

# EUREKA STREET

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## Unions on the back foot

The future of industrial relations  
in Australia Jon Greenaway





*The Burma of hopeful imagining: in reality a refugee camp, Mae La, on the Thai-Burma border, photographed by Mathias Heng in December 1995. Burma today is a mixture of SLORC brutality (SLORC is the ironically titled State Law and Order Restoration Council), an ongoing struggle to re-establish democracy, opportunistic trade relations with the West (in which Australian business is playing a part), refugee movements, and land mines. But there are still young Burmese who find time and heart enough to listen to The Cranberries singing about the Troubles. Kerry Murphy visited the border country and met the people. See Burmese bind, p18.*

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COMMENT

ANDREW HAMILTON

# What's in a mandate?

**P**OLITICAL RHETORIC ABOUT MANDATES is like the ritual puffed-out chest confrontation at the beginning of Grand Finals. It is all very impressive and threatening; everyone claims the biggest one; when the game begins, it all signifies little.

Popularly, a claim to a political mandate seems to imply a licence or a right to do what you want without being prevented. Etymologically, however, a mandate is a command, and that may be a more helpful way to think about its political use.

In Australia the government's primary mandate is the command from the people to govern. The scope of this command, however, is deliberately and carefully limited by the working out of the Constitution. The Government must pass legislation through both houses of Parliament, and its legislation may be subject to judicial review. A Government thwarted in the Senate can ask for a double dissolution.

Governments can also be said loosely to have a mandate to try to follow in government the policies which they proposed at the election. This mandate is relatively weak, for otherwise no government would be entitled to change its mind in the light of circumstances. Still, it does have a moral imperative to try to keep its word.

For the same reason, oppositions have a loose mandate to try to influence government to follow the policies which they proposed. This mandate is no less nor more binding than that imposed on the Government to follow its policies. The scope of the mandate of government and opposition is determined by the power to pass legislation.

The strong mandate to govern and the weaker mandate to follow policy, however, are subordinate to a more fundamental command implicit in the Constitution. This is the charge laid on all representatives that they should enable government for the good of the whole people.

Accordingly, regardless of the policies on which they sought election, governments may not claim a mandate to govern badly or for sectional interests. Nor may oppositions claim a mandate to destroy the possibility of good government. Hence, to deny supply or routinely block legislation in the upper house in order to force an early election may be legal, but it is illegitimate.

Ultimately, mandates protect the game; they do not privilege particular players in it. ■

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

# Native Title on pastoral leases—now you see it, now you don't

*You had the misfortune of occupying 'unoccupied land'.  
You had to correct your gross error.*

*You fought here for your country.  
Where are your monuments?  
The difficulties we have in belonging  
—these, these are your cenotaph.*

from Bruce Dawe's *For The Fallen*

**F**IRST IT WAS Mick Dodson and the National Indigenous Working Group on Native Title pleading for co-existence of native title on pastoral leases. Then it was Wilson Tuckey and the Coalition back bench chanting extinguishment of same. John Howard stood in the middle, rightly and happily committed to doing nothing. Why?

In *Mabo*, the High Court recognised Aboriginal rights to land before colonisation. It also recognised the colonising government's power to extinguish those rights at will. On much of the Australian mainland, that will had never been exercised prior to the passage of the Racial Discrimination Act, which requires state parliaments to treat claimants of all races equally. The land had never been developed nor granted to other persons. What was previously described as 'vacant crown land' may still be native title land.

The High Court developed the general principles of native title in order to resolve a dispute between Torres Strait Islanders and the Queensland Government. The case related to three small islands in the Torres Strait. On two islands, the government had previously granted leases for a sardine factory. The

lease required the leaseholder to permit the natives continued access to their gardens and plantations. The court was not required to determine the validity or effect of the leases. But, in passing, three judges said the grant of the leases by government would have extinguished any native title rights. Any continued native right of access to the land would have been derived from the terms of the lease. Two other judges said the leases would have no effect on native title.

On June 11, for the first time, the court will be required to consider the co-existence of native title on pastoral leases.

The majority judgment in *Mabo* conceded that there were limits to the extent judges could go in shaping the common law, especially when it affects rights granted to persons by government. The legal theory is that native title is a very fragile form of title at common law. It can be extinguished without consent, consultation or compensation. It can be extinguished

only by the crown, not by other persons. But the downside of that proposition for Aborigines is that native title is extinguished on a crown grant at the moment the crown gives another person the power to exclude Aborigines and not later when the person with the grant actually does something like enclosing the land or building a residence, thereby excluding the native title holders.

In the final stages of the negotiations for the Native Title Act in 1993, the Aborigines, pastoralists and government did a deal. It was midnight and the miners were at home in bed. After the High Court's decision, miners and pastoralists were worried about

*The antics of Wilson Tuckey and his National Party colleagues have suited Mr Howard, who can turn to Aborigines looking reasonable as he then shifts from the pastoral lease sideshow to the main game: he wants to take away the Aboriginal right to negotiate at the exploration stage, giving Aborigines nothing in return. This time around, the Aborigines, rather than the miners, will be the only losers. It's called a change of government.*

the security of their titles and the delays that might be involved in new development projects on native title land. All parties negotiated on the assumption that native title was extinguished on pastoral leases. The Aborigines won three concessions. The Native Title Act would not itself guarantee the extinguishment of native title on pastoral leases. The presumption would merely be stated in the preamble. The matter would be left to the court. Meanwhile Aborigines would trade on the uncertainty. A land acquisition fund would be set up for the purchase of pastoral leases on the open market. The legislation would permit a revival of native title on pastoral leases once purchased.

The pastoralists won their concession. They would be able to continue their pastoral operations and renew their leases without having to negotiate with Aborigines. But the miners were left in the dark. Until the law was certain, they did not know if they would have to negotiate with local Aborigines before getting access to white pastoral properties. Lawyers for the Keating government in later litigation submitted that native title was extinguished on pastoral leases.

If *Mabo* as interpreted, applied and developed by the newly constituted High Court extinguishes native title on all pastoral leases, that is the end of the matter. Pastoralists and miners need deal only with government when changing the use of pastoral leases. And so it has been assumed by all key negotiators since 1993. If native title were held to exist on at least the pastoral leases reserving continued Aboriginal access rights, no

Commonwealth Government would have the constitutional power to take away those rights except on payment of compensation. No state government could take away those rights unless the Commonwealth Parliament first amended the Racial Discrimination Act and the Native Title Act and guaranteed payment of just compensation to the Aborigines by the state. Mr Howard is right to await a High Court determination which in all probability will show that the miners and pastoralists never had anything to worry about. If Parliament were to act before the High Court, the residual doubts would simply be transferred from the pastoralists and miners back to government which would have to assess compensation for a right which may not have existed in the first place.

Of course, the antics of Wilson Tuckey and his National Party colleagues have suited Mr Howard, who can turn to Aborigines looking reasonable as he then shifts from the pastoral lease sideshow to the main game: he wants to take away the Aboriginal right to negotiate at the exploration stage, giving Aborigines nothing in return.

This time around, the Aborigines, rather than the miners, will be the only losers. It's called a change of government. How fickle is the Australian just and proper settlement. ■

**Frank Brennan** SJ is at Uniya, the Jesuit Social Justice Centre. His latest book is *One Land, One Nation*, University of Queensland Press, 1995.

COMMENT: 3

MICHAEL MCGIRR

## Aftermath

TEN DAYS AFTER THE MASSACRE at Port Arthur I was in Ballarat. I was visiting a factory and was told proudly that the company has a policy of locating in regional areas because of the proven loyalty of those communities. On the way home, I stopped for a quiet moment in the cathedral. The building was dark, cold and empty. I idly picked up something on the seat beside me and found that I had put my hand on the funeral booklet for Mary and Mervyn Howard, two of the victims at Port Arthur. They had been buried from a crowded cathedral earlier in the week. I had never met them. Never seen a photo until I looked at the pictures in the booklet. But sitting in that empty cavern I powerfully felt their absence.

At different points, the coverage of Port Arthur reached saturation. Even so, there were moments of lucidity. On the Sunday night, when the gunman was still at large, Richard Flanagan, a Tasmanian, responded by lamenting an understanding of society 'as only an aggregate of consuming individuals.' Later in the week, Andrew Bolt wrote in Melbourne's *Herald-Sun* that 'we not only mourn the dead, we fear the living. In doing that we risk contributing to the next such disaster.' Both Bolt and Flanagan are asking what a tragedy like this says about the state of Australian community.

Ironically, the core values of our community may well be clarified and affirmed as a result of what happened at Port Arthur. The ABC's *7.30 Report* ran an interview with a nurse—Lynne—who happened to witness the tragedy. Lynne realised what was happening sooner than most and took cover behind a stone parapet. She also knew she was one of the few people likely to be able to help, so, leaving her camera and handbag with her sister, she moved out from her place of sanctuary. Whatever unaccountable evil was stirring in the gunman, it was matched by the good that was stirred in response.

This is surely cold comfort to the Howards and to many others who mourn. Except that we have seen an entire nation, a community, on its knees. We have seen our leaders at prayer. Now they are attempting a legislative response.

As the community returns to its normal clutter of competing interests, as John Howard wades into industrial reform, trimming the economy, shedding jobs from the public service, deporting asylum seekers and rethinking land rights, new gun laws may be at least one thing to remind us of the resilience of an Australian community. ■

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





JACK WATERFORD

# In the holding paddock

**J**OHN HEWSON, OF COURSE, had *Fight-back!*. It was even better documented than the famous Program of Gough Whitlam—an answer for everything and a timetable for achieving it. 'We spent so much time working out what we were going to do once we got into government that we forgot that we had to get into government first', a disillusioned Hewson fan once remarked.

This had a spooky effect on the Howard team. Everyone was a little bit self-conscious about planning a transition. Even the policies—carefully sculptured to offend no one—were deliberately vague and fuzzy about the edges. Labor could scream there was a secret agenda—probably *Fight-back!* itself; Howard could suavely promise that he meant no such thing. Bar a few specific commitments—in industrial relations, and the Telstra-environment nexus—there would be hardly any changes at all. Certainly nothing that would hurt.

