS face, especially with mobility. A penny farthing is an awkward beast to manoeuvre: the rider can't even stand up on the pedals to relieve the pressure on his bum. For the first two days of the ride, John was in agony, with only pawpaw ointment to provide relief. It took 41 days to get from Uluru to Sydney.

John was accompanied on the trip by a 'very patient' support driver, David Penberthy. 'I averaged about 13 km per hour at the start of the trip so we made that a distance marker. David would drive ahead 13 km and wait for me to arrive. I would eventually arrive and have a ten-minute break and then cycle again. He would overtake me and drive ahead 13 km and, yes, you guessed it, wait for about one hour for me to arrive. All the way from Uluru. In total, he would have done this about 250 times.'

If volunteering is a sport, John McDermott is a practitioner of the extreme version. With the help of family, friends and supporters, he met all the costs of the expedition out of his own pocket. People were urged to ring a special number on

the side of the van David was driving and make a donation. He received quite a lot of media attention, his story featuring as a curiosity item at the end of local TV news bulletins in the places he passed through. He spoke regularly on the phone to radio presenters like Alan Jones. He literally worked his butt off. In spite of all that, he raised just a small fraction of his target. Undaunted, he is already planning another campaign to support the same cause.

There is an undeniable nobility in what John was doing. But also something inexplicable, something quixotic. It's impossible to meet John without thinking a little better of the human condition in general and a little worse of it as exemplified by your own particular case.

GUNNING, ON THE southern tablelands of NSW, where I live, supports a small number of businesses. Most of these cater for bread-and-butter necessities: petrol, food, postage and grog. In financial terms, it is a quiet economy. Yet there's a lot happening. And it's nearly all done by volunteers.

Every fortnight, a group gathers to assemble the local newspaper. It's called *The Lions Noticeboard* because it is organised by the small Lions Club. Normally it runs to about six double-sided A4 sheets, run off on cranky photocopiers, and contains small items advertising the next garage sale, yoga class and community meeting of one kind or another. It circulates about 1200 copies throughout the shire and is avidly read. Around here, three lines in the *Noticeboard* will bring a better response than half a page in the *Goulburn Post*. If the paper is running late, its readers start asking where it is. But it's a big effort from the organisers, and they're tired by the end of it, especially during

the spring shearing season. The same small group organises the monthly local markets, the 'driver reviver' on the highways during holidays and sausage sizzles at town events. Everybody admires them. Few people join them. The Lions Club organised an information night to try to attract new members. They letterboxed extensively, but nobody turned up.

The story is different when people are asked to volunteer for a cause that is closer to home. According to Peter Dyce, the local fire control officer, about ten per cent of the shire are active members of volunteer fire brigades. Dyce says that when he started fighting fires over 40 years ago, you were just expected to know what to do and, in the event of a fire, were shouted at until you did. Now they run courses. Parents bring their teenagers to earn their fire badges. In the culture of communities like this, it is almost as much a rite of passage as getting a driver's licence.

Dyce points out that nowhere is a change in volunteer culture more evident than in the acceptance of 'critical incident stress' counselling for firefighters who have been involved in traumatic situations, especially for those called to motor accidents. He says that the value of such counselling came home to him when he found himself in just such a session, for the first time, after a minor incident. He started to recall incidents vividly that were 15 or 20 years old and that he thought he had forgotten.

'It all sits up there,' he says, pointing to his head. 'It's a time bomb, that stuff. You have to deal with it or it can be triggered at any moment.'

Meanwhile, there would be no entertainment in Gunning if it were not for functions organised by local groups. There are fewer than 600 people in the town, a



couple of thousand in the shire, yet when the pre-school organised a trivia night 150 people came. A good number took the challenge to dress to the theme of 'the year of the outback'; the winning table had gone to the trouble of setting itself up as a rabbit-proof fence. Because the \$20 donation includes a three-course meal, running the evening was a huge undertaking. The kitchen attached to the shire hall was crowded with volunteer helpers. By the end of the night, some of them may well have needed critical incident stress counselling themselves.

The Catholic parish puts on an art show, the Uniting Church a garden show, the CWA caters the breakfast for Anzac Day. Groups like the Red Cross take it in turns to provide the Monday lunch for senior citizens; a volunteer committee is preparing for the 102nd annual show early next year. Another group organised a bingo night to raise funds for drought relief in Bourke. Parents from the local school have a roster to sell drinks and snacks at the swimming pool during the summer holidays.

The local Gunning Focus Group has brought live drama, string quartets, guitar ensembles, cello recitals and art exhibitions to town. On one memorable occasion, it persuaded an 80-piece orchestra

to come and play Bartók. They have also planted roses in the main street and other public places. Nobody asked them to do it. They are just glad they do. The Focus Group is significantly indebted to the vision of Mike and Wendy Coley, who thought they were coming to Gunning to retire.

Councillor Mike Coley makes a number of points about the volunteer culture in a town like this. He says it is easier for people to see what the needs are when the community is small; and their efforts are more likely to be appreciated. He also points out the way in which volunteering can bring two separate groups together. On the one hand, new arrivals to the town often look to join activities as a way of meeting people. On the other, the groups they can join have often been run for years by a small band of faithful workers. In some cases, their parents and grandparents were active in those groups.

The volunteer culture is deeply entrenched. It is represented in some ways by the much revered local war memorial outside the post office, the building from which many of those whose names are set in stone enlisted. The memorial is a shrine to the only exclusively volunteer army to fight in World War I. But those volunteers were paid—a shilling a day, according to

the legend. One of the shortcomings of a volunteer economy is that people can be suspicious of anyone who is paid to do work 'for the community'.

You often see an SES truck parked outside Coley's house. He is part of a group that is called outside the shire to help in rescues and storm relief. He is also the local snake-catcher.

'I used to have a paranoid fear of snakes but decided to get over it. Many years ago, as a sop for my "divorce" I started bird-watching. This got me into the bush and all kinds of flora and fauna. Snakes are an indispensable part of the Australian bush and I think they are beautiful creatures, so when the chance came to learn about them, I took it. Catching them was the pretext for the learning. Overcoming fear is good for you, be it through snake-catching, abseiling or public speaking. I still dislike spiders!'

Coley's experience with snakes says something about volunteer culture. It works best when personal needs and community needs fit together. It's hard to measure what that means to the economy of a town like Gunning. But economy is too narrow a term to describe life. ■

Michael McGirr is the fiction editor of *Meanjin*.



ngo

Caught in the middle

Overseas aid organisations face difficult times. **Patrick Kilby** reports.

LET US IMAGINE an Australian voluntary aid organisation that has just won a lucrative contract from the Australian government's overseas aid agency, AusAID. They are contracted to provide water to the people in a remote district of a country nearby. A large Australian mining company is also operating in the district, with its own lucrative contract, and is supported by the military of that country. For the local people, the predations of the mining company are a more immediate concern than an improved water supply, so they ask the Australian aid organisation to intercede on their behalf.

This request puts the organisation in a bit of a bind. On the one hand, they have a contract with AusAID that specifies the timing and outcomes of the water project,

and requires them not to get involved in 'politics'. On the other hand, the organisation's values of social justice and its commitment to the community make it very difficult for it to ignore the plight of people being exploited by the operations of a mining company. So what does it do?

This hypothetical dilemma is an everyday occurrence for Australia's voluntary aid agencies. Their work involves balancing their obligations to their donor (often the Australian government), to the people with whom they are working, and to their own organisational values.

AUSTRALIAN voluntary aid agencies are involved in channelling around \$500 million to developing countries. They work in water and sanitation, health and

education, and emergency work following floods and drought; they work in war zones and as advocates for human rights. These agencies range from global giants like Oxfam, Care and World Vision, to much smaller organisations—the vast majority—which are locally based and operate on a shoestring.

The debate about the role of the voluntary agencies in Australia is hotting up within aid circles. For its part, the federal government questions whether they are efficient and accountable for the public funds they receive. Others, especially on the political right, question whether the agencies should participate in the broader policy debates about issues like human rights and the operations of mining companies. The Institute of Public Affairs, for

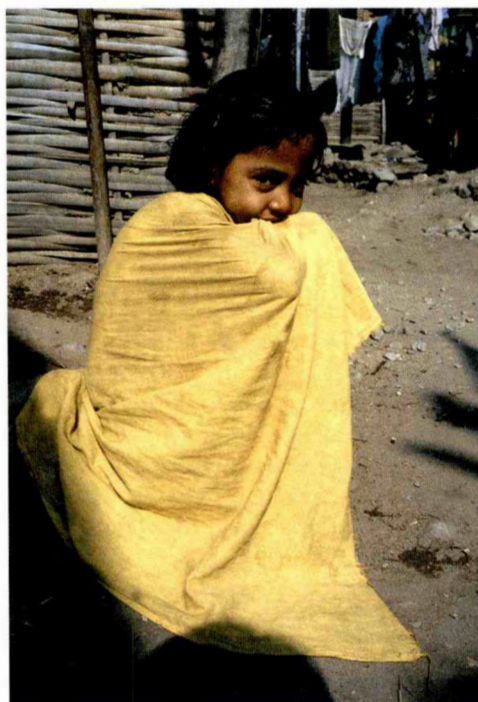
example, questions the role of the voluntary aid agencies in taking moral stands on policy and entering political debates. The Institute believes that the agencies should stick to their instrumental role as charities and deliver welfare to the less fortunate. Towards the other end of the political spectrum, writers like Alex de Waal argue that the voluntary agencies do not take a moral stance often enough and may be condemned for seeming to stand by as genocide takes place and then to provide food and shelter to the alleged perpetrators—as happened in Rwanda and Zaire in the early 1990s. He argues that they should be more passionate advocates for the people with whom they are working.

Voluntary aid agencies face a choice. Should they deliver services to those in need regardless of the broader context? Or should they risk their access to people and to public resources by entering political debates? Every day different agencies are engaged in campaigns on such issues as the rights of asylum seekers, the rights of indigenous peoples against states and mining companies, and the adverse effects of international trade rules on the world's poorest people. They all have to make judgments about whether they will damage themselves, their standing and their income by entering these public debates.

The \$500 million managed by Australian voluntary aid agencies is about a quarter of Australia's total aid expenditure (official and voluntary combined). Sixty per cent of the voluntary agencies' funding comes as donations directly from the Australian community—an average of \$38 per household each year. Nearly three million Australians involve themselves in some way or other in supporting voluntary aid work each year. The government's slice of the \$500 million is a little over \$100 million (eight per cent of the total government aid budget), a figure that has been almost static since the early 1990s. For each of the last three years, voluntary donations to aid organisations have risen by over 13 per cent; from the public's point of view, voluntary agencies seem to be doing something right.

Governments of all political colours seem to be less sure. Through a series of

inquiries over the past decade they have been questioning the role of the voluntary aid agencies, trying to understand what makes these organisations tick, and attempting to reach a view on how government should interact with them in a world where market values reign. Voluntary aid organisations seem to sit oddly in their public role. The problem is that voluntary agencies exist not to represent a particular group in society—workers, indigenous peoples, women, or business, for example—but solely to represent and promote certain values and, through those



values, to represent those who are marginalised and voiceless.

Most often these values are based on religion or spirituality, but they can also be based on humanism, altruism, environmental concern, or the pursuit of human rights. One could argue that the overarching value for voluntary aid agencies is humanitarianism—making the world a better place for its poorest and most marginalised citizens. It is because voluntary agencies represent values rather than a specific constituency—a constituency that votes in Australian elections—that governments have trouble working out how they should respond to them.

BUT NONE OF THIS is new. The history of voluntary aid is long. The church missions have been sending people, not only to proselytise but also to 'help the

poor and needy', for the last three or four hundred years. (The first record of voluntary foreign aid comes from Quebec in the 1600s.) Voluntary aid sought to address injustice and alleviate poverty in foreign lands well ahead of any government attempts to do the same.

Given the violence and injustice of colonialism, it was a natural progression for these early agencies to become advocates attempting to change the government policy of the time. A quick glance at the Nobel Peace Prize winners for the last century shows voluntary agencies earning the honour not for their charity, but for their work for peace and justice. Winners include the Red Cross (four times), the Quakers, Amnesty International, Médecins Sans Frontières, and a number of peace groups. The Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1787, now focuses on the latest and nastiest manifestation of slavery, child labour and sexual trafficking.

But it was not until the end of World War II, amid the humanitarian crises that followed, that the voluntary aid agencies became prominent. From the 1960s, the Vietnam War, war and famine in Biafra and, a little later, the Bangladesh crisis saw these organisations take centre stage in the public debates of the time. It was around this time, in 1965, that the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, the peak council of voluntary aid agencies in Australia, was established. Australian government funding of the voluntary aid agencies was still negligible, though public contributions were higher (as a percentage of GDP) than they are today.

In the mid-1970s the Australian government began to recognise the work of the voluntary agencies and began to provide a co-payment or subsidy to the voluntary agencies' work. This was quickly followed by tax deductibility for donations and full grant funding in the early 1980s.

The humanitarian crises of Cambodia and Ethiopia highlighted the broader role that voluntary aid agencies could play. In both cases, they could reach people in need more easily than government programs could. In the case of Cambodia, Australia saw the voluntary agencies as a way not only of supporting longer-term rehabilitation, but also of establishing links with the Cambodian government that would come in handy during the reconciliation process of the late 1980s.

Left and above: Whose priorities? Even locally based aid organisations in India have trouble reflecting the needs of their communities.

Photographs by Mathias Heng.

Jesuit Social Services



We work with communities, families and young people in critical need.

- Some of Australia's most disadvantaged communities in Newcastle, Collingwood, Fitzroy and Richmond
- Migrant families, refugee youth and asylum seekers
- Homeless young people just released from prison
- Long term unemployed with serious disabilities

You can help by forwarding a tax-deductible donation!

Jesuit Social Services

PO Box 271, Richmond VIC 3121

Tel: (03) 9427 7383 www.jss.org.au

- I enclose my Christmas donation of \$
- Cheque/Money order enclosed
- OR Please debit my Bankcard
- Mastercard Visa
- No. _____ Expiry Date..... /

Signature

Name.....

Address

..... Postcode.....

Telephone Home Work.....

But the end of the Cold War reduced the need for the aid organisations to perform a broader quasi-diplomatic role, and so began a decade of questioning where they fitted into the official aid program. Were these agencies as efficient and effective as they claimed? Did they have the public support to warrant a role in official aid? These questions coincided with the policy of 'downsizing' government and introducing contestable contracts for government services, including foreign aid.

REVIEWS OF THE relationship between government and voluntary aid agencies came one after another in the 1990s. AusAID's *Review of the Effectiveness of NGO Programs* (1995) was followed by reviews of efficiency and accountability by the Industry Commission (1995) and by the National Audit Office (1996 and 1998). Most recently, AusAID has conducted an internal review of the quality of the voluntary agencies' work, through what they refer to as their 'quality assurance processes'.

All of these reviews questioned the basis of the engagement between government and the voluntary agencies. For example, the *Review of the Effectiveness of NGO Programs* found that non-government organisation (NGO) programs were rated as better than satisfactory in meeting their objectives, and were cost-effective in 90 per cent of cases. But it went on to question the basis for government funding and to argue for an even greater contribution of voluntary funds to AusAID's NGO funding schemes.

The other government reports of the 1990s focused primarily on the role of the voluntary aid agencies as service-delivery agents, and the accountability obligations inherent in that relationship. The Audit Office put it most succinctly when it referred to the relationship strictly in client-patron terms. This 'purchaser provider model' is:

concerned with the relationship between those who define the objectives—the principals—and those responsible for delivering them—the agents. The basic premise is that the principal-agent relationship is a contractual one: legally enforceable rights and obligations are created. The three crucial elements of the contract are that the 'task must be clearly defined, the

responsibilities of the agent delineated, [and] the relevant performance indicators identified'.

According to this model, there is no role for the voluntary aid agency in identifying priorities, needs or approaches, let alone advocating on issues of social justice. This represented a sea change in the approach of government to voluntary agencies, and is a distinct shift away from its view of these organisations in the mid-1980s. At that time, the Jackson Committee report into the official aid program emphasised the voluntary nature and values base of the private agencies, and suggested an even greater flexibility and autonomy for the government support of voluntary agencies.

In the mid-1980s the funding of voluntary agencies was a sign that government recognised the value of their work, and would match voluntary donations. Now the funding of voluntary agencies is seen as an AusAID program, which the voluntary agencies subsidise from their own funds. A cynic might argue that this is merely a way for the government to reduce the cost of official aid.

This sharp change in government perceptions has led to increased tension between government and voluntary agencies in the early 2000s. The voluntary agencies have consequently begun to focus their attention on the new policy environment, and how their values are threatened. At a recent conference, voluntary aid agencies emphasised their commitment to values, to forming strong partnerships with people they work with, and to entering into long-term engagements.

AUSTRALIAN voluntary aid agencies are not beyond criticism. But the criticism they receive is often ill-directed. The real debate for Australian voluntary agencies is about their relationships with the people they serve in developing countries. The danger is that the agencies can allow their own values to drive their programs and define the need, which may be different from the real aspirations of the people they are serving.

When I surveyed poor and marginalised Indian women for a recent research project, for example, I found that family violence and the effects of an overbearing patriarchy were major issues. But most

voluntary agencies won't touch these issues. This reluctance is exacerbated if, under pressure from Western governments, agencies are forced into weakening their relationships with local communities and start to see them as 'beneficiaries' of the donor's largesse.

Voluntary aid agencies often use the language of empowerment, but if language is to be turned into action then their relationship with the people they are serving would have to change radically. And that possibility is not even remotely considered in the new system of government contracts. NGOs would have to give up some power, not to the donor government as is currently the case, but to those people they are working with in developing countries. For the smaller voluntary agencies this is possible (although few do it), but for global giants like Oxfam, Care and World Vision, this change in direction is virtually impossible.

This issue is not confined to aid programs funded by Western governments. During my Indian research I looked at 15, mainly small, local voluntary agencies and found that as 'public benefit organisations' they were not required to have any accountability to the people they were working with. As a consequence, only a couple of these organisations had a process for checking back with the community on their work and giving the people a role in planning the work of the organisations. While voluntary agencies are generally closer to communities they are serving than other aid agencies, such as government agencies or commercial contractors, the evidence that voluntary agencies are encouraging real participation and empowerment still seems a little thin.

There are three competing pressures that Australian voluntary agencies face in how they work with the poor and marginalised. First, their partners and the people with whom they are working in developing countries are becoming more involved in issues of empowerment and human rights. As a consequence, questions arise about whether voluntary agencies are allowing the poor and marginalised to determine their own priorities. The pressure for change comes as people with whom voluntary agencies are working begin to hold the agencies to account. What this means, in practice, is that voluntary agencies are beginning to reflect

on the relationship they have with their counterparts in developing countries. They are asking how they can expand local control, meet real needs and be accountable to those people.

The second pressure conflicts with the push for more local control. Even though the proportion of government funding is not high, it is still enough to give the government some control over how voluntary agencies operate. The purchaser-provider approach used by the government means that in order for voluntary agency programs to attract official funding, their objectives, processes and practices must all be approved and, in some cases, determined in advance by the government.

nevertheless the diversity of values has prevented the voluntary agencies falling into the trap of seeking blueprints for success, something virtually impossible in a chaotic world.

The move to standardisation and the widespread adoption of development fashions such as 'micro-finance' or 'natural resource management' mean that the strength of the diversity is being lost. And it becomes very hard for a voluntary agency to take moral stands and protest against injustice when their work on the ground is pre-programmed.

The voluntary aid agencies are now asking the government whether the purchaser-provider model is appropriate.



Language of empowerment: a school run by an Indian NGO in Delhi. Photograph by Mathias Heng.

Development success in the AusAID scheme of things is now being measured more by adherence to fixed logical frameworks than by responsiveness, flexibility and local control.

The final pressure on the voluntary aid sector, coming indirectly from government, is to find some standard model that they can all adopt. This is the rhetoric of 'best practice'. But the strength of voluntary agencies over the past few hundred years has been in their diversity—so much so that one could borrow from Mao his dictum, 'let a thousand flowers bloom'. Voluntary agencies have approached different problems in different ways, and espoused different values. One could question these values at times, but

This debate is important, and the outcome will determine whether Australian voluntary agencies maintain their diversity and unique character.

But the other debate is broader, and is not one just for government action. Voluntary agencies face the challenge of maintaining their values while at the same time being more accountable to the people they work with, and enabling those people to find a voice in a globalised world. ■

Patrick Kilby is completing a PhD on NGOs and Empowerment in India at the National Centre for Development Studies at the ANU and does policy work for Oxfam Community Aid Abroad.

Where have all the activists gone?

Why has social justice slipped off our agenda? asks **David Scott**, former director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Community Aid Abroad.

ACTIVISM is flourishing in some areas of public policy but is effectively absent in others.

Large numbers of people have been attracted to A Just Australia, a group advocating just refugee programs, led by Julian Burnside, Malcolm Fraser and Phillip Adams. Organisations promoting land care, water conservation and environmental protection are buttressed by public figures like the actor Jack Thompson, businessman Richard Pratt and musician Peter Garrett. The Australian Conservation Foundation and Greenpeace have large memberships and are supported by hundreds of groups defending clean air and water, combating salinity and greenhouse effects and protecting native animals and old buildings. Noel Pearson, Pat and Mick Dodson, Peter Yu, Lowitja O'Donoghue and many other leaders of the Indigenous community command attention and respect from the media, the public and government. And Robert Manne and Raimond Gaita have provided resolute leadership in the 'stolen generation' debate. Hundreds of thousands of Australians supported the notion, if not the implementation, of reconciliation in public events during 2001.

This is the good news. But what of the 250,000 Australians trapped by long-term unemployment and the 400,000 other unemployed people and their dependants? And, with work as the main determinant of living standards and a place in the community, what of another 560,000 people wanting more work and 800,000 who aren't looking but who would take work if it were

available? Behind these statistics are alienation, drug abuse, family breakdown, ill health and crime. But where are the leaders to mobilise public opinion and influence government policies with well-thought-out strategies, imaginative policies, skilled communications, passion and persistence?

Traditional dissenters, the churches and community non-government organisations (NGOs), have become less vocal, even acquiescent. Some of them produce well-argued reports that reflect their concerns, but there is no sustained, identified, social justice movement with publicly recognised leaders.

Why the muted voices?

There are many reasons. Under privatisation policies, responsibility for health and welfare services has been delegated to the private sector or to non-government, not-for-profit organisations. The Kennett government in Victoria, for example, implemented this policy through compulsory competitive tendering of contracts. Small and often vocal local agencies were closed to achieve economies of scale in tendering. Larger, special purpose organisations were amalgamated into Catholic, Anglican, Salvation Army and Uniting Church conglomerates under centralised boards and management, obliged to compete with one another. Under the Bracks government the method of funding has been changed but the structures and many of the consequences remain.