Now no-one could pretend that Howard's massive victory did not give his government a mandate to do something more than simply preside over the economy and tidy up industrial relations. But he must also be highly thankful that he discovered the great 'black hole'—a well-known repository for spent atoms and items of unspeakable denseness—to give everyone the impression of a post-electoral flurry of purposeful activity. The real question is whether he has much of an agenda at all. And, if he has, whether he has yet much of a program for achieving it.

The black hole—whether a product of Labor overspending or changing economic activity—certainly helped galvanise the public service. But in a service which has been the subject of pretty tight expenditure review for several decades, there are in any event few easy options without highly conscious changes to policies and programs—in the goods and services which government actually delivers to the citizens. Once the impression gets abroad that one might actually be sacked, however, ideas come more readily, even if the political costs in reduced services are clear enough.

In some respects it started off well. Only a handful of ministers—such as Alexander Downer, Peter Reith, Richard Alston and Peter Costello—were given responsibilities they had previously shadowed in opposition. Although the department of Finance was relatively early in setting a broad agenda of cuts, it was not, initially, being very prescriptive about how they might be achieved. Rather there were statements of the kind: 'Your department has to cut \$1.5 million (Education Employment and Training, and Social Security) or \$1 billion (Health) and let us know how you mean to do it.'

For several months, however, most public servants have been in a blind panic and the Canberra economy has been in free-fall. The housing market, already desultory, has almost vanished for want of buyers. Public servants, unsure of where

they would be tomorrow (a current Canberra definition of an optimist is a public servant who irons five shirts on Sunday night) have battened down in discretionary spending. Even their departments, desperate to save on running costs, are not ordering routine supplies. Morale in many departments is at rock bottom. Private sector service industries, particularly in law, accounting, computers and communications, are shedding staff because of the collapse in demand.

Yet Canberra will survive. It stands to lose about one in four of the jobs which must, it is said, be shed—perhaps 3000 by the end of the epidemic. But the Canberra economy is not as

hooked on growth as it was during the last great exodus in 1976—when, on top of about the same cuts in numbers, about 6000 people in the building industry lost jobs as well. Today the build-

ing industry is only about 2000 strong, and demand should sop up the housing supply by about Christmas. The biggest problem is uncertainty. By August, when the scope of the changes becomes clear, most Canberra public servants will breathe a sigh of relief and be out with the credit cards again.

**T**HE BIG IMPACT OF THE CUTS will be in regional towns or cities which will suddenly lose, say, 30 families when a CES office closes, plus the services which were provided and the value of the children in the local schools and the wages cheques at the supermarket counter. Universities will be hard hit—some smaller ones, such as the Catholic University in NSW, will not survive the cuts at all.

To what purpose is not yet clear. Even senior and generally sensible public servants believe darkly that there is a secret agenda involved. I have my doubts. The zeal for cost-cutting, and natural tendency to silliness by some of the parvenus such as Amanda Vanstone, betrays more an obsession with the bottom line than a desire to have their departments or programs go anywhere in particular. Certainly if they have agendas, they are not articulating them.

Just where John Howard wants the public administration and Australia to be is not at all clear. He seized the moment well with Port Arthur and deserves some credit for stitching up the deals before the moment had passed. And since then, he has flicked, if with some effort, a number of revolts from his own backbench, not least from the northern and western rumps who tend to twitch reflexively when Aborigines or guns are mentioned.

But the real sport will come from hitting sixes off the Opposition. Whether Labor will disappear into the black hole is not so clear—particularly if Howard's double dissolution strategy involves a horror budget in August. ■

**Jack Waterford** is the editor of the *Canberra Times*.

*A current Canberra definition of an optimist  
is a public servant who irons five shirts  
on Sunday night*



## Wrong way, go back

From Elizabeth Bleby

An article entitled 'Push to build more jails' (*Adelaide Advertiser*, 16 March 1996) made worrying reading, but has apparently raised little comment. It said, in part: 'The number of prisoners in metropolitan jails could double by the year 2000 and, on present calculations, the State's prison population overall is expected to more than double by 2010.'

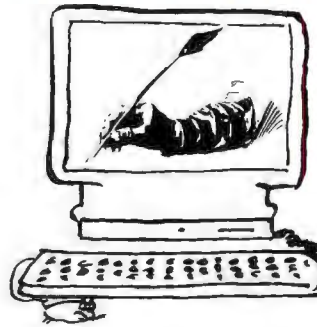
It went on to say that the government is negotiating for the construction of another jail, and that this 'would probably...be privately built and run.'

There is nothing in the article to say what information is behind the projected figures. This in itself is a worry, together with the apparent complacent acceptance that this will be so. The South Australian Government is cutting welfare services. The well-respected Para Districts Counseling Service has already closed. And



Female prisoners in Brixton, 1862. From *The Oxford History of Prisons* (see Megan Gressor's review p. 38).

*Eureka Street* welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters may be edited. Letters must be signed, and should include a contact phone number and the writer's name and address. If submitting by e-mail, a contact phone number must be included. Address: [eureka@werple.net.au](mailto:eureka@werple.net.au)



funds to the successful Keeping Families Together program are being drastically reduced at the end of this financial year.

What sort of reasoning encourages the social and economic costs of crime and punishment? It is much more cost-effective to resource good welfare services than to build more jails, and it shows far more respect for human worth. This seems not to be a factor in our government's reasoning. What does seem to attract it is the prospect of profit-driven correctional institutions. Whose profit? Apart from the morality of making a profit out of any social wrongs, the profit goes to the overseas companies who are winning the tenders for private prisons.

There do not seem to be any strong voices of protest. Must we just accept the apparent prevailing reasoning that if it makes money it has to be good? Even jails?

Elizabeth Bleby  
Millswood, SA

## A truth universally acknowledged

From Ray Cassin

The compiler of 'Product of the Month' (*Eureka Street*, May 1996, p10) opines that 'they can't be making legionnaires the way they used to.' Indeed they can't, if the object pictured is meant to be a Foreign Legion képi. The shape is right, I grant you, but the colour is not. The official headgear of the immortal (I wish I could say

invincible) legion is a white képi.

Having thus declared my P.C. Wren-inspired affection and admiration for the nation that all decent Australians are supposed to loathe, I would also like to respond to a letter and a critical essay in the May edition that, in different ways, reflect on nationalism, imperialism and their artistic effluvia.

John Gartlan (Letters, p8) takes Juliette Hughes to task for lamenting that *Sense and Sensibility* (Emma Thompson's screenplay) departs from the plot of *Sense and Sensibility* (Jane Austen's novel). Hughes' complaint, Gartlan says, 'is as shallow as condemning one of Shakespeare's historical plays because Shakespeare gets his history wrong.'

Why should we suppose it shallow to condemn Shakespeare's history plays on such grounds? In the same edition of *Eureka Street*, John Carmody (Opera, pp42-44) reviles the racist spirit of Wagner's operas while conceding that the composer wrote 'gloriously inspirational music'; similarly, it is possible to judge that Shakespeare put gloriously inspirational verse at the service of low propaganda, and that the quality of the verse does not redeem the propaganda. The hero of his second tetralogy, Henry V of England, was in fact a priggish, sanctimonious, rapacious, imperialist thug.

Would we find a play or film praising, say, Hitler or Pol Pot, less repellent if it were devised by a writer of genius? On the contrary, I suspect we would judge it even more harshly. Consider Leni Riefenstahl's vile *Triumph of the Will*: the fact that Riefenstahl is such a good filmmaker is part of what makes it stomach-turning. And so it should be with *Henry V*, for with it Shakespeare did for the Lancastrian-Tudor ascendancy what Riefenstahl did for the Nazis with *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia*.

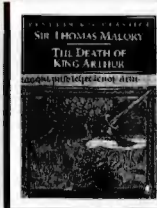
Whatever the merits of Thompson's adaptation of Austen's novel, there is nothing shallow about making an ethical evaluation of a work of art. Jane Austen, whose art consisted precisely in a subtle tracing of the lineaments of the ethical life, understood that very well.

Ray Cassin

Moonee Ponds, VIC

*Editor's note: The képi came from a catalogue of military toys and memorabilia we received as a byproduct of an inadvertent subscription to Readers' Digest. They leaves the 'off képi.*





This month,  
courtesy of Penguin Books,  
the writer of each letter we  
publish will receive  
two of the  
Penguin 60s Classics

## Point counter-point

From R.F. Holt

When reading my March edition of *Eureka Street* I was disturbed by the quality of Paul Collins' article, 'Coming Clean'. Paul Collins' argument, in essence, is as follows:

(1) Recently, sexual crimes by Catholic priests and brothers against children and adults have been prominently reported in the media.

(2) The Church as an institution has 'cosseted these child molesters' because keeping such scandals secret enhances its power.

(3) Another related power-enhancing area of sexual secrecy concerns the non-observance of celibacy by priests; an American author, Sipe, maintains that 60% of priests in the US do not lead celibate lives and the same 'is probably true of Australia'.

(4) A 'public appraisal' of priestly celibacy would conclude that celibacy should be optional but the Vatican will not allow this, nor will it allow theologians to express support for optionality.

(5) Therefore, the institutional Church is 'dysfunctional', it is racked by the disease of 'narcissistic clericalism' and rotten to the core, serving the needs of neither the laity nor the religious; this 'dysfunctionality' is like the 'dysfunctional family' which is artificially held together through false loyalty to an abusive, bullying father.

(6) In fact, the present Pope is this abusive father personified; he is trying to impose his personal theological agenda, he lacks 'connection with the mainstream of the Catholic tradition of theology and ministry' and he is vindictive towards some theologians, and

others who disagree with him.

(7) Celibacy and the Magisterium are not 'genuine and characteristically Christian'.

(8) The solution to this whole, general problem is to be found in:

(a) the pressure currently exerted by many ex-priests;

(b) many of the laity and clergy *hanging in there*;

(c) us 'rediscovering the real nature of priestly and ministerial leadership'.

Let us now examine these propositions, one by one.

P1 is a truism, but the author overlooks the fact that the same crimes have been committed, and are being reported, by married clergy from other denominations and religions.