At the federal level, funding was removed from dissenting organisations, notably those working for women, youth and the environment. Grants to others,

notably the Australian Conservation Foundation, were reduced. The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) has agreed to notify the Department of Family and Community Services just prior to issuing a media release (although the department does not see the release until it is distributed publicly and does not have the right to veto or amend).

THE LEADERS OF non-government organisations are now responsible for large, diverse and complex organisations that may include income-producing businesses and expensive fund-raising operations. Many have 'corporatised' on models designed to achieve efficiency and effectiveness in enterprises where outcomes can be measured quantitatively. CEOs have less time for policy development and sustained advocacy. The need to attract funding from the business sector also tempers reforming zeal.

Many organisations, founded by determined, passionate people, are reaching middle age. Anglican priest Gerard Tucker, founder of the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Community Aid Abroad, recognised the implications of the life cycle of organisations.

When Tucker was gravely ill in the 1970s, the Brotherhood's chaplain, Peter Hollingworth, visited him in Geelong Hospital. Tucker had devoted his life to the Anglican Church. Hollingworth asked him what he had to say about it. A weak voice replied: 'Burn it down and start again.'

The movement by some NGOs into 'Third Way' initiatives such as 'social

entrepreneurship' and 'community-business' partnerships is actively promoted by Prime Minister John Howard. Ron Clarke's Council for the Encouragement of Philanthropy is another initiative aimed at raising money from business and giving donors 'a say in how donations should be spent'.

These projects will certainly give some business people a more realistic understanding of social disabilities, but there is a risk they will deflect attention from political reality. It is government that distributes, or fails to distribute, access to jobs, homes, education, health services and reasonable living standards and opportunities. And it is governments that must be influenced to respond to social injustices.

Business recognises the role of government in creating a favourable environment in which it can operate. Perhaps business can also be encouraged to appreciate the social and economic costs of exclusion and support the modest policy changes needed to remove some of the systemic causes of disadvantage.

Unemployment, family dysfunction, youth alienation and homelessness seem complex and intractable alongside reconciliation, environmental protection and the treatment of asylum seekers. And the reason for this sense of intractability—and the malaise it can cause—is that the policy responses we need to address these systemic issues have been ruled out for almost a generation by the market doctrine shared by Coalition and Labor parties. Australians have been effectively denied the opportunity of considering more inclusive economic policies.

Employment Minister Tony Abbott's redefinition of the notion of 'mutual obligation' reflects the dominance of these attitudes. For 40 years, 'mutual obligation' included the government's responsibility to provide jobs. Although 'full employment' was seldom achieved, there was a broad recognition of a right to work. The obligation of unemployed people was to accept the jobs that were available.

As the government now sees it, its only obligation is to provide a below-poverty-line level of benefit. In return, unemployed people are required to submit to a regime of regulations reinforced by a punitive 'breaching' code and Work for the Dole, which should have been voluntary, not compulsory. As Employment Minister in this atmosphere, Abbott's task is to

manage the political issue of unemployment, not to provide more jobs. We need to challenge the notion that employment is instrumental—a function of industry—and no longer has intrinsic value as a policy objective in itself.

The UK and the Netherlands have reduced unemployment to half the Australian level with a mix of economic reforms that encourage part-time work, local community development programs and economically justified job creation. Australian

'needed to come up with the words that move us, that cut through the selfishness and the fear and the prevailing pragmatism that judges policy not by its intrinsic merit, but by its popularity'.

Economist and long-time dissenter, J.K. Galbraith, believes a greater measure of social justice will only be achieved by a coalition of the people with advantage—whose personal values are offended by gross inequality—and the 'victims', the people excluded from much that society



A public housing estate in inner Melbourne. Photograph by Bill Thomas.

social policy, once in the international vanguard, has stagnated under Coalition governments and the Labor Party's policy vacuum. Meanwhile, public funding for education in Australia has declined as a proportion of Commonwealth expenditures, and much has been shifted across to the private sector. A similar trend is occurring with health expenditure.

The lack of moral leadership for the less popular and seemingly intractable social issues is difficult to understand. The misery caused by social injustices in a prosperous society is, and should be seen to be, as morally repugnant as the treatment of asylum seekers or abuse of the environment.

Where are the angry intellectuals and knowledgeable welfare sector leaders? Where are the self-help organisations? Why do a million unemployed people have no effective voice? Where are the writers who, in the words of Hilary McPhee, are

offers others. Australian churches, trade unions, community agencies and sympathetic people in the business world could form a formidable force for social justice.

Among these, human-service organisations know best the urgency of the need for affirmative action to change priorities, and to convert unmet employment needs in the infrastructure, environment, and health and welfare sectors into viable, productive jobs. These measures will also benefit the economy.

Will NGOs provide leadership for a social justice movement or have they become franchisees of government? ■

David Scott is the author of *Don't Mourn for Me—Organise: The Political Uses of Voluntary Organisations* (Allen & Unwin). He is a former director of Community Aid Abroad and the Brotherhood of St Laurence and a past president of ACOSS.

THE SHORTLIST



Faith: Faith Bandler, Gentle Activist, Marilyn Lake. Allen & Unwin, 2002. ISBN 1 865 08841 2, RRP \$39.95

Faith Bandler is one of those few people whose presence, you feel, could sweeten the memory even of harsh times. She always worked on the edge, but also found and gave the support you need to live there. Her father had been kidnapped in the Pacific islands for work in the cane fields; he then had to disappear in order to avoid being forcibly sent back to the fields.

She knew discrimination at school, but found also the affirmation to sustain her study. She worked and found companionship during the war, but her commitment to justice for Indigenous people was fed by her discovery that Indigenous women were made to work separately and were paid less. When she went as a Peace Council delegate to the Soviet bloc, she recognised the inequities of life there, but on her return was sacked for having gone. She married a Jewish refugee, and became involved in Indigenous politics. Her work with the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders helped prepare and carry the referendum of 1967. Subsequently, she negotiated for the recognition of the South Sea Islanders, who were overlooked in the Act that followed the referendum. In her later years, she wrote and spoke extensively.

Marilyn Lake's biography captures something of the attractive personality of Faith Bandler and her integrity and ability to negotiate in the face of the prejudice she met in almost all her commitments.

—Andrew Hamilton sj

Terror: A Meditation on the Meaning of September 11, John Carroll. Scribe Publications, 2002. ISBN 0 908 01184 9, RRP \$16.95

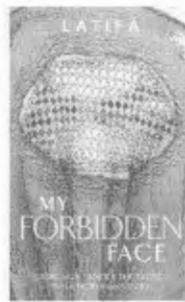
The pictures of September 11 are the stuff of apocalypse. John Carroll's meditation on September 11 is in hieratic and apocalyptic mode: the event reveals the crisis of Western culture, its cult of excess and its lack of self-knowledge. September 11 shows the need to return to cultural roots.

The hieratic and apocalyptic genre is hard to pull off today. It assumes belief in a God who reveals authoritatively to the small and fearful the drama behind the world of their suffering. This drama is for their salvation.

In the absence of such a shared belief, the modern prophet is reduced to dissecting the cultural and political entrails of the world while trying to persuade us that they are more than tripe. In Carroll's meditation, Osama bin Laden, the site of the World Trade Center, Duchamp's urinal and John Ford's films all become heavy with significance.

Terror offers many insights based on rich cultural association. But to my mind it makes precisely the wrong moves. When September 11 is made a cultural icon—in which clashes of civilisations, of good and evil, of order and chaos, of culture and anomie, are all embodied—the ordinary preciousness of the human lives of those affected by it slips out of view. If the humanity of those who died in the World Trade Center, in the planes and in Afghanistan is obscured by the mists of higher meaning, death will continue to beget death.

—A.H.



My Forbidden Face. Growing up under the Taliban: A Young Woman's Story, Latifa (with the collaboration of Chékéha Hachemi, translated by Lisa Appignanesi). Virago Press, 2002. ISBN 1 86049 956 2, RRP \$19.95

Latifa is not her real name, and she was smuggled into France to tell this story. She was 16, and was living in Kabul when the Taliban took over in 1996. *My Forbidden Face* includes a political history of Afghanistan, but it's mainly her first-hand account of what happened.

The book's focus is the extraordinary, deliberate persecution of women by the Taliban. Latifa is convinced that it was designed to destroy Afghan women, rather than compel them to lead a different life. For example, women couldn't work, so there were no female doctors, and a sick woman could not attend a male doctor. Widows were begging on the streets, little girls were found murdered. Other details in the book are even more distressing.

But I was struck by the solidarity between men and women in Kabul, their sense of the Taliban as foreign occupiers, the long background of war, and their struggle to get news from the outside, believing the world had forgotten Afghanistan or didn't understand what was going on. In France, even Latifa wanted to go home to Afghanistan. I wonder what she and her family are doing now.

—Susannah Buckley

The Naked Fish: An Autobiography of Belief, Ian Hansen. Wakefield Press, 2002. ISBN 1 86254 593 6, RRP \$24.95

Students eat teachers. They assimilate even the best of teachers into themselves. For that reason, it is always illuminating for former students to read their teachers' stories in which they themselves are made food for their mentors' thoughts.

I remember Ian Hansen with gratitude as a teacher who insisted that literature is not simply something that you read and judge, but is part of a personal journey. In *The Naked Fish*, named after the ancient Christian symbol, he describes his own journey, making special reference to changes within his religious beliefs.

More deeply, however, it is a book about the aloneness inherent in being son and father, and about the feeling of loneliness that this can engender. Like Edmund Gosse, Hansen's father was raised in the Plymouth Brethren. But he later became a Baptist minister. He fought in the Great War, and afterwards his feelings and convictions were veiled in a lack of communication.

His son rarely penetrated the silence. Yet he found a world both in and beyond the Baptist church, and was also able to make a way around the rigid doctrine of scriptural inspiration that he inherited. In a poignant chapter, he also describes the pain entailed in the separation from grown children and grandchildren.

Many of Hansen's reflections are concerned with religious belief, and his path to a belief that is reasonable. Towards the end of the book, he moves to faith and its images, and perhaps to the goal of this journey—the resonances between the pain of separations and the confronting image of the Father giving up the Son out of love.

—A.H.



Repetitive injuries

Nickel and Dimed: Undercover in Low-wage USA, Barbara Ehrenreich.
Granta Books, 2002. ISBN 1 862 07521 2, RRP \$24.95

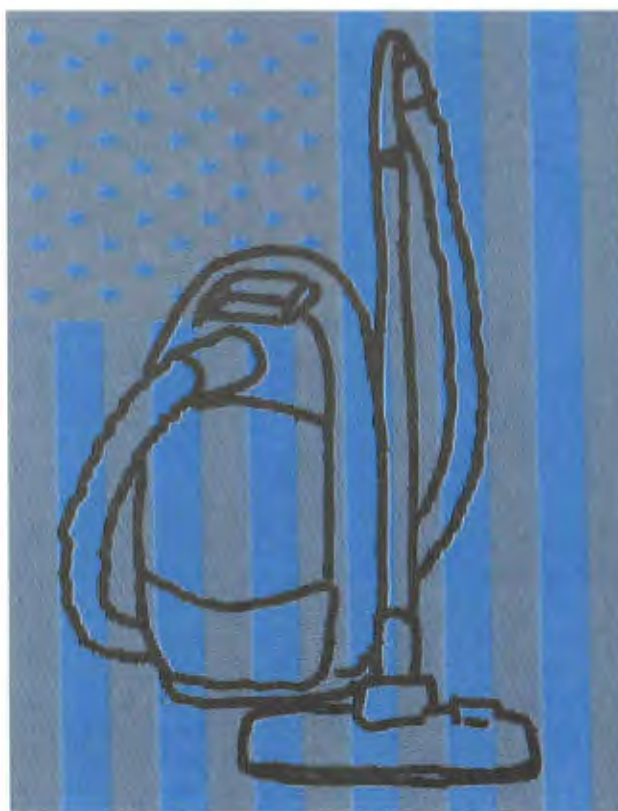
WHY DO POOR Americans live in expensive motels? And why do they need to pee in a cup every time they change jobs?

There was a time when the respected author and journalist Barbara Ehrenreich didn't even have an inkling that such questions existed, let alone how to answer them. But one day in 1997 over lunch with one of her editors—in a pretty good French restaurant, she readily admits—conversation turned to the fate awaiting the millions of American women who were about to be booted off welfare and into low-wage jobs by the Clinton administration. 'Someone,' Ehrenreich foolishly opined, 'ought to do the old fashioned kind of journalism—you know, go out there and try it for themselves.' A few years later she would find herself publishing *Nickel and Dimed: Undercover in Low-wage USA*.

This kind of 'participatory journalism' has a long and honourable tradition. Think of George Orwell, living a tramp's life in Paris and London; or George Plimpton, climbing into the ring with the boxing champion Archie Moore just so he could write about being pummelled by an expert. But it is a difficult form to get right because it requires at least two things that most journalists don't possess: the ability to report on themselves, and a preparedness to be seen as less than perfect.

Luckily Ehrenreich is a superb reporter on herself and unafraid of exposing her foibles and failures. She also gets off to a good start by being scrupulously honest about her methods and intentions. Before downshifting from her cosy middle-class existence, she carefully admits to constructing her very own self-funded safety net.

While on the assignment she would always have a car—usually a Rent-a-Wreck,



which she paid for out of her journalistic earnings. She would never go homeless. If the experiment looked like leading to sleeping in doorways she would be on the first flight home. She would never go hungry. Her next square meal was only ever an Amex card away. And she would allow herself a little nest egg to cover start-up costs—\$1000 for accommodation, \$200 for emergencies and \$100 to cover her initial grocery bill. In addition, as she is quick to point out, Ehrenreich came to this experiment with a number of other advantages: she was white, unencumbered by children, educated, fit and healthy.

'So this is not a story of some death-defying "undercover" adventure', Ehrenreich writes, 'almost anyone could do what I did—look for jobs, work those jobs, try to

make ends meet. In fact, millions of Americans do it every day, and with a lot less fanfare and dithering.'

So how did she go, and what did she discover?

Finding a job in the tight US labour market of the late 1990s wasn't a problem. 'Barbara', the award-winning journalist, had no trouble becoming 'Barb'—or more usually, 'Honey' or 'Girl'—the unskilled worker, earning \$6 to \$7 an hour. Finding a life worth living, however, proved next to impossible.

In Florida she worked as a waitress and a hotel cleaner. In Maine she became a contract house cleaner for a company called Maids International and worked weekends serving meals at a retirement home. In Minnesota she worked as a shop assistant at Wal-Mart, the world's largest retail business. The jobs proved to be as back-breaking and mind-numbing as you would expect, but Ehrenreich's description of doing them is both entertaining and poignant. She

is particularly adept at noticing the small things, like the half-smoked cigarettes that are returned carefully to their packs by her fellow workers.

BUT NO MATTER where she went there were always the same hoops to jump through.

First up, completing the application questionnaire. The American job seeker, she discovered, is expected to answer any number of questions along these lines: 'Do you think safety on the job is the responsibility of management?'; 'How many dollars worth of stolen goods have you purchased in the last year?'; 'Do you find it difficult to stop moods of self pity?'

Next, the obligatory drug test—because 'if you want to stack Cheerios boxes or



New Directions Sabbatical New spirit for a new world

Renew

your spirit in a flexible program, a global community, and the scenic San Francisco Bay area. Whether you want to take a break or take on new experiences, you will enjoy a wide range of spiritual, recreational, and academic resources.

New Directions
a sabbatical for one or two semesters

JESUIT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY at Berkeley

a member of the
Graduate Theological Union

1735 LeRoy Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94709
(800) 824-0122
(510) 549-5000
Fax (510) 841-8536
E-mail: admissions@jstb.edu
www.jstb.edu

vacuum hotel rooms in chemically fascist America, you have to be willing to squat down and pee in front of a health worker'. In the Land of the Free, drug testing workers is now a billion-dollar industry; some 81 per cent of large employers now insist on their right to see the colour of your urine before they will even contemplate employing you.

And what were these demeaning practices supposed to achieve?

The urine tests only allow corporate America to weed out the weed users, it seems, because cannabis lingers in the system for several weeks, while other, arguably more dangerous, drugs such as heroin, cocaine and alcohol, remain undetected because they pass out of the body within a few hours.

As for the questionnaires, they might identify the rare, congenitally stupid applicant labouring under the misapprehension that admitting to criminality is a good thing to do in a job interview, but as they are unable to pick out intelligent imposers like Ehrenreich—who passed all her job applications with ease—you have to wonder about their efficacy.

'The real function of these tests', Ehrenreich decides, 'is to convey information not to the employer but to the potential employee, and the information is always the same: You will have no secrets from us.'

Where Ehrenreich failed consistently—despite her many advantages—was in making ends meet over a sustained length of time. At one point she questions whether a fellow worker is wise to live in a motel paying a high daily rate. Why not rent an apartment, Ehrenreich inquires naively, wouldn't it be cheaper? 'And where am I supposed to get a month's rent and a month's deposit for an apartment?' she is asked with some vehemence.

And that's the problem in a nutshell. Ehrenreich would arrive in town and quickly eat up her nest egg during the job-hunting phase on unavoidable expenses like motels, petrol and phone costs. By the time she was employed, however, the poverty trap had well and truly snapped shut and she was paying too much of her income in rent and relying too much on expensive fast food.

She soon worked out that unless you acquire an employed spouse or a second job, the low-wage life can begin to look pretty hopeless. And as Ehrenreich obviously drew the line at adultery in the name

of journalism, she was forced to attempt the latter option. Unfortunately, she was never able to make this work either. When she did manage to score a double shift, she soon realised that working at two physically demanding jobs for 16 hours a day would lead her swiftly down yet another financial cul-de-sac, to a pile of unpayable health bills.

Besides failing to survive, Ehrenreich was surprised to discover that sometimes she just simply failed to cope. After exhausting herself working two shifts back-to-back, she stuffs up royally while waitressing and walks out rather than sticking around to see if she's been fired. 'There is no vindication in this exit, no fuck-you surge of relief, just an overwhelming dank sense of failure ...' Despite a successful writing career, a PhD in biology, a healthy level of self-respect, and years of active gym membership, a job paying \$7 an hour can tear you down and make you cry—not because the pay is lousy but because you just can't hack it.

And this realisation cut a little deeper for Ehrenreich because waiting on tables could have so easily been her life. Her father, she reveals, was a miner who managed to get into management, paving the way for her escape to the middle classes via university. Indeed, many members of her family, including her sister, still work in low-wage jobs.

One night working a late shift as a shop assistant at Wal-Mart, she gets into an argument with another worker and experiences a dark and depressing epiphany. Maybe 'Barbara' isn't as far away from 'Barb' as she smugly thought:

Take away the career and the higher education, and maybe what you're left with is this original Barb, the one who might have ended up working at Wal-Mart for real if her father hadn't managed to climb out of the mines. So it's interesting, and more than a little disturbing, to see how Barb turned out—that she's meaner and slyer than I am, more cherishing of grudges, and not quite as smart as I hoped.

It's an example of what Ehrenreich dubs the 'repetitive injury of the spirit'—and it is disheartening to think that it only took her a few months engaged in this wholly artificial experiment to suffer from it. ■

Brett Evans is the author of *The Life and Soul of the Party*, UNSW Press.

Tied to the gum tree

Gum, Ashley Hay. Duffy & Snellgrove, 2002. ISBN 1 876 63126 0, RRP \$25

IT'S A VERY Australian thing to do when you're far from home: to pick a leaf from a gum tree—a tree that is growing, often, where you least expect it—crush it, and inhale the smell of eucalyptus. Because they smell so strongly of home, the leaves of the eucalypt have been sent by wives and sweethearts to soldiers at the front, and carried in purses and wallets by travellers venturing out into the world. They've been turned into bookmarks and coasters and other knick-knacks to give to visitors as expressions of our selves, the portable essence of Australia, a reminder of our difference.

They remain an emblem of that difference, even though gum trees have been established in other countries now, for so long and in such numbers that their Australian origins are forgotten or misunderstood by the people who live there and who see them every day. In Brazil, Spain, India, California, they are treated, almost, as natives. Our trees have been exported ever since Joseph Banks took his thousands of botanical specimens back home to fire imaginations and make his reputation. In Ethiopia, as Ashley Hay tells us in one of the many laconic asides that characterise this splendid book, the 'Emperor Menelik, who had to move his country's capital every time it ran out of firewood, named its first permanent site Addis Ababa—"new flower"—after the eucalypts that had been planted as a permanent source of fuel'.

The reference to Addis Ababa is one of many fascinating snippets that Hay does not labour but leaves to settle in our minds, reminding us that while we were cutting down trees for wood and pasture as if there were no tomorrow, we were also relentless in our enthusiasm to see the eucalypt take root in as many corners of the world as possible, even in those where logic might have told us it would not thrive. This 'colonising tree', branded by many of the early arrivals from Europe as dull and useless, came to



seem the answer to everything, Australia's gift to the world. It was a fast-growing, ever-renewable resource that produced fuel and shelter and could also, thanks to the curative properties of its oil, banish illness.

Hay is excellent on that strange paradox that lies at the heart of our mixed and contradictory attitudes to the gum tree. In the mass, they are numberless and undifferentiated, stretching away into the distance. Anonymous, their colours neither bright nor clear enough, their shapes twisted, even deformed, they are resistant to improvement by clipping or pruning or other forms of human intervention. But beneath the superficial anonymity is an extraordinary variety of species and sub-species, a play of light and shade that is unique to each tree, lending it a distinctive personality, an almost human character that deepens and improves on acquaintance. It's what keeps us coming back, as artists like Glover and Heysen and Namatjira and Williams kept coming back, for another look.

We respond to the gums the way we respond to people. Taken together they are overwhelming: impressive in their way, but difficult to feel any real connection with.

We fare better when we concentrate on the particular, the individual trees or varieties that we feel we can know and understand. Hay does just that, focusing in *Gum* on a small number of magnificent specimens, both botanical and human. Among the human specimens are Sir Joseph Banks, Baron von Mueller, Thomas Mitchell, May Gibbs, and Max Jacobs, himself a forest giant who in the postwar years had an enormous influence on the way in which Australia saw the gum tree.

Obsessives all, they were gripped by the unique Australianness of the eucalypt and the need to catalogue and define and represent it, and to proselytise on its behalf. Like the soaring red gum that Harold Cazneaux photographed again and again, or the resonantly christened Chapel Tree and Christmas Tree that helped to focus public attention on the threat to old-growth forests in Tasmania, these superhumans of cataloguing and recording stood out from the crowd, driven by their own single-mindedness.