P2, in the absence of evidence, can easily allow alternative interpretations to do, e.g., with complex Christian beliefs about judgement, charity, the interests of the victims, etc., (The 'institution' has, of course recently conceded that its strategy was wrong in the past, but this is not the same as conceding conspiratorial motives).

P3 is a charge of such gravity that, clearly, the reliability of Sipe's estimate needs to be questioned, as does the author's simple extrapolation to Australia. Also, it strikes one as odd — even devious — that such a huge, destructive charge is only made as a kind of aside, as if it were not worth commenting on, as though its only significance were the fact that it reinforces the notion of 'secrecy'.

P4 makes a bald assertion that, in the absence of any evidence, might or might not be the case. Worse, it assumes that some sort of public debate (hosted, by any chance, by Phillip Adams??) is the proper mechanism for changing a tradition that is sixteen centuries old. Surely, one could expect from the author far less vague suggestions about how

such a momentous issue could appropriately be raised and put on the agenda. (Cf. the English-Welsh National Conference of Priests' recent establishment of a committee to study the issue of celibacy from all angles, as reported in *The Tablet*, 16.9.95).

P5 is so exaggerated and vague that it does not deserve comment, except to say that if the Church does not serve the needs of either the laity or the clergy, then why, it must reasonably be asked, are so many of their lives so influenced by it?

When one considers the extensive achievements of the present Pope, P6 is clearly mean-spirited and unjust — far more vindictive itself than John Paul's alleged treatment of some theologians.

P7 is clearly an historically false statement.

P8(a) is an assertion that many would contest. Indeed, rather than refuting celibacy such ex-priests are interpreted by many as having acted in the most appropriate manner when they found they could not live up to their vows. 8(b) is too vague to comment on and (c) naively assumes that 'real' is meaningful.

Paul Collins, finally, makes much of the virtues of the free media; what a pity that in both our everyday experience of the media and also in his article so little responsibility accompanies that freedom.

R.F. Holt  
Ashmore, Queensland

*Paul Collins replies:*

The *reductio ad absurdum* is an argumentative device well known to priests trained in the very useful scholastic logic common in pre-Vatican II seminaries. R.F. Holt has either not heard of the *reductio*, or is deliberately engaging in it. He turns *Coming Clean* into a series of simplistic and incomplete statements which he then conveniently proceeds to demolish.

Since he has so inaccurately summarised the article I have no intention of arguing the specific issues raised in his letter. Rather I would prefer to make some substantiating comments on *Coming Clean*.

Firstly, the history of celibacy: the assertion of John Barich (Letter, *Eureka Street* May 1996), drawing on Roman Chiolj's book *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, that celibacy has a doctrinal base that can be traced back to the apostles, would not be accepted by any informed historian of the period.

## Counselling

If you or someone you know could benefit from professional counselling, please phone Martin Prescott, BSW, MSW, MAASW, clinical member of the Association of Catholic Psychotherapists. Individuals, couples and families catered for:

Bentleigh (03) 9557 2595



# Talking points

**From a speech, *Saint Catherine And The Emperor Penguins*, by Toby O'Connor, National Director, Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission:**

The Church has both the right and the duty to participate in the public forum on issues of social importance. The Australian Catholic Bishops are aware of current debate about the right of churches to enter the public arena on social policy issues. Cardinal Clancy addressed this matter in his presidential address to the recent meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops thus:

The Church does not have a political program, but that does not mean that her mission will never touch the political process; and it does not mean that Christians should put aside their faith when they become politically involved. The making of public policy is not some abstract game, but something that affects actual human lives. Christians in a democracy do not merely have a right to participate in that process, they have a duty to do so. Their faith and what it tells them about justice and human rights, about compassion, truth and love, can and should inform their political activity. That does not mean that they will have all the answers, but it ensures that some good questions will be asked.

**Toby O'Connor again:...**

The human dignity of our indigenous people is currently under threat. Dubious accusations currently levelled by Canberra and fuelled by certain elements of media calling into question the financial regulation of some Aboriginal welfare and rights organisations have failed to acknowledge the continuing plight of indigenous peoples. They have ridden rough shod over continuing inadequacies in access to basic human services, health and education.

## **St Peter's Anglican Church, Eastern Hill,**

Melbourne, celebrates its sesquicentenary in 1996. On 18 June, at 7.30pm, Rowan Ireland, John Carroll and Trevor Hogan will talk about past, present and future directions of Christian communities.  
Enquiries: (03) 9662 2170, (03) 9662 2391

## **Inaugural Melbourne International Choral Festival**

From 27 July to 3 August, 1996, the City of Melbourne will host 250 choristers from six international choirs in a new choral festival. Over 13,000 people are expected to attend the 21 events of the festival, which is believed to be the only one of its kind serving the southern hemisphere.

You are warmly invited to attend public concerts of international choirs, a concert of all-Australian choral music, and a Gala performance at the Melbourne Town Hall.

### **International Guest Choors**

Cantores Novae—Sheffield, England  
Columbia Valley Festival Choir—Oregon, USA  
Coro Universitario Sant Yago—Valencia, Spain  
Dawn Children's Choir—Moscow, Russia,  
Elektra Women's Choir—Vancouver, Canada  
Israel Kibbutz Choir—Israel

For information please write to:  
MICF, PO Box 456, Richmond VIC 3121

The history of clerical celibacy is well established. In the New Testament it was seen by Saint Paul basically as a gift given to a few, including himself, but he stresses that 'about remaining celibate I have no directions from the Lord' (I Corinthians 7:25). There were calls for compulsory celibacy for the clergy from local (mainly Western) synods from the fourth century onward. The motivation for these calls was founded on fears of the notion of ritual impurity (the fear that a priest may have had intercourse with his menstruating wife before celebrating the eucharist), and in the latter part of the first millenium of the danger of alienating church property by passing it on from priest father to priest son. While ritual impurity is found in the Hebrew Scriptures, it is basically a pagan notion based on the fear of diabolical pollution of the menses.

However, celibacy was not universally imposed on the Western church until Pope Gregory VII (1073-1084). It was part of a reform aimed at breaking the power of local feudal lords over the church and its property. It was strongly resisted at the time by the clergy (especially in Germany) and was only eventually enforced by the imposition of the most stringent penalties. In the High Middle Ages it was not seen as part of priestly spirituality, but was an element in the maintenance of ritual purity. For centuries, like sobriety in Denmark, it was more honoured in the breach than in the observance!

My argument is—and it is a view shared by many contemporary Catholics—that compulsory celibacy has far outlived its usefulness for ministry. Certainly there will always be some celibates, but only as a gift given to a few for the sake of the church. It certainly should not be imposed on all priests.

Secondly, as I said clearly in *Coming Clean*, I was critical of A.W. Richard Sipe's approach to celibacy. His work lacks an historical context and shows little sense of the actual situation in which priests have found themselves since Vatican II ended in 1965. But it would certainly be safe to say that he knows a lot more about the personal lives of Catholic clergy than my interlocutors. He has spent 35 years in an extensive clinical study of the Catholic priesthood. Therefore, I would take his view on the actual practice of compulsory celibacy as reasonably informed and accurate. He himself claims that his figures can be

extrapolated to other developed countries—like Australia.

Thirdly, I have spent a lot of time working on the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, and have two books on the theology and history of the papacy being published over the next 12 months. In the light of that work I would argue strongly that he is an extraordinarily powerful pope and that his clearly articulated agenda has stymied the renewal of the church as it struggles to face the key ethical, theological and spiritual issues that arise from our culture and the process of the contemporary ministry.

## Not bad boys

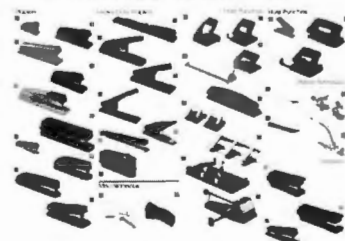
*From G. Kearney*

I am writing in response to Paul Rodan's letter (*Eureka Street*, May 1996). The main criticism of the Keating Labor government appears to be its adherence to so-called economic rationalism. My feelings are that both the Hawke and Keating Labor Governments made decisions that have been of great benefit to Australia and its citizens. I appreciate of course that Australia's unemployment rate is too high and poverty levels are also too high.

Any Labor government can be criticised for not adhering to Labor ideals. I think a government needs to cope with the economy as it finds it. The days of nationalising banks and other institutions are hopefully over. We need a healthy private sector to support an efficient welfare system. In conclusion, political parties need to spend time in opposition to regroup and realise that the will of the people via the ballot box is supreme.

**Graham Kearney**  
Chambers Flat, Qld

### **Product(s) of the Month**



Less is more?: from Officeworks, 12 varieties of hole punch, 27 types of stapler and 5 brands of staple remover. *Eureka Street* has opted for the *Reflex Matador*.





# Right on target

**O**BSERVERS OF MEDIA POLICY are used to pre-emptive strikes. Less common are pre-emptive defences. One of those seems necessary right now if we are to maintain the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in public ownership.

In this multi-channel era, covetous eyes are being cast over its audience, program library, facilities and goodwill. Unloved by politicians because they fund it but usually cannot control it, the ABC must be considered a prime candidate for full or partial privatisation.

My argument for the ABC is based on the narrow ground that public broadcasters are critical to the health of journalism. I hope others will develop other aspects of the case.

As media evolved, from the press through to cyberspace, they have always been vessels for journalism, but each medium affected its journalism differently. Reading, listening and watching are different experiences. Methods and costs of entry into media differ, as do the funding bases of each medium. One consequence has been the struggle of journalism to be independent: of owners, of advertisers, and of governments.

But what is that independence for?

It is to assist the practice of journalism conceived as something bigger than propaganda, entertainment and advertising. Of course all three are inevitable, but they are not sufficient.

The 'something bigger' is journalism as:

A sentry who watches and warns; a guide who searches, maps and explains; a scribe who listens and records; a witness with courage to speak; a host to debates amongst others; an advocate for the weak; a keeper of the collective memory.

I suppose it sounds idealistic or quaint or old-fashioned. I don't apologise. Especially in Victoria, we live in a time when some of the formerly settled elements of the Australian brand of democracy are being shaken. In Lillian Hellman's language, it is a 'scoundrel time'.

These are times for journalism to state its role with confidence, and then to try to fulfil it. Let it consciously differentiate itself from those who merely barrack, coo and amuse.

I do not believe this more spacious conception of journalism can be delivered by market alone. The national broadcaster must be maintained in public ownership as a separate vessel for the carriage of journalism. Not because the ABC is necessarily better than commercial media, but because it is *different*.

Not because this will *guarantee* that my touching conception of journalism will be realised. But because it will



increase the chances that it will be approached. And it will pull against the opposite trend that currently prevails.

Pre-emptive defenders must anticipate the cry that the onus is on the ABC to show why, in the era of selling assets and shrinking government, it should not be privatised and sent away to seek and serve niche markets.

Defenders should accept the challenge, because the climate is vastly different from earlier times. Remember when the then Communications Minister, Gareth Evans, tried to initiate debate about the future of the ABC in 1988? Yes, I'm sure the motives were mixed, but in hindsight that was an opportunity, not just a threat. Then, people seemed to rest their case that we should keep the

ABC on the grounds that it was there. In this current period of media flux, nothing is self-evident.

So, some arguments for maintaining the public broadcaster in health:

1. Scarcity, while ending, has not ended yet. The concentration of ownership and control of the media, which inhibits the journalism I envisage, remains. The introduction of pay TV has not ameliorated it and in some respects has made it worse. We cannot expect scarcity to turn to plenty, and to lower the barriers to entry, for some time.

2. New commercial entrants are unlikely to have a paying audience or an advertising base sufficient to support the kind of journalism I have outlined.

3. The non-commercial culture of the ABC by itself favours the chances of better, or at least different, journalism. Being commercial does not inevitably prevent the best journalism, but it can inhibit it. The combination of both commercial and non-commercial media cultures improves the chances of a better net result.

4. The large size of a media vessel like the ABC can help its journalism because: it can face down threats of costly litigation, or withstand it when it ensues; its disclosures go wider, so its impact does too; its separate institutional identity makes it less vulnerable to government pressure, if the ABC's leadership is deft.

5. The ABC is free and universal, contributing to equity at a time when the gap is growing between those with access to the raw material of the Information Age (and of democratic life) and those without.

6. The cultural role of the ABC is unique.

7. The ABC is a public institution that still works, while others, including parliaments, falter or metamorphose into private ones. ■

**Paul Chadwick** is the Victorian coordinator of the Communications Law Centre.



## This change may be no holiday

**E**CONOMIC POLICY MAKERS can rarely resist a catchy metaphor. Paul Keating liked to see the economy as a machine, constantly boasting about his unrivalled skill in 'pulling the levers'. With a little tinkering to the engine, he promised to 'lift the speed limits' so we could all enjoy a faster ride.

Occasionally, he would adopt a less mechanistic metaphor, boasting about his surgical prowess in 'unclogging the arteries'. In every case, however, the goal was the same—to remove obstacles to growth.

The Howard Government has the same goal. It also employs the same metaphor as Keating, with Peter Costello announcing within a couple of days of taking over as Treasurer that he too wants to 'lift the speed limits' on the economy. The only difference is that he and Howard share a fresh enthusiasm for implementing the reform agenda which has attracted bi-partisan support for well over a decade.

Howard admires the initial fervour with which Keating embraced the libertarian agenda of deregulation, privatisation, user pays and a smaller public sector. His only complaint is that Keating slacked off once he moved from the Treasury to the Prime Ministership. He is determined to avoid this mistake. His ministers have certainly wasted no time in selling the benefits of accelerated change, even if it might occasionally clash with the campaign promise to

SADLY, WE'VE HAD TO  
DOWNSIZE OUR LABOUR FORCE  
BECAUSE OF THE NEED TO CREATE  
A MORE EFFICIENT ORGANISATION  
THAT'S RESPONSIVE TO THE  
TECHNOLOGICALLY SOPHISTICATED  
PRODUCTION ENVIRONMENT  
OF THE NINETEEN  
NINETIES!

YEAH, WE SAID  
THE SAME WHEN  
WE MOVED SHOP  
TO HANOI TOO!

MOORE



restore family stability as the centrepiece of Australian society. As the Employment Minister, Amanda Vanstone, keeps assuring those who are sacked in the name of 'structural reform', they should rejoice at the opportunity to get a 'real job'.

Structural reform, we are constantly told, requires everybody to 'bench mark' themselves against 'best practice'. Fortunately, it is possible to bench mark the bench markers when it comes to economic policy.

The objective of the bi-partisan approach to economic policy is to free up the economy so it can grow at a faster rate before it hits the speed limits by inflationary pressures and the current account deficit. Once the speed limits are lifted, faster growth should allow serious inroads to be made into unemployment.

So how are these performance indicators looking? To date, the answer is not too flash.

The trend for unemployment has been up, not down. After averaging well under two per cent for more than a quarter of the century after World War II, the unemployment rate rose under the Whitlam Government and has continued to climb ever since. The average rate under the Fraser Government was 6.6 per cent. During Hawke and Keating's stewardship, it rose to 8.7 per cent and currently stands at 8.9 per cent. If the speed limits have been lifted, the unemployed are yet to notice.

On Channel Seven's *Face to Face* program immediately after the election, Vanstone said the Coalition's goal was to restore full employment, which she defined as an outcome in which anyone who wanted a job could get one. It's not a definition Vanstone is likely to repeat during the life of the Howard Government. Instead, she now refuses to say when she expects unemployment to decline, let alone when the full employment goal is likely to be reached.

Vanstone's new-found caution is understandable. If the Treasury's projections of 3.25 per cent economic growth for each of the next three years are correct, there is little scope for unemployment to fall. Admittedly, the projections do not incorporate the gains supposed to flow from the renewed focus on micro-economic reform under Howard.

The most significant reform is designed to free up the labour market so that it can create more jobs rather than merely facilitate further 'downsizing'. Slashing government spending is also supposed to help by increasing business confidence and national savings regardless of any negative impact on productivity from cuts to education and infrastructure.

The most likely reason for growth to pick up in the next couple of years, however, is that the rest of the world will grow more quickly. But we may never get the chance to test whether the speed limits have really been lifted because the Reserve Bank will probably apply the brakes before the re-engineered economy reaches its productive capacity.

The financial markets, having urged the Bank to jack up interest rates, will then parade the resulting increase as compelling proof that the Howard Government needs to accelerate the pace of micro-economic reform in order to lift the speed limits on the Australian economy. Whatever else changes, metaphor will survive as an economic tool. ■

Brian Toohey is a freelance journalist and broadcaster.



THE NATION  
JON GREENAWAY

# Industrial revolution

**M**AY 1969: the secretary of the Victorian Tramways Union, Clarrie O'Shea, was gaoled for contempt. He had refused to produce the union's books before the Industrial Court. Justice Kerr (later to become Governor-General) said that he had no alternative but to commit O'Shea to prison under powers granted when the Arbitration Court was split 13 years earlier. These permitted the Industrial Court to gaoil or to fine union officials and members for taking action against its decisions or for refusing to comply with its orders.

Over the 6 days O'Shea was in prison, hundreds of thousands of workers were called out on stop-work meetings supported by ACTU branches and Trades and Labor Councils across the country. He was released when a mysterious lottery winner paid his and the union's fines.

The mass protest was driven by the deep resentment of those who had been stung by the court before. Some \$280,000 worth of fines had been imposed on 29 different unions since 1956. When claiming that the action would make the government think again

about its adherence to the powers, Laurie Carmichael (then Victorian State Secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union) said that the last six days 'should inspire us [the union movement] that we can beat and overcome anything that crops up in the future.'

Twenty-seven years and two days after Clarrie O'Shea walked out of Pentridge, the Workplace Relations Bill was introduced into Federal Parliament, a document—weighing in at over 200 pages—that has been described by industrial lawyers and even the government's hand-picked advisers as overly complex and legalistic. It brings with it the possibility that unions and officials may again be subject to pecuniary disadvantage, as the act would repeal the exemptions from civil liability for unlawful industrial action as a means of preventing secondary boycotts.

However, more significantly, the legislation represents a shift away from collective bargaining to individual contracts, and a significant retraction of national arbitration. Collective bargaining and arbitration have been cornerstones of Australian industrial relations in the 20th century. Unsurprisingly, it

*Photographs  
pp13 & 15:  
by Andrew Stark*

*This system is predicated on notions of trust. Trust on the part of the government in the ability of employer and employee to come to agreements without the intervention of a union. Trust on the part of the employees that the boss will do the right thing by them.*

is on these two issues that the legislation is being most fiercely contested. Already it appears that unions will dig in for what could become a long fight, particularly for the right to represent those in the so-called greenfield sites who have never had union membership, and which many see as crucial to the union movement's survival. But before the legislation can be passed, the government must negotiate its passage through the Senate. The Democrats present the main obstacle (and should continue to do so, given that the coalition are unlikely to have the vote of Tasmanian Green Dr Bob Brown when he comes into the Senate next month), with Senator Cheryl Kernot protesting loudest over the reduced role the Act allows for the Industrial Relations Commission.

Indication enough of what is at stake in this dispute is the zealous language employed by those party to it, each desperate to proselytise public opinion. The Government justifies the changes with the libertarian notions of the right of the worker to negotiate his or her own wages and conditions, and the principle of freedom of association. Unions argue that the reforms represent the dismantling of a system which has existed since the 1907 *Harvester* judgment. The Democrats, true to their credo, believe that Australian industrial relations cannot operate fairly without an independent umpire. But at the heart of the dispute between unions and the government is the question of what represents the most

government—and particularly Prime Minister Howard—has been at pains to stress that no worker would be any worse off in the new régime.

Industrial Relations Minister, Peter Reith reiterated that these reforms were not about declaring war on the union movement, but about more efficient and versatile workplace relations. If unions are to be disadvantaged, Reith argues, it is because their role in the old industrial relations system has obstructed greater efficiency and versatility.