HAY IS REMARKABLY even-handed in the way she conveys the obsessions of her heroes and heroines, these commanders of the gum-tree squad—whether it be Mitchell dividing the country into a grid and proceeding to document its eucalypts square by square; or May Gibbs with her formidable combination of the idealistic and the commercial, churning out gumnut babies to meet a seemingly insatiable demand; or Stan Kelly, that quintessential enthusiast, who, in his desire to 'paint them all', travelled all over the place in the '50s and '60s. Kelly's obsession took him to Darwin on a Vespa. Kelly chose that most un-Australian mode of transport so that he might always smell the eucalyptus on the wind. Hay leaves us with a last picture of him literally up a gum tree, sitting among its branches, enveloped, as he later recalled, by 'these beautiful orange-coloured flowers'.

Things We Tell Our Doctors

that we average only half a bottle a night
that we walk at least five miles a day
that unfortunately we missed the Diabetes Nurse
that fourteen stone is not a lot to weigh

that two grandparents lived well over ninety
that, yes, we're at ease with our sexuality
that *timor mortis* is full of latin dignity
that dieting's surely a matter of degree

that we'd always intended taking out insurance
that fifteen cigarettes a day is rather low
that Uncle Charlie fell dead on the golf course
the way he said he'd always wished to go

Peter Porter

A Cat Jumps

He jumped, the trellis jumped, I jumped—I saw
the scraggy cat on his compulsive flight
cross the garden wall, the encircling vine
and hannibalic thistles—

and as he went
he howled the final human howl
of being, of flinging an arm across
the body of complicity
in imitation of the shape of love.

Poor sorrower, half a kitten,
enslaved by appetite, but lost involuntarily
to thinking—no-one could ever hold him
to an oath.

Unlike him, we
are boiling with commercial promises,
with musical interventions, panderings
to politics, death-bed emporia,
compelled to jump whichever way thought moves.

Peter Porter

But for all her even-handedness, Hay does slip occasionally, revealing a hint of bias underneath. She describes the wealthy colony of Victoria, for example, as being ready in the mid-19th century to spend its excess money on 'the encouragement of science', as if suggesting that the scientific, quantifying impulse arises largely from boredom and too much cash. She characterises the gums of 150 years ago as 'just need[ing] people to study them', but her tongue is in her cheek. The trees don't need us at all, Hay seems to be saying. We need them.

In 1951 a Festival of Trees gave the government the opportunity to emphasise the extraordinary usefulness of the eucalypt. Gone, it is true, were the days when we could claim its oil would cure cancer or gonorrhoea, but the eucalypt remained, in the words of a Department of the Interior publication quoted by Hay, 'an ambassador of goodwill abroad', offering sustainability in construction, fuel supply, the manufacture of paper, and land reclamation, among a range of other uses.

But the world was moving on, and the dozens and dozens of countries that had taken in the gum and made it part of their landscape—some, such as India, from the very first days of European settlement in Australia, and others, in Indo-China for example, much more recently—were beginning to have second thoughts. While our attention in Australia turned in the '70s and '80s much more sharply to conservation, so too did theirs. The difference was that what belonged here, and was part of the landscape, did not necessarily belong elsewhere, in other countries, where they had their own traditional landscapes to nurture and regenerate.

The utility of the gum—its capacity to be turned into something else, like wood pulp, or to be turned at least to some practical purpose—is now seen by many as a distraction from, even a threat to, its real purpose. The strength of the gum today, for those who fight to preserve and regenerate it, lies in its very capacity to withstand our economic and scientific intervention and to remain unequivocally itself. In retailing the extraordinary story of the fight to save the Tasmanian wilderness over the last 30 years, Hay emphasises, rightly I think, the overtly spiritual dimension to that struggle, the sense of the untouched forest as a cathedral for the times.

Hay quotes Bob Brown as he recalls the usual suspects, the advocates of

In October, Peter Porter's Max is Missing won Britain's Waterstone's Prize for the best collection of poetry.

development and exploitation, the enemies who must be overcome. 'The unions, big business, the newspapers,' he says, and then, oddly and accusingly, he also takes a swipe at the churches. The silence of the churches, the failure of organised religion to speak up for forests and for nature, is set implicitly against the much more positive, regenerating silence of the trees that Brown and all the other activists were, and are, so determined to preserve.

One does not have to be an advocate of the ruthless exploitation of the natural world to detect something vaguely disquieting in this new spirituality, arising as it does from what David Foster calls 'a reawakened respect for trees'. Hay quotes Brown again on the blowing up by the Taliban of the Bamiyan Buddhas. 'Is there any difference between that and chainsawing the tallest living creatures in the southern hemisphere?' Brown asks. Well, yes, there

is, actually, quite a big difference. But let it pass. As this beautifully written and evocative book makes clear, we are tied to the gum tree in ways we can't even imagine and, difficult though it may be to define that attachment, there is surely something spiritual in it. ■

Richard Johnstone is a Pro Vice-Chancellor at the University of Technology, Sydney. He writes on travel, food and culture.

BOOKS 3

PILITA CLARK

When is it wise?

Why Do People Hate America?, Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies.

Icon, 2002. ISBN 1 840 46383 X, RRP \$21

The Eagle's Shadow: Why America Fascinates and Infuriates the World, Mark Hertsgaard.

Bloomsbury, 2002. ISBN 0 747 56053 6, RRP \$22.95

THE LAST TIME I looked at Amazon.com, more than 200 books had been written about September 11. I've already read a few, like *The Cell*, about how the FBI and CIA failed to stop the attacks. I've flicked through others, such as Magnum's coffee-table book of 9/11 photos. And I plan to avoid most, especially *Even Firefighters Hug Their Moms*, *Seven Steps to Getting a Grip in Uncertain Times* and *America from the Heart: Quilters Remember September 11, 2001*.

Amid this exhaustive outpouring of commemoration is a second, less patriotic pile of books. You may already have read Noam Chomsky's bruising *9-11*, since he managed to rush it out barely a month after the attacks, or Gore Vidal's *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace: How We Got to Be So Hated* and Ted Honderich's *After the Terror*. In this group, too, are the books under review, *Why Do People Hate America?*, by the British writers Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, and *The Eagle's Shadow: Why America Fascinates and Infuriates the World*, by the American journalist Mark Hertsgaard. For these writers, the September 11 attacks were justified, but they were a reminder that many around the world regard the United States as a dangerously hypocritical nation



or even, as Chomsky says, as 'a leading terrorist state'.

Together, these two sets of books, the patriotic and the dissident, underline one of the defining questions of our age: what is the true nature of the US?

In the Cold War we defined ourselves, and others defined us, according to whether we were for or against Marxism. In hindsight, it should have been obvious then that in the post-Cold War world, with its solitary American superpower, the key question was going to be whether one was for or against the US and

all that it claims to stand for. And if it was not obvious before September 11, it surely seems to be so now.

In the shocked days after the attacks, there was a brief period in which the world's headline writers agreed we were 'all Americans now'. Not any more. Today, there is a divide between those who believe, as George Bush Jr has put it, that the September 11 attacks were committed by evil radicals who 'hate our freedoms' and want to end everything America stands for, and those who believe that a too-powerful US has for too long arrogantly pursued its own ends around the world, caring little and knowing less about how much pain, poverty or resentment it caused in the process—in short, those who think America either had it coming, or at the very least needs to understand why it came.

But, as these two books unwittingly demonstrate, finding reasons for anti-Americanism is easy but making a compelling link between those reasons and the attacks of September 11 is much harder.

Of the two, Hertsgaard's book is by far the more readable. Begun well before September 11, it was initially conceived as a sort of reverse de Tocqueville: the author would tour the world for six months, hanging around in cafés and bars to collect

foreigners' observations about America. Not bad work if you can get it.

But then came the attacks and, as Hertsgaard acknowledges, his potential readers were suddenly in no mood for criticism. The result is a book that stoutly criticises Washington's arrogance, but takes care to point out that the US is a lot more than a demonic capitalist behemoth. Its people not only invented jazz and national parks, they helped usher in some of the world's most influential social movements, including second-wave feminism, environmental safety, consumer protection and civil rights. And while many foreigners may claim to detest it, thousands are willing to spend their life savings crossing deserts and cramming into squalid cargo holds to get into it every year.

Sardar and Davies deliberately shun such complexities, explaining in their introduction that they didn't want to write a book about the positive sides of the US. They succeeded on that score, but their book is often shrill and cartoon-like as a result. It is also littered with clunking cultural-theory jargon and even more worrying cultural 'analysis' of why people hate America.

One reason, say the authors, is what they call the 'hamburger syndrome': just as a burger is a whole meal of different ingredients, so America glories in the 'compound whole' of its government, its history, its companies and its philosophies, and that's why people hate it. By that definition, we should all hate Botswana. Or Iceland. Or anything else worth calling a country.

There is also far too much plodding political correctness, like this priceless sentence about the contentious military commissions the Bush administration proposed to deal with terrorists after September 11:

The Commission cannot even be described as a kangaroo court (an appellation offensive to Australians, who know the loveable qualities of this marsupial) because it is not a court at all.

But the book has more serious flaws. A key part of the authors' argument is that Americans suffer from 'knowledgeable ignorance'. That is, they have inaccurate understandings of histories and civilisations, even though more accurate information is readily available. But in their rush to find as many examples of American ignominy as they can, the authors display quite a bit of knowledgeable ignorance of their own.

They blithely quote claims, for example, that the US has 'perverted elections and interfered with the democratic process' in 23 nations, including 'Australia 1974-1975'. Really? There has been widespread speculation about CIA involvement in the downfall of the Whitlam Labor government, but proof? Sorry, not yet.

At another point the authors berate the US for its hypocrisy in banning foreign political donations to its own political parties in the name of free and fair elections, even though it funded favoured candidates in Lebanon in the 1950s. But the ban on foreign donations to US political parties was not introduced until 1966.

Why Do People Hate America? does have its better moments. In fact, the strength of both books is their relentless cataloguing of US policies and demands that even the superpower's most loyal allies have found breathtakingly hypocritical.

Take the way in which successive administrations, Democrat and Republican, have demanded that smaller nations abide by the rules of the World Trade Organization and open their markets to free trade, even as Washington lavishes billions on subsidies for American farmers. Earlier this year, at the same time that George W. Bush was trying to build an international coalition to fight terrorism, his administration infuriated Washington's closest allies in Britain and Europe by announcing stiff tariffs on steel imports. This was the same President Bush who said, during the 2000 presidential campaign, 'Those who shut down trade aren't confident.'

But this was hardly a surprise. Washington always seems to find it easier to talk about free trade in sectors in which it is strong, such as farming and films, than in those in which it is weak, like steel.

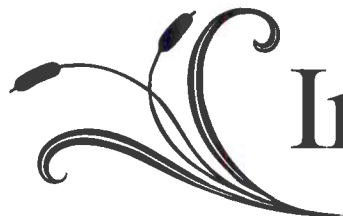
AND THEN THERE IS Kyoto. As Hertsgaard shrewdly points out, on the very day Bush went to the United Nations last November to demand international co-operation on terrorism, his administration was shunning negotiations in Morocco aimed at finalising the Kyoto Protocol on global warming. So much for international co-operation.

Indeed, the first two years of the latest Bush administration have been marked by a determined unilateralism on a range of issues, not just Kyoto and steel tariffs. The administration has also angered Russia, among others, by withdrawing from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, a cornerstone of nuclear arms control agreements for 30 years. And it has infuriated allies from Canada to Europe by refusing to sign the treaty creating the International Criminal Court and demanding other nations sign bilateral agreements to exempt American citizens from the court's reach.

If America's wealthier allies in the West despair of such arrogance, what of non-Western nations, for whom Washington's unilateralism may be not just irritating but economically devastating?