'You had everybody in the union, you had preference clauses and compulsory unionism, where employer organisations had responsibility for certain sectors of the economy,' Reith observes. 'It was all mapped out and there was a place for everything and everything in its place.'

'But that whole idea has broken down with the external pressures on the Australian economy and the need to be more efficient.'

**I**N PLACE OF NEGOTIATED FEDERAL awards bargained for by the relevant unions and employer groups and vetted by the Industrial Relations Commission, there will be individual Australian Workplace Agreements negotiated between employers and employees without input from a union or reference to the IRC. Unions will only be able to enter into negotiations where they have been invited by the workers *and* the employer to help strike a certified agreement. With certain specified exceptions, the IRC will only have power to arbitrate in relation to 18 core award conditions. The legislation will allow individual agreements to supersede federal awards through the use of the corporations power.

This system is predicated on notions of trust. Trust on the part of the government in the ability of employer and employee to come to equitable agreements without intervention from a union. Trust on the part of the employees that the boss will do the right thing by them. Trust that the contracts that workers negotiated with CRA at Weipa can be duplicated across the country. Peter Reith believes that such faith is well placed, particularly in the light of the number of workers who are disillusioned with their union—evidenced by the increased vote of rank and file unionists for the Coalition in March.

'Unions are service providers, and they should stand or fall on whether or not they do a good job for their members. I think we'd have better unions if they had to be more responsible and accountable to their members,' Reith argues.

'The rank and file want their unions to be worried about the members, rather than the union bosses being worried about getting themselves a seat in Parliament for the Labor Party.'

Whether Peter Reith is right about self-serving political aspirations of the union leadership, the



equitable and relevant method of industrial negotiation: collective bargaining or individual contracts.

The Coalition argues that the Workplace Relations Bill is delivering on their pre-election policy promise of industrial relations reform, for which they claim a mandate. They have vowed that deregulating the labour market will provide much-needed flexibility of employment, as well as freedom of association for Australian workers by removing the last vestiges of compulsory unionism. At the same time the



proportion of workers who belong to a union has in the last decade seen its sharpest decline since the 1930s. Unionists now represent only a quarter of those employed in the private sector. Outside of the mining, manufacturing, construction and waterfront sectors, where a strong presence has been maintained, the decline leaves the union movement ill-equipped to answer Laurie Carmichael's clarion call.

In May, the NSW Labor Council released the findings of a poll conducted amongst some 1200 Australians—both union members and not—in which a variety of questions were asked to gauge their appreciation of unions. The results showed some encouraging signs: 67 per cent believed Australia would be worse off without unions, and 54 per cent of young people would rather be in a union than not. However only 43 per cent of respondents thought unions were looking after their members effectively, and, significantly blue-collar workers were more dissatisfied than white-collar workers.

The Labor Council secretary, Peter Sams, says that the intention of the poll was to shake people up so that unions would develop recruitment strategies accordingly, irrespective of what was happening in Canberra. But the prospect of the Howard Government's legislation gives added urgency.

'No matter what the legislation says, we would have had a continuing problem,' Sams suggests, 'though some have argued that the current hostile environment will make it a little easier to recruit.'

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union secretary-elect, Doug Cameron, is one of those who sees opportunity to re-energise the union movement in the change of government. While he believes that blaming the Accord and 13 years of Labor in power for the decline in membership is too simplistic, Cameron does recognise that workers may set greater store in belonging to a union under a coalition government:

'I'd rather we didn't have this legislation,' he says, 'but it does represent a challenge to workers' wages and conditions and this is where the union movement comes in.'

'It is difficult to get to those new areas of low union membership but steps are being taken to address that.'

Even if workers feel a greater need to join a union now than they did under Labor, provisions of the Workplace Relations Bill will inhibit moves to increase union membership. Right of entry will be

restricted to unions who have been invited by two or more workers on site. The expanding service and clerical sectors represent a challenge to the union movement with their extremely low rates of unionisation. Many shops and offices would be without a union member. Even if unions get around the access restrictions, they still have to be invited by the employer to the bargaining table. Add to that the removal of the 'conveniently belong' and 'preference' restrictions and it will be difficult enough for the union movement to keep hold of the members they do have, let alone expand membership.

However, amongst all the rancour in the union



movement over the Workplace Relations Bill, there is recognition that changes to the rules covering organisation could be of some benefit. The same provisions that will allow enterprise unions to emerge will also permit unions that have been amalgamated with larger unions to disamalgamate from their host. As well as acknowledging that unions were not seen to deliver better wages during the Accord era, some unionists concede that the superunions did not respond to their members' needs. Such reforms could help unions to get back

in touch. But in the meantime, the majority of Australian workers will enter into individual contracts with no thought of union representation, and only a select minority will bargain collectively.

It is this select minority that Dr Steve Dowrick, senior fellow in economics at the ANU's Research School of Social Sciences, believes will fare best under the Reith reforms. He argues that there are two main strategies to achieve wage harmony in the workplace. One is the high regulation that we had with the accord process. The other is to deregulate, push unions out of the picture, and have everyone on individual contracts along the lines of the New Zealand model. With the Howard Government moving in this direction, he argues that it will not be possible to remove unions entirely from the process of wage bargaining. As a result, Dowrick predicts a mixed industrial relations system with its winners and losers:

'By trying to move in that direction, but not managing to achieve full decentralisation and full

*'Certainly those stronger sectors can negotiate good outcomes, but they could do that in any system. What we have to do as unions is recognise that the vast bulk of people out there who can't negotiate from a position of strength have traditionally relied on the unions to do that for them.'*

**—Peter Sams,**  
Secretary of the  
New South Wales  
Labor Council.

competition in the labour market, you end up with a half-way house of a partially decentralised system.

'You've still got unions who are major players and they still have enough allegiance in the workforce for the workers to have them negotiate wage outcomes on their behalf, and those unions are not held together by the collective responsibility of the accord process. The experience of the past is that those are exactly the conditions that are ripe for inflationary wage rises.'

'There are going to be a lot of losers,' Dowrick argues.

'Groups of workers will be less well set up, less well protected in bargaining on their own, particularly when you think of part-time workers, women, immigrants, and workers in vulnerable sectors of the economy.'

Peter Sams agrees with Dowrick, despite recognising that, in some cases, individual contracts are more appropriate than collective outcomes. It is where there is an unequal bargaining position that problems will occur. He points to the US experience as an indication of the direction the new legislation would take us:

'Recent survey material indicated that unionised workers on average received 37 per cent higher pay than non-union workers and yet union membership continues to decline.

'You'd have to argue that a person would join a union if they thought they were going to get higher wages, but in fact that doesn't happen. There's a whole regulatory process in the United States which is anti collective bargaining.

'Certainly those stronger sectors can negotiate good outcomes, but they could do that in any system. What we

Howard's promise that no worker will be worse off. And to ensure this is the case, the IRC will concentrate on guaranteeing that these conditions are maintained:

'We are changing the role of the Commission, that's true,' he says, 'so that it focuses on the lowly paid, so that we have a proper and fair set of minimums for those lower in the labour market in terms of their pay.'

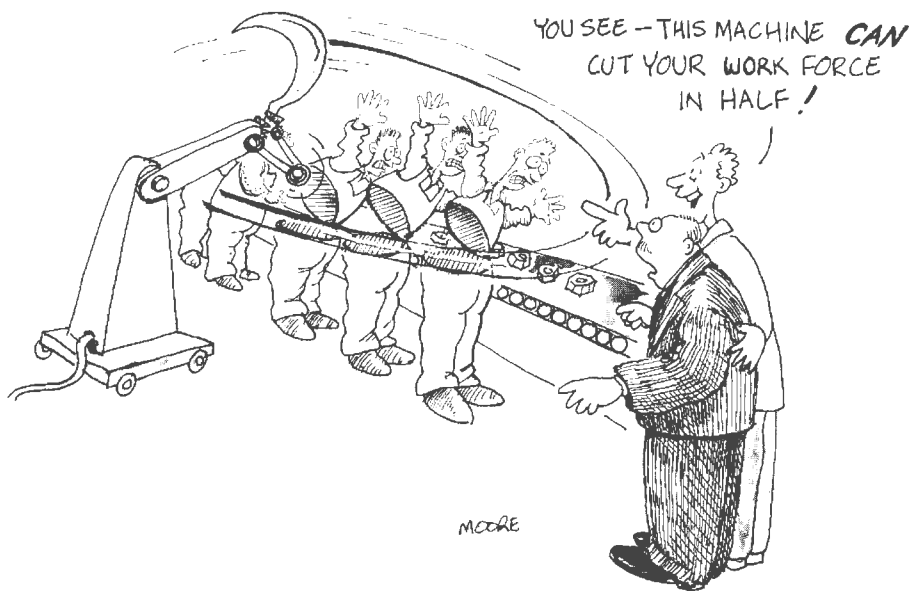
'In that sense we're strengthening it and giving it a more modern and up-to-date role for the future.'

The legislation will also establish the Office of Employment Advocate, which for administrative purposes will be placed in the Department of Industrial Relations. It will police the individual workplace agreements. The intention is that this body will wear a number of hats: it will act as an umpire, ensuring agreements comply with regulations; as an advisor to both employer and employee, and a type of union for non-unionists by assisting workers to prosecute breaches if appropriate. This, Reith assures us, will provide the environment for employers and employees to enter into contracts in good faith.

**U**P UNTIL THE INTRODUCTION of the bill, the union movement had, for the most part, been cautious in its comments. ACTU President, Jennie George, bracketed her rejection of the Government's intentions to shift industrial relations away from collective bargaining to individual contracts, by recognising the coalition's mandate to make the changes. However, when aspects of the legislation were released prior to the tabling of the Workplace Relations Bill, she came out of her corner swinging. On the Thursday before the tabling, the *Financial Review* published details of the legislation. On the following Sunday, appearing on Channel Seven's *Face to Face*, George raised the prospect of a challenge in the High Court. She was disgruntled with the prospect of junior wages for the young and restricted access to workplaces, but it was the use of the corporations power to enable the Australian Workplace Agreements plan which drew most of her ire. The individual contracts will allow state awards to over-ride the federal system. Her foreshadowing of a High Court challenge has received the support of unionists from both the right and left.

But it will be some time before the legislation has its day in court. First will have to come the bargaining in the Senate. On the day of its introduction, the Senate referred the Bill to a committee sight unseen. In the interim, there is the stand-off between unions and the government on the waterfront.

The Maritime Union of Australia was, at the time of writing, preparing for the passage of the Shipping Grants Bill—legislation which would withdraw assistance to Australian shipping. The Government also intends to end cabotage—the system that reserves coastal and trans-Tasman trade to ships registered here, and manned by locals. All this, according to the union, will result in the introduction of flag of convenience ships and an attendant deterioration in standards.



have to do as unions is recognise that the vast bulk of people out there who can't negotiate from a position of strength have traditionally relied on the unions to do that for them.'

Peter Reith doesn't agree that workers without union coverage will be disadvantaged under the new system. He argues that the establishment of 18 core conditions which relate to relevant awards—covering matters such as casual rates, annual and sick leave and equal pay for equal work without discrimination based on sex—will deliver John



The Maritime Union is positioning itself to mount an industrial campaign against these reforms. MUA's industrial officer, Tony Morison, recognises that changes to industrial relations would hamper the campaign:

'If you look at cabotage, it [the legislation] has the significant potential for emasculating our union's capacity to have an influence on safety standards around the place and maintain wages.'

Significantly, the MUA has recently agreed a strategic alliance with both the AMWU and CFMEU. It could well be that reform of the waterfront will result in secondary boycotts around the country before Parliament has passed the Workplace Relations Bill. Potentially the legislation, which would make secondary boycotts illegal, could come into operation while such disputes are in train. Tony Morison sees breaking the Maritime Union as a priority of the Howard Government:

'The coalition's real mission here is to break unions. They think they're going to do it by breaking the Maritime Union first. But we will come through here no matter what goes on.'

While the attention of the nation will be taken up by negotiations and conflicts as the stronger unions band together to defend their patch, the non-unionised masses will quietly look on and usher in the core of the Reith reforms. It is these people—clerks, shop assistants and shift workers—who will be the operative cogs of the new industrial relations system, not national institutions and large, structurally supported organisations.

It may be a quiet revolution but its ripple effects could change the Australian workplace forever. If unions want a stake in the future, they will have to find a way to recruit those who until now have had difficulty finding good cause to belong. ■

**Jon Greenaway** is assistant editor of *Eureka Street*.



## A Jane makes the grade

FEW WEEKS AGO I UPGRADED my word processing program. The manual drew attention to a wonderful new feature: Grammar Check. So, of course, I couldn't resist clicking the appropriate icon after finishing an 800-word book review. The results were not encouraging. Grammar Check told me that I was much too fond of long sentences, the passive voice, ungrammatical structures and gender-specific expressions. Gloom and despair. Then it occurred to me to find out how the following would rate.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings and views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

'My dear Mr Bennet,' said his lady to him one day, 'have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?'

Mr Bennet replied that he had not.

'But it is,' returned she, 'for Mrs Long has just been here, and she told me all about it.'

Mr Bennet made no answer.

'Do you not want to know who has taken it?' cried his wife impatiently.

'You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.'

This was invitation enough.

Grammar Check found this much more acceptable: it scored 79.5 out of 100 for 'readability', whereas my piece came in at a disappointing 52.7. Furthermore, you need to be in grades 10–12 of the US education system to understand my book review, whereas it seems that grades 6 to 8 would find little difficulty with the other writer. Nevertheless, the program suggested certain improvements, most of which could be put in place by simply clicking the mouse. Here is the emended version:

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single person in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a spouse.

People may know little about the feelings and views of such a person on his arrival in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, the surrounding families believe this to be so true that they consider him the rightful property of someone or other of their daughters.

'My dear Mr. Bennet,' said his person to him one day, 'have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?'

Mr Bennet replied that he had not.

'But it is,' returned she, 'for Mrs Long has just been here, and she told me all about it.'

Mr Bennet made no answer.

'Do you not want to know who has taken it?' cried his spouse impatiently.

'You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.'

This was invitation enough.

Who is to say that this does not represent an obvious improvement, even at the cost of a decline in 'readability' of almost four points to 75.6?

As an afterthought, I decided to try this:

This is Peter. This is Jane. This is Spot the dog. This is the garden. Peter and Jane are playing in the garden. Peter throws a ball to Spot. 'Run Spot, run,' says Jane. 'Run Spot, run,' says Peter. Spot can't find the ball. 'Find the ball, Spot,' says Jane. 'Find the ball, Spot,' says Peter. Spot finds the ball.

The result? A score of 100 for 'readability', though the program insisted that one of the sentences should be recast as 'Peter and Jane is playing in the garden'. ■

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# Burmese bind



*Burma, December 1995. Forced labour is used in the construction of roads, buildings and airfields.*

*Photograph: Mathias Heng*

**'C**HECK', SAW ANNOUNCED. 'It will be checkmate in 3 moves'. He predicted accurately. 'You made no strategic moves'.

I had not played chess in some years, so was not in practice for my two games with the Karenni deputy Minister of Education in a refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border. The Karenni are an ethnic minority in Burma seeking independence from the Burmese military government, known as SLORC—the State Law and Order Restoration Council. The camp is about three hours' drive in a pick-up from Mae Hong Son, in northern Thailand, through jungle and rivers.

Over 90,000 refugees live in camps along the Thai-Burma border. The camps are built like traditional villages. There is room for people to grow crops and keep animals, such as chickens and pigs. Some camps have schools attached, usually from kindergarten through to year 10. There is nothing available for students after year 10. Recently there were attacks on some camps on the border (as a result local authorities often force the refugees to move their camps) so there is little stability in the life of these refugees.

One refugee camp in the Mae Hong Son area in northern Thailand was turned into a tourist attraction



by the authorities, who brought in some of the Padang (the long-necked women), for the tourists. In town, the tours advertise visits to a refugee camp to 'see the long-necked women'. Loss of dignity is another burden for refugees.

**H**OWEVER, THE ATTRACTION the region holds for the West extends beyond tourism. The presence of multinationals within Burma's borders has become the focus of recent protest by human rights groups, who have been encouraging the boycott of companies that do business with SLORC. Levi Strauss closed down their production in Burma following consumer pressure in the US. Pepsi recently announced that they will reduce their role in a bottling plant in Rangoon.

Nobel Peace Prize winner, and Companion in the Order of Australia, Aung San Suu Kyi, supports such protest even though it will affect the livelihood of people inside Burma. Her argument is that the need to change the rule of SLORC and to end human rights abuses is a higher priority than the need for economic development of Burma. This approach is supported by ethnic minority groups as well, especially where it concerns overseas aid. The Burmese critics of SLORC claim that if overseas aid were given to the military government, SLORC would use the fact to claim legitimacy from the West. The aid that they do encourage is aid across the border to the refugee communities. This, they argue, is essential for survival. Aid provided through SLORC is reduced because the Burmese government takes a percentage of aid for their own purposes. The largest item of expenditure in the SLORC budget is for the military.

Recent Burmese history has yielded little peace for its 45 million people. In 1988 there were student protests for democracy in Burma, but SLORC arrested democratic leaders and crushed the student movement. Many students fled to the jungles to take up arms. Some are still fighting. Democratic elections were held in Burma in 1990 and were won by the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung Sang Suu Kyi. Although the NLD won the elections, the military refused to hand over power. SLORC held Suu Kyi under house arrest from 1989 to 1995, when she was released following international pressure. Her continued public criticism of the military regime puts her at risk of renewed arrest. Currently there is a constitutional proposal that candidates for election must have lived in Burma for a substantial period of time. This would render Suu Kyi, who lived in the UK for some years (her husband is English) ineligible for election.

Within Burma, there are a substantial number of ethnic minority groups, some of whom are seeking independence, while others are willing to accept a federation within Burma. The civil wars have been ongoing since Burmese independence in 1948.

The common aim of the ethnic minorities is the removal of the military regime and the establishment

of democratic government. SLORC oppresses minority groups in Burma in a variety of ways. Numerous human rights abuses have been reported by Amnesty International and the US-based human rights group, Human Rights Watch—Asia.

Forced labour is a common problem. Refugees on the border have experienced SLORC troops entering their village and forcibly taking people to work on road-building or as porters for the military. The roads will aid the establishment of a gas pipeline across Burma into Thailand. Total and Unocal are developing the pipeline for SLORC but this is achieved through the use of forced labour. Some people escape this form of slavery and live in the refugee camps in Thailand. Their stories are of torture and abuse of people, especially of women, by the military.

Another threat comes from landmines. Landmines are used by SLORC and some of the ethnic groups fighting SLORC. Reports from the border indicate that civilians are used not only as forced porters for the military but also in mine clearance. Injured civilians are unlikely to receive medical treatment and there are reports of the execution of injured civilians. Village livestock are also destroyed by landmines. SLORC will seek compensation from a village for the loss of a mine when livestock are killed by it. There is no equivalent compensation from SLORC for the loss of village and family livestock due to mines.

**S**LORC LAYS MINES but, for security reasons, does not advise the villagers where they are laid because mines are also used by the ethnic opposition and SLORC does not trust the loyalty of villagers. When a SLORC vehicle is destroyed by a mine, or ambushed, SLORC forces nearby villages to pay them compensation. They send conscripted porters in front of their military columns, like sacrificial canaries. In areas where roads are being built for the military, the civilians are again the innocent victims. Village ox carts or SLORC trucks are forced to load up with rocks and children and drive along a road. If a mine detonates, the village is blamed and forced to pay compensation. Villages are forced to relocate and houses are destroyed if they fail to pay.

The Thai authorities are trying to balance several competing factors in dealing with SLORC and the refugees. SLORC has a powerful army which Thailand does not wish to antagonise. There are economic factors, like trade, and the pipeline which Thailand wants for its own development. Logging is common along the border and provides another valuable trading commodity. But Thailand has traditionally allowed the refugees sanctuary within its borders despite not being a signatory to the international

*Refugees on the border have experienced SLORC troops entering their village and forcibly taking people to work on road-building or as porters for the military. Total and Unocal are developing the pipeline for SLORC but this is achieved through the use of forced labour.*





conventions relating to refugees. Although the camps are not the best possible, the Thais allow some international Non Government Organisation assistance for the provision of food and health services.