And then there is Hollywood. America's media-industrial complex is not content merely to smother smaller markets with its beguiling products. It also has the temerity to rewrite history in its own image. As Sardar and Davies note, the World War II film, *U571*, about the capture of the German Enigma code machine is translated into a totally American triumph. In reality, the British captured the machine in 1941, before the US had even entered the war. Likewise, Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* unthinkingly suggests

Imprints Booksellers – Adelaide's leading independent bookshop committed to justice, equity, peace, reconciliation... an active contributor to the culture.



Imprints
BOOKSELLERS

107 Hindley St, Adelaide ph. 8231 4454 fax 8410 1025 email books@imprints.com.au www.imprints.com.au

Hitler was vanquished by only one nation: America.

One could go on—and both these books do—about all the usual complaints that have been levelled against America for years: its one-eyed support for Israel; its dominance of the International Monetary Fund; its insular news media; its meddling in Latin America; its mistreatment of Native Americans; its history of aggression.

Eventually one is forced to ask: couldn't most of this have been written at any time in the past ten years? More to the point, how should we think about this in relation to September 11? Is there any way in which any of this justifies those attacks? Or, put another way, what exactly should Washington have done to stop men like Osama bin Laden and Mohammed Atta from launching those attacks in the first place?

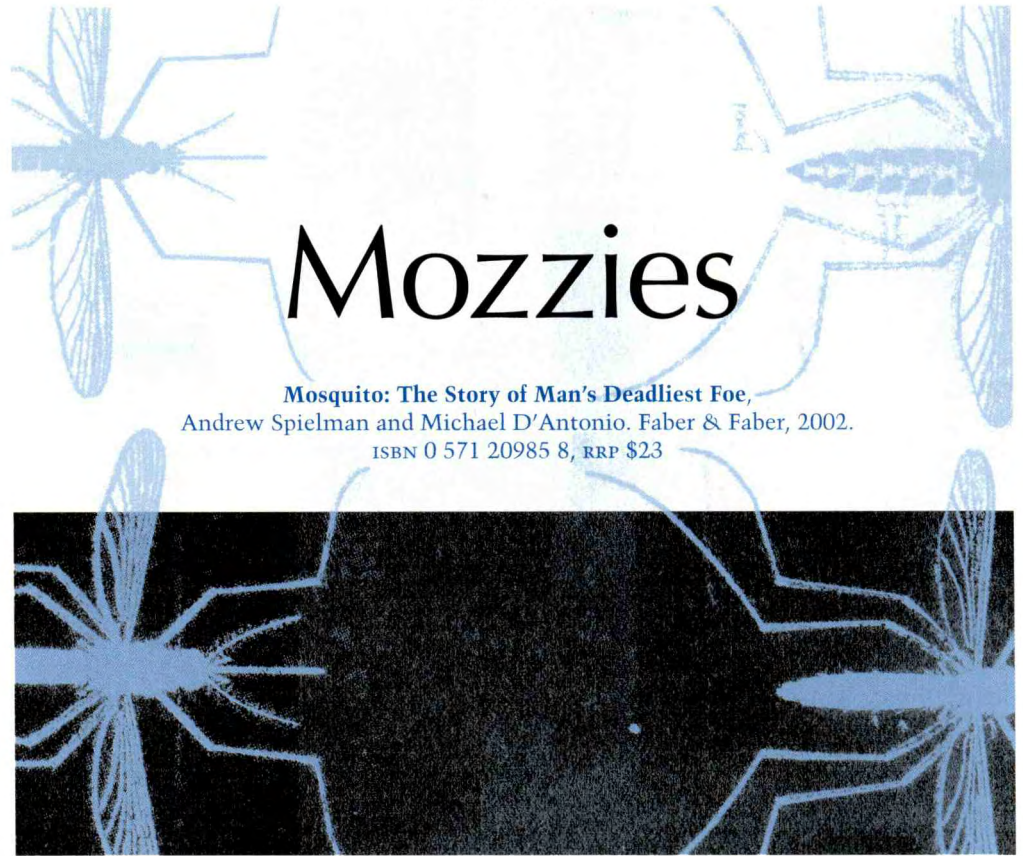
It is on these questions that both books falter. Sardar and Davies eventually suggest that 'American support for Israel' should be looked at, though they doubt it would be very easy. Hertsgaard tries to tackle the question a little more forthrightly.

'Would bin Laden have launched his attack if the United States were not financing Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories and stationing troops in Saudi Arabia?' he asks. 'Quite possibly not, though I don't mean to suggest that Washington should grant terrorists veto power over its foreign policy. The point is, Americans need to have an honest discussion about our conduct overseas: where is it wise? Where is it not?'

It would be nice to think that such an 'honest discussion' would eventually lead to a change in the American policies that engender so much distrust of the US around the world. I for one would cheer an end to US foreign policy hypocrisy almost as much as I would like to see George W. Bush abandon his dangerous unilateralism and clumsy diplomacy.

But I have trouble believing that this alone would have definitely prevented those attacks in New York and Washington. Perhaps someone will eventually produce a careful analysis that connects the complex history of anti-Americanism with the tragedy of September 11. But so far, that book remains unwritten. ■

Pilita Clark is a *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist based in London.



HERE IS A CHALLENGE for creationists who believe that every living creature is the result of divine intention and design. Explain the mosquito!

Before we turn from Darwin to embrace the biblical account of special creation we need a theologically and scientifically sound justification for the existence of a little insect that seems to have only two purposes in life—propagation of the species and the delivery of misery and death to the descendants of Adam and Eve. Any satisfactory explanation for mosquitoes will involve some ingenious insight into the mind of the Creator.

'More than most other living things', write Andrew Spielman and Michael D'Antonio, 'the mosquito is a self-serving creature. She doesn't aerate the soil, like ants and worms. She is not an important pollinator of plants, like the bee. She does not even serve as an essential food item for some other animal. She has no "purpose" other than to perpetuate her species. That the mosquito plagues human beings is really, to her, incidental. She is simply surviving and reproducing.'

The use of the feminine pronoun is not a case of entomological correctness. It just happens to be a fact that if it were not for the female of the species we would take little interest in the mosquito. It is, in fact, the female *anopheles* (of which there are several varieties), *aedes aegypti* and *culex pipens* that carry malaria, yellow fever, dengue, equine encephalitis and—of particular interest to us of the wide brown land—Ross River and Murray Valley viruses.

Last month *Nature* magazine carried a cover story announcing yet another advance in the war on malaria. The maps of the DNA of both the *anopheles* mosquito and the malaria parasite have been drawn. Now, the optimists say, it is just a matter of time before this new information is turned into vaccines and therapies, or even genetic time bombs to be planted in the mosquito itself.

In *Mozzies*, medical scientist Andrew Spielman and journalist Michael D'Antonio warn against hubris. If there is a God the evidence appears to suggest that the mozzie has a special place in His affections. The little buzzer is incredibly difficult to outwit, let alone eradicate.

Take the celebrated application of DDT. Successive US governments in the '50s and '60s spent millions on mosquito eradication programs around the world, largely for propaganda purposes and to demonstrate the inherent superiority of the capitalist way of life. Never mind the motive, for a time the program seemed to be working. But two things happened to bring the widespread use of DDT to a halt.

One was Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, in which she argued that DDT was not the harmless chemical it had been thought to be. It was killing beneficial insects as well as pests and it was proving to be remarkably persistent in human milk. Not long after the publication of *Silent Spring*, DDT was banned in the US.

The second and more important factor in the loss of confidence in DDT was that mosquitoes proved remarkably adaptable to the stuff. Because of the short life cycle of the insect, observers could see evolution happening before their eyes. At each spraying of DDT most mosquitoes in the vicinity were killed. But a few hardy specimens laughed at the insecticide. They had the field to themselves when it came to

producing the next generation of *anopheles*. So, within the space of five years in any treated location, the mosquito population was DDT-proof.

There was another, and initially unforeseen, consequence of the early success of mosquito eradication. For a space of a few years malaria disappeared from the treated areas. This had the effect of reducing the immunity of humans to the disease. When malaria returned the result was worse than if the eradication program had never been attempted.

And, just to prove that the God of *anopheles* has a sense of malicious humour, the medicines derived from quinine (from the bark of a Peruvian tree, the powder of which was offered by the natives to 17th-century Jesuit missionaries to cool their fevers), and the synthetic alternatives, are now virtually impotent against the malaria parasite. Overuse and misuse of quinine and its derivatives has aided and abetted the evolution of malaria strains that are impervious to its therapeutic effects.

IF YOU, LIKE ME, have been labouring under the misapprehension that malaria is a disease confined to the tropics, you will be as surprised as I was to learn that the Roman army invading Scotland lost more than half its 80,000 soldiers to the disease. There is even a theory that, back in its home base on the Italian peninsula, the Roman empire was brought down by little *anopheles*, rather than by great big hairy Goths, Vandals and Huns.

As Spielman and D'Antonio tell the story of mosquito versus human, there is no doubt that the insect has suffered only one serious setback in its war on humankind—the eradication of its breeding places. Swamp drainage and removal of standing-water ponds, pools, jam jars, chamber pots and old motor car tyres, have done more to remove malaria from affected areas than any other human action. Cold and swampy England, for instance, was rid of malaria by land reclamation long before the nexus between mosquitoes and the disease was understood.

Observers in the 18th century had speculated that mosquitoes could be a disease vector, but they were dismissed as cranks. Everyone knew that disease was produced by foul miasmas and immoral living and that blaming an insect was simply trying to evade the implications of divine wrath. It wasn't until the invention of

the complex microscope confirmed what had been intuited that the presence of the malaria parasite in the mosquito gut was demonstrated beyond doubt. Grand economic projects like the Panama Canal and great military ventures like the British invasion of Mesopotamia provided the impetus necessary to get insect control programs under way. Ferdinand de Lesseps, seeking to perform an encore after his Suez triumph, was utterly destroyed by the mosquitoes of the Panama isthmus. During his ill-fated attempt to build the canal, thousands of his workers died from malaria and yellow fever. When the Americans took over the project they got their priorities right and they attacked the mosquitoes before they dug the ditch.

Spielman doubts that any of the expensive malaria vaccine and treatment research projects around the world—including the work in Australia, where the National Health and Medical Research Council funds a number of laboratories—will eradicate the disease. The malaria parasite is too adaptable to be easily wiped out. The poverty and illiteracy of the affected populations make it inevitable that drugs will be either inaccessible to them or they will be improperly used. The evidence shows that illiterate people tend to use as much of the drug as is needed to make them feel better today and then put the rest away to use the next time they get sick. The malaria parasite finds this practice amazingly congenial.

Even in those populations where the disease is temporarily defeated it will come back later to attack generations that have no immunity. No place on the globe that can be reached by ship or aeroplane is now safe from attack. It turns out that there is a very good reason for spraying airliner cabins before the passengers, big and little, are let loose.

Spielman and D'Antonio are also sceptical of any proposal to release genetically modified, sterile insects into an area of high mosquito population and endemic disease. They describe the impossible logistics involved in making a difference to insect numbers and show the folly of even trying.

Spielman has not yet given up on DDT. For all the post-Carson fear of its long-term effects he reckons that millions of lives have been saved by its judicious use and not one life has been lost.

The scientists presently engaged in seeking the magic bullet to shoot down

Essential reading for all who care about the future of Christianity.

The Suicidal Church

Can the Anglican church be saved? BY CAROLINE MILEY

THE SUICIDAL CHURCH is a critical assessment of why the church is failing to relate to contemporary society in Australia. Falling church attendance is not a new trend but it is at odds with the increasing interest in spirituality in Western culture.