These competing factors can create conflicting policies. Earlier this year, the Mon people were told they would be required to return to their traditional lands inside Burma. The Mon have lived in camps in

working illegally in Thailand. Once arrested, the women are detained and then deported. There are few, if any, people able to help people with HIV/AIDS once they are back in Burma or on the border.

There are many young people in the camps. Isolation does not dull their enthusiasms. Talking with the Karenni Prime Minister, I heard the latest recording of the Irish Rock band, The Cranberries, playing



southern Thailand for some years and were irregularly forced to move their camps by the Thai authorities. Although the Mon indicated they were afraid to return to Burma for fear of SLORC, they felt they had no option and the repatriation will go ahead.

The treatment of malaria is a major health need in the camps. A growing problem is that of HIV/AIDS is another, particularly for young women who are forced into prostitution in Thailand. Some women are sold into prostitution there, others become involved because of the poverty of their families. The risk of infection is high and they also face possible arrest for

in the background from another hut.

My chess has still not improved but, reflecting on my visit, I realised that I can afford to lose at chess and make no strategic moves. The refugees have no such luxury when dealing with the military Government in Burma. Their moves and decisions must be strategic in order for them to survive. ■

**Kerry Murphy** is a lawyer and coordinator of the work of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Australia, based at UNIYA, the Jesuit Social Justice Centre in Kings Cross, Sydney.

*Above: a blind Karen refugee who lives alone in a makeshift wooden hut.*

*Far left: A Karen villager chopping wood for daily use.*

*Photographs, both taken in December 1995, by Mathias Heng.*

# Tell me who you are

*You don't stop fighting for justice simply because those around you don't like it. You keep on fighting.*

—Rob Riley, 1995

**O**N MAY DAY, 1996 Rob Riley hanged himself in a Perth motel room. Sixteen days later he was buried by his people in the land of his ancestors, but in a white man's cemetery.

He never had a medal or a permanent public service job. You won't find his name in *Who's Who*, though most Aboriginals and just about every WA public servant, politician, journalist and cab-driver knew who he was, and many of Perth's rednecks had offered to kill him.

Rob Riley was one of the 'homies' from Sister Kate's, an institution for the stolen children, raised with love and good intentions, but as orphans by white cottage parents and the Presbyterian Church. He found out, at twelve, that he *did* have an Aboriginal family and that they loved him. He went to live with them in the slums of East Perth and on the Pingelly reserve.

Rob Riley became an activist. After three years in the Army he became deeply involved in Aboriginal politics, finally chairing the National Aboriginal Conference—the 'toy parliament'—when he wasn't yet 30. Bob Hawke scrapped the Conference in 1982.

Riley exhausted himself in the long negotiations for Aboriginal land rights, which saw the then WA Opposition leader, soon-to-be Premier, Brian Burke, commit his government to land rights legislation—then welsh—and the post-*Mabo* native title legislation fail to deliver a single acre to his people.

He toured the country promoting the concept of ATSIC, saw a pale shadow of his vision falter and crumble under internal bickering and, finally, a new paternalism. He was an adviser to then Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Gerry Hand. He headed the Aboriginal Issues unit of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, dealing daily for three years with the grief of the bereaved families. He was to observe, with some bitterness, every Australian government's ignoring of its recommendations. More than 30 of the deaths in custody the Commission investigated came from Western Australia. Now, six years after the Commission reported, Aboriginal people are more grossly over-represented in that State's prisons than when the Inquiry began, and jailed at 35 times the national average, while both the Coalition government and ALP opposition vie for votes with 'tough on crime' rhetoric.

His last full-time position was as head of the WA Aboriginal Legal Service, but its Aboriginal management committee sacked him last October, after he was first convicted of drunk driving then, 3 months later, dobbed in then arrested for driving without a licence. The first conviction came a few days after he disclosed that, as an 8-year-old, he had been gang-raped by three teenagers while he was in Sister Kate's. The second came when someone rang the police when he drove after dark to an Aboriginal family in need.

The only work he got after that was with an Aboriginal centre at Manguri—what used to be Sister Kate's, where he uncovered evidence of what happened to the black children of WA's establishment families. The irony was not lost upon him.

Rob Riley was a generous man with a wicked sense of humour and a quick and lively wit. Because he was such an effective media voice for Aboriginal people he regularly received death threats. Because he could not change Australian society, even by playing according to the white man's rules, he was regularly and bitterly criticised by his own community.

Perhaps his greatest shame, one which should never have been caused, came from the police media unit's release—to Perth commercial TV stations—of an official video of his angrily resisting his second arrest. He may have felt that he had lost all moral authority and purpose, along with his position.

**T**HE SAME TV STATIONS inexplicably learned of his death that May Day afternoon, hours before police made contact with his family.

On his personal *dies irae* Rob Riley didn't go home to his wife and their three teenage daughters, because his marriage had paid for his pursuit of justice. Life ended for him a few days after the last Port Arthur slaughter—not the greatest mass killing in Tasmania or in the memory of the Aboriginal people—one week after WA's





latest death in custody and a week before he was to give his evidence to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's *Stolen Generations* Inquiry.

Rob Riley had been treated for anxiety and depression: he had much to mourn and no ready vent for his anger. His wounds did not heal. Maybe harmony and wholeness can't be reclaimed by one who never had them, by a child who had neither the sense of self that comes from familial relationships nor the relationship with the land so fundamental to Aboriginal identity. It gets dark quickly, in Perth, and on that May day it fell, and was complete.

**W**HO KNOWS WHAT Rob Riley felt on that awful day. He left a note. He left a lot of people angry, guilty, and ashamed of the shame he felt. Shame, according to the Macquarie dictionary, is that 'painful feeling arising from the consciousness of something dishonourable, improper, ridiculous, done by oneself or another; disgrace, ignominy'. It is simply the worst thing one human can give to another.

There were hundreds of death notices in the *West Australian*. One of them said Rob Riley was 'a stolen child, taken from his people the second time', but that was not the whole of it. Had Rob Riley's hope been stolen from him, or did he think that, by dying as and when he did, he might at last unite his people, or force governments to face what they did to Aboriginal society by taking their children away?

Who killed Rob Riley? Nobody can be blamed for another man's suicide, or sacrifice. Rob Riley was sick, he was tired, poor, lonely and humiliated. Yet at the end of the day, it seems to me, Rob Riley died because his life had left him unable to answer the vital question: 'Who am I?'. ■

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## T A road to nowhere

TECHNOLOGY AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY are as different as chalk and cheese. The former is grounded in practical research and produces inanimate systems and devices; the latter is grounded in ideas and philosophy and produces ways of managing human affairs. Nowadays the two are often forced together.

Take the establishment of cable-TV in Australia. What has emerged looks like a classic case history of a situation where competition does not serve the public good.

The former Federal Government—a Labor government, mind you—seems to have created two redundant cable systems which will have to be upgraded within a decade or so. It's hard to imagine a more costly or clumsy way of doing things.

A couple of years ago, the then Federal Government decided Australia was ripe for cable-TV. They had already laid the basis for at least two competing phone companies—eventually with their own private networks. The decision to allow cable-TV simply extended the arrangement into another arena. So the great cable race began. Subsidiaries of Optus and Telstra are cabling suburban Australia faster than anywhere else in the world. The estimates are that 60 per cent of the country will be served by two systems by the year 2000, at a cost of between \$3 billion and \$4 billion for each cable network.

When the two competitors started, the most efficient technology with the greatest capacity for transmitting information was optical fibre. The problem was that optical fibre uses light to carry information, but the telephones, computers, VCRs and other electronic appliances at the home-end of the line use electricity. When the cable networks were planned, opto-electronic devices to convert between light and electric signals were expensive—too expensive to install in individual homes.

So, each mindful of the competition, both companies opted for a compromise technology, hybrid fibre coaxial cable, which uses optical fibre to a neighbourhood conversion point where one or a few opto-electronic devices convert the light signal into an electric signal which is run by conventional coaxial cable to service about 1000 to 2000 homes. It was proven technology since the great bulk of information travelling through the cable was in the form of common signals—such as cable TV—going to many homes.

Times change. First, there has been an explosion in interactive services stimulated by public access to the internet. If the current rate of growth in users were maintained, every man, woman and child on earth would be connected to the 'net by 2001. What that means is far more pressure for cable capacity to take individual signals from individual homes than was ever envisaged. The network will have to take an enormous amount of traffic both ways, whereas it was designed to funnel most traffic one way.

Second, the price of opto-electronic conversion has now dropped to the point where it has become economic to fit devices to service only 10 homes rather than 1000. That gives 10 subscribers access to the optical fibre capacity which in Australia will be provided to 100 times as many—much more capacity for individual users to satisfy their interactive desires.

Australia's two major phone companies would be praying now for some technological breakthrough which will enable them to increase the capacity of hybrid fibre coaxial to carry information. Otherwise, it is beginning to look like Australia is in for a very expensive upgrade within a decade or two.

So there you have it—competition has provided Australia with not one, but two networks that may have to be renovated not far into the next century. Perhaps continued public ownership of the communications networks should have been considered more carefully at the time the former Federal Government established competition in the telecommunications industry. The companies could just as easily have competed by renting capacity on a common carrier.

While this presumably would have meant that the Government would have had to keep the satellite system it foisted onto Optus, it might have ended up saving the nation a great deal of money. With a single publicly owned cable network, Australia could have had more time and money to consider its options. There would have been no headlong race to see who could cable the nation first, and a greater ability to weigh up the value of more expensive, but longer lasting alternatives. ■

**Tim Thwaites** is a freelance science writer.

# From both sides now

*Media and church institutions have more in common than they will usually admit.*

*Edmund Campion and Chris McGillion, who know both worlds inside out, detail the history and trade secrets.*

ONCE UPON A TIME the chief job of the religious affairs roundsmen of the daily papers was to cover the Sunday sermons. Their big day was Monday, when the papers would carry columns and columns of sermons. Each Sunday, on his way out to open a church or school, Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane would drop his speech in to the *Courier-Mail*, where it would appear the next morning. That was a long time ago.