So why is there a loss of faith in the church? Caroline Miley asserts it is not religious belief that is the obstacle for many Christians

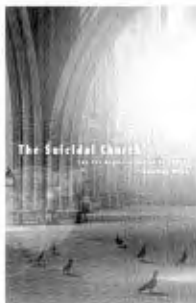
but the church's culture. The great sadness is its failure to preach the gospel authentically and its betrayal of a vibrant Christianity that brims with energy and embraces diverse human experiences.

Miley examines the current failings of the church and its culture of timidity, fear, racism, sexism and homophobia that is now crippling the institution. For the church to be relevant in the twenty-first century it must undergo large-scale radical change. THE SUICIDAL CHURCH provides ideas and recommendations for achieving such a 'new reformation'.

THE SUICIDAL CHURCH is available in all good bookstores nationally in November 2002.

ISBN 1 86403 182 4

Pluto Press Australia • www.plutoaustralia.com



mosquito-borne disease divide into two groups: those who think the victory will go to the inventor of the vaccine and post-quinine prophylactic and those who think that vector control or eradication will win the war. Spielman, after a lifetime of eyeball-to-many-eyeball encounters with the insect, thinks that eradication is the way to go.

I suppose that you could make out a case for God being the Big Mozzie in the Sky. Consider the fact that the mosquito's wings beat between 250 and 500 times per second and that 'the veins that run along the long axis of each wing provide stiffness while allowing for flex, which increases the flow of air'. Meanwhile, 'muscles at the wing's base help it to bow with each stroke, adding to its lifting properties'. You have to ask yourself what immortal hand or eye has framed its fearful symmetry. Even more impressive is the fact that when the little blighter sinks her proboscis into your arm and starts to suck up your blood she does so through a tube that is so small in bore that, by all the laws of physics, the friction should be too great to allow her to ingest a single corpuscle. But, in fact, she can do the double trick of stealing your blood and replacing it with the malaria parasite or yellow fever virus without waking you up.

Spielman is in awe of the beauty of the insect to which he has devoted his life:

Posed against an enormously dangerous environment, this seemingly simple organism thrives. Everything about its design is economical and precise. And though it is incapable of thought, it manages to meet great challenges, adapting to our use of pesticides, the loss of habitat, even climate change. Charles Darwin would have been amazed at the speed with which those mosquitoes that exploit the human environment adapt and diversify today.

Next time, on a summer's night, when the buzzing stops and I feel the slightest brush on my arm and wait a moment for the proboscis to probe and I hold my breath and smack at the spot where I think the mozzie is, I will smite her with respect. Perhaps the earth was made for her and I was put here as nothing more than a food supply. It is a humbling thought. ■

Terry Lane is a writer and broadcaster who presents *The National Interest* on ABC Radio National.

September 11, 1973

Santiago, Chile, September 11, 1973

Was a dark spring
Of terror, flames and fumes
Two jets
Flew like the evil wings of death

Made in the USA.

Soldiers in the streets formed part
Of the scaffold of violence from the sky
Rivers of blood ran through our mouths.

Made in the USA.

At the table a dark flower grows in our own silence at night
The singer was tortured.
Socialism was a red crop burnt in the field.

Made in the USA.

Victor Jara* rehearsed his *último poema*
In a stadium of pain and howls
One hour before he was shot his broken guitar was burnt;
And wounds of doves and wounds of words were embers in his canto.

Made in the USA.

September 11, 1973

From the North, Kissinger awakes
To converse with Nixon at the *White House*;
Both smiling that morning in September,

Made in the USA.

Juan Garrido Salgado

* *Victor Jara was a political folk singer*

This is the poem from which last month's Comment piece made extensive quotation.

FLASH IN THE PAN



Thrice bitten

Red Dragon, dir. Brett Ratner. The credits aver that no animal was harmed during the making of this film, but I and the tiger in the zoo veterinary scene would take issue with that. When Francis Dolarhyde (Ralph Fiennes all tattooed and bad-haircutly intense à la De Niro in *Cape Fear*) takes literally blind date Reba (Emily Watson) to see (well of course only figuratively see, but there indeed literally lies the rub) a sedated tiger, she goes for the squirrel grip, making one very sorry for the poor beast which is unable to bite her head off as it would if she took such liberties when it wasn't doped and completely helpless to offer its opinion of such indignity.

That's the only unusual thing about this film. The rest of it is fairly faithful to Thomas Harris' mildly interesting novel, which is the first in the Hannibal Lecter stories. In this one he is at least not quite so valorised as in Ridley Scott's nauseating *Hannibal*.

Red Dragon is a simple thriller where you are mostly three steps ahead of FBI

profiler Will Graham (Ed Norton, a male Jodie Foster), but the prologue where he first catches Lecter is full of the right kind of suspense and is even witty. There is a whiff of Ridley Scott's Hannibal-as-divine/demonic-avenger when Lecter serves bits of an unreliable flautist to an unknowing set of society dinner guests who comprise the board of the opera.

Less disgusting than *Hannibal*, and nothing like as original and scary as Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*, this second adaptation of *Red Dragon* won't disturb you much, unless you think tigers have rights. As for people being disposable and objectified, that's a whole other author. —Juliette Hughes

Good intentions

The Road to Perdition, dir. Sam Mendes. Even without the normal pre-release hype, *The Road to Perdition's* arrival in the cineplexes of Australia would still have generated much genuine excitement. It is, after all, director Sam Mendes' follow-up to his Oscar-winning *American Beauty*.

So it's a pity to report that his take on the gangster film proves to be so unsatisfying.

In *The Godfather*—the genre's undisputed classic—Michael Corleone starts out as a war hero and ends up as a Mafia Don. Though he fights it, Michael finally gives in to the family and the darkness of his true nature. Now, that's a story.

In the Mendes film, set in the Midwest of the 1930s, Michael Sullivan (Tom Hanks) starts out as a devoted father, a devout Catholic and a ruthless killer. By the time the credits roll he has killed 14 people and he is still a devoted father and a devout Catholic.

Lots of things have happened—murders, gunplay, narrow escapes—but nothing much has happened to Sullivan. Hanks is a superb film actor—he can achieve things with just his eyes, his posture, and his timing that must be the envy of his peers—but he can't make the character of Michael Sullivan add up.

And not much happens to anyone else either. His son, Michael Sullivan Jr (Tyler Hoechlin), sets the story in motion when he secretly follows his taciturn and stoical father to work, only to witness a murder which will eventually lead to the destruction of his family and a trail of murderous revenge. So is he sent crazy by guilt? No, he finishes the film as he started it—incapable of violence and touchingly in love with his father.

It is disappointing to see so much talent employed to so little emotional effect. Actors of the calibre of Paul Newman, playing the crime boss, John Rooney, who betrays Sullivan, and Jude Law, who plays the eccentric assassin sent to kill him, give fine performances. And the cinematography of Conrad L. Hall is superb; every frame is a thing of beauty. Yet the film never quite takes flight; there is technique aplenty, but little soul.

The Road to Perdition is paved with good intentions, but good intentions alone won't create a great film. Mendes has brought all his storytelling abilities—which are considerable—to bear on a narrative that didn't deserve such lavish attention.

—Brett Evans

Elephant stamp

Nine Queens (Nueve Reinas), dir. Fabián Bielinsky. Every year produces its sleeper in the industry—a film released with

minimal publicity and dependent on word of mouth for its success. *Nine Queens* is just that, and is playing to packed cinemas in England and the United States. In Argentina, a country which has a film industry that is more than 100 years old but stunted by intermittent political interference, this movie dominated the 2001 Argentinian Film Critics Association Awards.

The film opens prophetically with a bill-changing scam which goes wrong, but in the process brings together two small-time con men. The older, Marcos, is a veteran of the street scam. He is looking for a new partner, and Juan, who is just learning the trade, is in desperate need of money to get his father out of jail.

It is agreed that they will pool their talents for a trial period of one day—Marcos providing the know-how and Juan the boyish charm. After a couple of petty scams, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make big money by dishonest means presents itself.

An ageing and decrepit master forger recruits Marcos and Juan to sell a counterfeit set of stamps that he has produced. The stamps are near-perfect copies of a very valuable set of stamps known as 'The Nine Queens'. The con men's 'mark' is a multimillionaire businessman, who is about to be deported from Argentina (the very next day, in fact), because of his nefarious business activities. He's the perfect target: a fanatical stamp collector, with the money to afford the originals (if they had them!), and no time to have the stamps authenticated by a philatelic expert.

The scam is set, but somehow nothing seems to go right. With con men, swindlers, hoods and thieves around every plot corner, you are left wondering, just who is conning whom?

Ricardo Darín, as Marcos, makes a memorable sleaze, while Gastón Pauls as Juan, the swindler's apprentice, provides the personal charm essential to a successful con.

The subtitles are unobtrusive and for the most part unnecessary, given the film's visual strength. The script has a David Mamet quality about it and violence is either absent or not to be taken seriously. And there are no car chases—the film moves briskly enough on foot.

Don't be conned by a couple of local negative reviews—this film is worth a look. In a nutshell, an Argentinian *Sting*.

—Gordon Lewis

Dying to know

Walking on Water, dir. Tony Ayres. Gavin is young and dying. His two closest friends, Charlie (Vince Colosimo, below) and Anna (Maria Theodorakis), have nursed him through the worst of his illness and are now charged with helping him die. His pain is unbearable and, as Anna says to Gavin's reluctant mother, 'He's brilliant, not brave.'

And so the film begins—with a physical end. Using the occasion of death may seem a hackneyed way of exploring life (*The Big Chill* being just one horror of that particular genre), but *Walking on Water* has taken the tradition and given it a sound punch in the nose. By avoiding stereotypes, it has given its characters (living and dead) some real-life respect.

Gavin, despite a massive dose of morphine, simply won't die. His body refuses to be at peace—it jerks and heaves and groans like an irascible old drunk, clinging hard at the grim edge of death. Those by his bedside are in turn horrified, exasperated,



amused and finally driven to desperate measures. This is not comfortable cinema. It is rare and bold—allowing death to flirt outrageously with farce.

Ayres (in his feature directorial debut) has taken on big ideas with both gusto and intimacy. Appreciating that despising the presence of baby's breath in a wreath of red roses is as much part of the texture of life as the mending of a broken heart, Ayres has resisted the temptation to create hierarchies for the emotions. He just lets them be—big or small—as the moment moves him. As a result the film is airy and rich with the haphazard emotions of life.

Every performance is memorable. Neither Colosimo nor Theodorakis, playing two friends competing for the biggest slice of grief, employs a drop of sentimentality. Judi Farr is wonderful as Gavin's mother, dragging hard on her Holiday cigarettes and conveying the pain of outliving a

child with the simple pursing of her lips.

The photography is very handsome. With great areas of the screen out of focus, the tiny pieces given the attention of sharp focus become almost unnerving. The art design, so heavy as to be slightly oppressive, nonetheless does its job.

It would be wrong to call this a great film, but it sure is a good thing for Australian cinema. The greater the risks, the greater the rewards. —Siobhan Jackson

Developing film

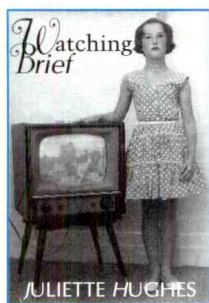
Sunshine State, dir. John Sayles. The films of (very) independent director John Sayles typically incorporate social and political issues in their complex, character-driven plots. *Sunshine State* follows in that tradition.

On Florida's Plantation Island, developers are assessing properties for their money-making potential, local residents are choosing whether to sell up or voice their protests, daughters defy parental expectations and tourists descend for the 2nd Annual Buccaneer Day festival.

The lives of two local women (one white, one black) overlap within this broader story. Marly Temple (Edie Falco) runs her father's motel in Delrona Beach. While avoiding her ex-husband, she becomes involved with a landscape architect working for the hated developers. In the black enclave of Lincoln Beach, Desiree Perry (Angela Bassett) returns to her mother's home after a long absence, forced to confront her family and the community she left 25 years ago.

Sayles has assembled an accomplished cast. Falco's Marly is assured and sassy, but also hiding dissatisfaction. In Bassett, we see Desiree's bubbly infomercial persona contrasted with the woman trying to mend broken relationships from her past. The characters in *Sunshine State* are woven together so intricately that every player (no matter how minor) is important. A choric quartet of Florida golfers acts as a clever framing device, playing off each other while offering wisdom, philosophy and hardbitten realism.

Social and political issues—the importance of family and community, relations between black and white people, land exploitation—are subtly evoked in Sayles' comedy. Developers spout familiar rhetoric and history is invented to attract tourists. *Sunshine State* is warm, engaging and full of satisfying twists. —Sara Chomiak



Soap flake

'How different, how very different, from the home life of our own dear queen.'

—Attributed to a lady leaving a London theatre in the 19th century after attending a performance of *Antony and Cleopatra*.

IF YOU ARE ON LEAVE, or if your working hours are what is now called flexible (overwork/underwork/overwork/underwork—come on proles, flex those working hours for the good of the economy!) you might have seen some daytime TV. Come on, admit it. When I talk about the everyday wonder of Bert Newton (Ten, 9am) or the sheer joy of *Passions* (Seven, 3pm) many of my over-educated pals start to shy like horses who've smelt tiger, harrumphing nervously. They start changing the subject to something they feel more comfy with, like Derrida's left foot and Foucault's canary or Flaubert's umbrella and the unbearable lightnesses of nuanced thingies at arthouse cinemas. Don't get her going on Morecambe and Wise, they whisper. They're quite at home with Jacques Tati because he's not really funny. They are secretly worried that the best Australian movie ever may well be *The Castle*; that its best two magazines might be this one and the *Australian Women's Weekly* and I think they'd be right.

Anyway, if you are flexible enough to be catching the likes of Oprah and the soaps you might also be an initiate into the aforementioned *Passions*.

If you have ever followed the soaps, you will be familiar with their immutable traditions. Some of these are: the long close-up reaction to bad news; amnesia for at least one character; near-incest between unknowing half-siblings; pregnancies' origins concealed; jiggery-pokery with wills; people in comas in hospital; marital misunderstanding of the pantomimically obvious kind. And Byzantinely curly plots that require the detailed connivance of several indefatigably evil characters who afflict the few innocent characters (who, despite painful previous experiences, are all as trusting and oblivious as a flame-entranced moth). P.G. Wodehouse used to watch soaps in the afternoons when he'd done a morning's writing, impressed by the craft and the complications of the plots.

If your definition of a soap is *The Sullivans* or *A Country Practice*, you haven't understood. The real ones are daytime soaps, not evening. The hard stuff: *The Young and the Restless*, *General Hospital*, *Days of Our Lives*. When I was a slip of a young rebel at uni, there was time for suchlike foolery. At college we had a coterie of soap fans watching *Days of Our Lives*, following the doomed marriages, the Chinese-puzzle deceptions, the onion-layers of causation and interrelation, the amnesias, the deaths, the long, long stays in hospital (always,

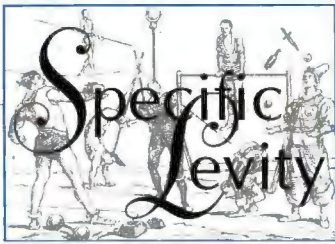
always with tubes up the nose; your true soap character would be intubated for an ingrown toenail).

I like to think it prepared many of us for what was about to happen in our real lives. Amidst all the family turmoil, you could always say to yourself along with the anonymous London society lady, well, I haven't just discovered that my real father is my third husband's older brother whose child I am carrying. And so far I haven't forgotten who I am, haven't gone to jail for shooting my sister's seducer, and my best friend isn't a secret agent/devil worshipper with designs on my inheritance. And even if you had all of these things happening to you, it would be nice to feel you weren't all on your own.

A LONG, LONG TIME AGO, the series *Soap* satirised the conventions but gave itself away by being screened at night. Whereas *Passions* is a real, if extreme, soap. It takes all the conventions and drives them to the precipice of disbelief. Suspended there, we watch the unfolding of the interwoven plots, usually laughing, but never quite detaching. And that's the cleverness in the making of it: you end up rooting for characters, whether good or bad. There are several major plot threads, but in a nutshell, *Passions* is about a small American town laughably called Harmony, which has a history dating back to the Puritan witch trials. Tabitha, the town witch, is 300 years old and has a doll-familiar called Timmy, who becomes flesh when alone with her. (No-one knows, of course.) She has the dirt on all the old families, particularly the Cranes, who are evil millionaires. Alistair Crane is a shadowy omniscient Godfather type; we never see his face, but he blackmails, assassinates, cavesdrops and fakes DNA records to suit his purposes. His son Julian is married to Ivy, but their son Ethan is really the biological child of Sam, the handsome town cop who is married to the warm, innocent, dumb but occasionally (but mostly uselessly) psychic, Grace. Ethan has just jilted his childhood sweetheart, the patrician Gwen, to betroth himself to innocent Theresa, the daughter of Pilar, the Cranes' housekeeper, whose husband was recently killed in suspicious circumstances that implicate Julian's beautiful and innocent sister Sheridan who is the lover of the smouldering Luis, Therese's brother. As a fan called out at a William McGonagle recital, 'Wheer's your Wullie Shakespeare noo?'

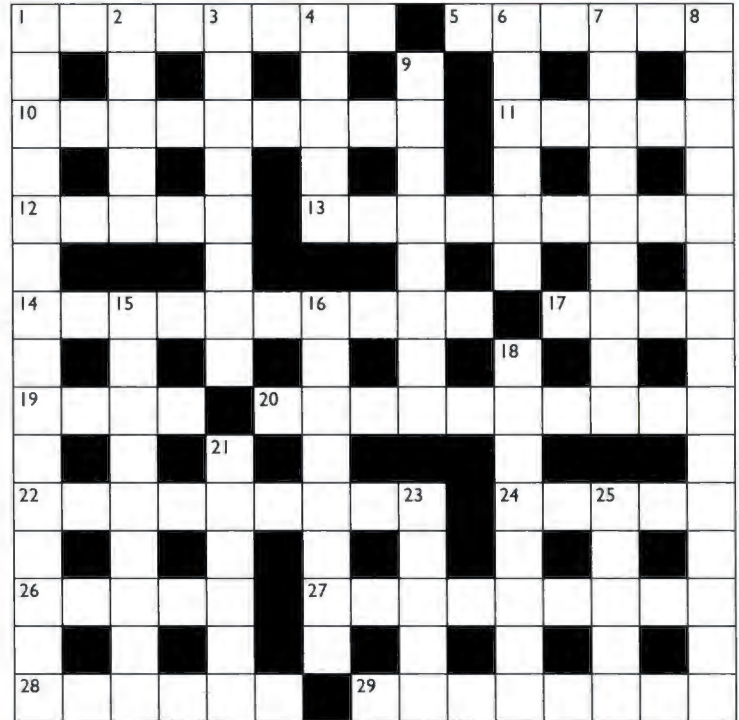
Having given you the smallest fingertip of the *Passions*-plotberg, I'm now going to settle in and watch episode three squillion and four. It's more believable than what's coming out of Canberra at the moment. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 108, November 2002

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS

1. Bought us a treat, perhaps, but it was steep! (8)
5. An essayist, Bacon was possibly more foolhardy than most. (6)
10. Position of CEO I fix, by arrangement, as of right. (2,7)
11. Instrument in the dungeon? O, how highly strung! (5)
12. Some give one cup per person in the room that's above. (5)
13. Could be well dressed, as it happened. (6,3)
14. Hall, anyhow, permits celebration of this feast. (3,7)
17. Appear to notice me at first. (4)
19. It was partly the atmospheric situation, so they say, that produced the charged particles. (4)
20. Informal apartment in Canada Len got for half a cent? I offer my sympathy! (10)
22. Peculiar lunar bed 'e found could be borne with ease. (9)
24. Extreme? That's super! (5)
26. It took a long time for the south-east to clear. (5)
27. Surprisingly, I recount a story about the spirits? (9)
28. Said to be the official count? Humanly, in fact, there are five. (6)
29. Supporter unfairly caned for taking part in this rhythmic and provocative movement. (3,5)

DOWN

1. Tendency to conjecture about seven sites? *Culpa mea!* (as they say in Latin) (15)
2. Large group of scouts, maybe, going to Porto as arranged. (5)
3. Allusion to umpire mistake, Al noticed. (8)
4. Understood Tom returned to it. (5)
6. Jeffrey draws a long bow? (6)
7. Tricks or treats on the day before 14-across is celebrated. (9)
8. Perfect atmosphere for 27-across, for instance. About 20°C. (4,11)
9. Something like this goes with something blue for the wedding. (8)
15. Tall, haggard and over-extended? (4-5)
16. Never do this, and become increasingly successful? (4,4)
18. Ostentatiously displayed curious nude in flat. (8)
21. Suspend, we hear, ornamental strip on wall. (6)
23. Is Heather her name? (5)
25. Poetic contraction for an intermediate state. ('5)

Solution to Crossword no. 107, October 2002



EUREKA STREET

This subscription is:

- New Renewal Gift

Length of subscription:

- One year (10 issues for \$63, \$54 concession for pensioners, students and unemployed. Inc. GST.)
- Two years (20 issues for \$115, \$98 concession. Inc. GST.)

overseas rates on application:
tel +613 9427 7311
email: subs@jespub.jesuit.org.au

Send to:
Eureka Street Subscription
Reply Paid 553
Richmond VIC 3121
(No postage stamp required if posted in Australia.)

Your Contact Details:

Mrs/Miss/Ms/Mr First Name

Surname

Street No. Street Name

City/Town/Suburb State Postcode

Daytime Telephone No. Fax/email

Gift to: (Please also fill in your own contact details, left)

Mrs/Miss/Ms/Mr First Name

Surname

Street No. Street Name

City/Town/Suburb State Postcode

Daytime Telephone No. Fax/email

Payment Details

- I enclose a cheque/money order for \$ _____ made payable to Jesuit Publications
- Please debit my credit card for \$ _____
- Please send me direct debit forms

Visa Bankcard Mastercard

Cardholder's name

Signature Expiry date

Mailing list: I would like to remove my name from the mailing list when it is used for outside advertising.



Three generations of East Timorese women sewing their future (L-R) Australian Volunteer Angela Cronin, Carmelinda Guterres, Tomaziea Monez, Diana Soares and Francesca Boavida in Manatuto, East Timor. Photo by Mathias Heng.

Angela Cronin is one of 230 Australians recruited by the Australian Volunteers International East Timor program since 1999.

Working with women and children at a community centre in Manatuto, Angela has made a personal contribution to the enormous task of rebuilding peace.

6000 Australians have lived, worked and learned in developing communities in nearly 70 countries since the Australian volunteer program began in Indonesia in 1951.

As Australians, we are all enriched by this experience.

You too can contribute to building a more peaceful and just world.

For more information or to make a donation, please call or visit our web site.

Phone 1800 331 292

www.ozvol.org.au

Living Working Learning

The Australian Government's overseas aid program is proud to provide significant support for Australian volunteers who work in a development capacity overseas.

ISSN 1036-1758



9 771036 175017