Once upon a time Catholic writers were deferential to bishops. Episcopal words and pictures dominated the church press; and the opinions of bishops were treated with the respect elsewhere reserved for Saint Augustine. If laypeople had doubts about the sagacity of their leaders, they kept these thoughts private. Very occasionally—as in Christopher Brennan's grumble in his *Curriculum Vitae* about Archbishop Michael Kelly's opacity—you might hear the voice of the toad beneath the harrow. Most of the time, however, loyalty to the church encouraged a strict Sicilian observance of the code of *omertà*. Such subservience was reinforced by a feeling that we Australian Catholics were living in an unfriendly society. With the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Argus*, to say nothing of the history departments in the universities, ready and willing to attack our church, we kept our secrets to ourselves.

In 1958 two remarkable fortnightly magazines appeared in the newsagents: *The Observer* and *Nation*. Frank Packer had set up *The Observer* to engage the full talents of Donald Horne, and for a time it functioned under the umbrella of Packer's lowlife *Weekend*, which Horne also edited. After three years *The Observer* merged with *The Bulletin*, when Packer bought that antique property for its real estate holdings. *Nation* was different in kind. Its founder and editor, Tom Fitzgerald, was a financial journalist whose ambition was to start such a magazine before he turned forty. His only asset was a suburban home, which he mortgaged in order to bankroll his dream. In the same

spirit his writers worked for nothing, happy to engage in the venture that with *The Observer* was changing the face of Australian journalism. Look at the Australian press before and after the fortnightlies and you will notice immediately how successful they were in their objective. They opened public life to fresh ideas and more robust debate; they were sceptical in their assessments of the would-be great; and they had pretty, irreverent wit.

Both fortnightlies were interested in religion. As his first three volumes of autobiography and other books made plain, Donald Horne was a textbook secular humanist, a child of Sir Henry Parkes and Sir George Higinbotham. Nevertheless, as a public intellectual he recognised the force of the religious idea in Australian life, and he set out to explore it in a candid way.

Tom Fitzgerald, on the other hand, came from a strong Catholic background. A regular communicant (as he told Ken Inglis), with a personal devotion to the face of Jesus, he took charge of the religious upbringing of his younger brothers and sisters, who remain observant, even fervent, Catholics. He read Catholic newspapers and was a founding member of the Australian Catholic Historical Society.

WHEN HE MARRIED, his bride was a daily communicant. By the time he started *Nation*, however, all that was in the past. By then, in the objective canonical sense of the word, Tom Fitzgerald was an apostate. Whatever the reasons for this, it did not abbreviate his interest in the church—to the end of his life he liked to hear news of Catholic scholarship, especially about that deep well, John Henry Newman—and he opened his pages to anyone writing intelligently about religion. Like Donald Horne, he thought it bad journalism to ignore something of major concern to many Australians.

When it came to religion, the two fortnightlies found a school of young writers who had caught the new waves coming

from the universities. By the beginning of the 1950s, university chaplaincies were resonating with the insights of Joseph Cardijn, whose Jocist movement became the key lay element on 20th century Catholicism. In part this enthusiasm for Cardijn grew in opposition to B.A. Santamaria, whose interest lay in colonising the university in the service of extraneous objectives. It is a melancholy fact that Santamaria, the most significant Catholic layman in Australian history, has never succeeded in nurturing intellectuals or independent writers. Why this should be so, is an open question. By contrast, the Jocist-style chaplaincies produced an abundance. Jocist movements developed critical intelligences which, while rooted in Catholicism, were comfortable with the liberal ethos of the universities. In the chaplaincies undergraduates were formed to use their intellects as critical tools at the service of both the gospel and the university. It was a servant, rather than a colonising, Catholicism; one which energised the life of the mind, and so produced writers. A decade before the formal opening of the Second Vatican Council, here was the Vatican II generation stirring to life in Australia.

The harbinger of change was an attractive university paper, *Prospect*. Produced by the circle which formed around Vincent Buckley, it appeared in 1958 and made an immediate mark. 'There is no contradiction in being both Christian and intellectual,' the first issue announced. Subsequent issues made good on this claim by taking seriously the questions of the day, that is, by not acting as if there were an easy solution to every problem—if only one could locate the relevant papal encyclical. Here was a paper which was neither clerical nor overtly ecclesiastical; and yet it was manifestly Catholic. Outside their own ranks it attracted writers as diverse as A.D. Hope, Ian Turner and Sam Lipski. Half-way through its seven years' existence it printed a list of financial supporters; the names included





two archbishops (O'Brien and Young) but also Donald Horne and Manning Clark. As the *Prospect* group found its feet on university questions they began to chance their arm on church comment. They won their colours first as lay intellectuals before speaking in the household of the faith. Today those early essays read like rehearsals for Vatican II.

Ahead lay:

- the grown-up *Catholic Worker*, which would lose its timidity before minatory glares from the cathedral and strike out independent lines on church matters.
- the impact of the *National Catholic Reporter* from the USA, whose free-for-all journalism was dynamite around the English-speaking world.
- the opening up of the Letters pages in the diocesan press to debate, especially Michael Costigan's *Advocate*, the opinion-maker of Australian Catholicism (for decades the Letters page of Sydney's *Catholic Weekly*

I'VE OFTEN HEARD IT SAID that the model the media use for understanding religious institutions is borrowed from political reporting: we categorise key characters as insiders or outsiders, as power holders or those who would take power from them. We look for dark motives behind peoples' actions, and we always suspect that we're not being told the whole truth and that we (on behalf of our readers/ viewers/ listeners) have a right to know the whole truth.

There's some truth in all of this. But let's balance it with a reflection on church models for dealing with the media. If you want to know what these are, ask yourself why you bother with the media at all.

We could sort the answers to that question into two batches. The theme of the first batch would run along these lines: we deal with the secular mass media in order to get the message across. The implicit assumption here is that the media can be a useful tool for evangelism. Disappointment and frustration often result when the media don't play along.

The second batch would share the theme: we ignore the media at our peril because the less we know about them, the more they'll be able to do us over. The assumption here is that the media are hostile. This is often the stuff of self-fulfilling prophecies.

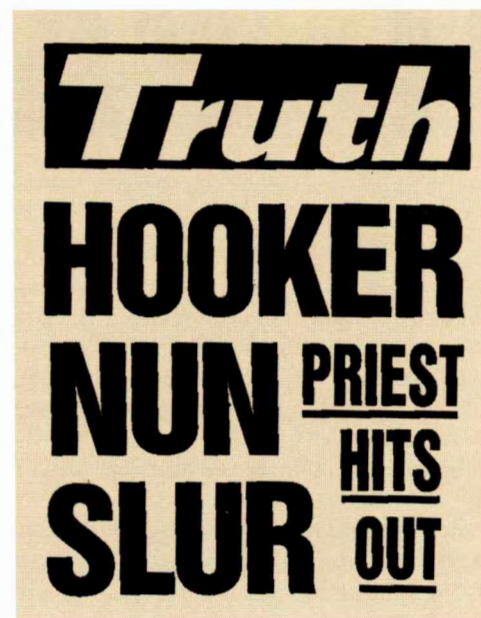
There are various reasons why each group holds to its model, but I suspect that the most compelling of them comes down to ease of habit. It is much easier for a reporter to approach the church as an institution

would remain under clerical scrutiny).

- Paul Stenhouse's new-look *Annals* in its proactive period, which left the dead to bury the dead and jumped into the future.
- Priest Forum*, where relevant ideas got a free airing and the infant National Council of Priests found nourishment.
- Report*, where you could find international news that was missing in the diocesan press.
- the sound of individual voices beginning to speak from their own experience in venerable magazines like *Messenger of the Sacred Heart* and *Madonna*.
- and church roundsmen who now did more than report the Sunday sermons: Ursula O'Connor on the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Mark Baker in the *Age*, and Graeme Williams in the *Australian*.

'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive  
But to be young was very heaven.' ■

Edmund Campion is Chair of the Literature Fund of the Australia Council.



than to conceive of it as also a community, a tradition, and a body of teachings and insights. These other dimensions only complicate the issue and can confound editors in search of *the story*.

It is easy for people in the church to view the media as either unfulfilled potential or as enemy because then the failings are all on the other side: imaginations don't have to be stretched, responsibility can be off-loaded, and excuses can be found. (Only recently I read a report about NSW police criticising the media for undermining their public image and their morale: there is a feeling among officers, it seems, that the culture of corruption that the cops have allowed to develop

in this State—that the Wood Royal Commission has belatedly revealed, and the media has merely reported—can be dismissed as so much 'bad press').

Journalists live in a world of abbreviated English and symbolic representation. When it comes to Catholics, there is a short list of about four types that they seek out.

The first is the *official Catholic*. This one is distinguished by his (or her) title (and, in the visual media, by the clerical dress or other obvious message-laden props). The more impressive the title, the greater the credibility. So a cardinal outranks a priest, but a priest outranks a nun, and both outrank a lay person with a Catholic institutional background. The *official Catholic* is meant to give *the line* on an issue—which may be sought for the purpose of informing the public or to set a context for further coverage/comment (a process often referred to as 'the setup').

The second type is the *ratbag Catholic*. What makes a ratbag is something said or done out of the ordinary. But what makes the media interested in a ratbag is the influence he/she is imagined to be able to muster. And so rank, title, uniform is important again in ranking. A cardinal makes a better ratbag than a priest ... and so on.

A ratbag is usually different—which is why the media are interested in them. That may also mean controversial but it may simply mean interesting or amusing.

The third type is the *celebrity Catholic*. A celebrity Catholic is a public figure and almost always a lay person. He or she doesn't have to be particularly well informed or well briefed but must be well known and preferably well liked. The *celebrity Catholic* is usually required to be inspirational in a given context or to provide the 'colour' in a particular story. Sometimes, of course, celebrities misplace the script and can produce their own share of controversy.

The last type is the *expert* or *specialist* who may or may not even be Catholic. This is someone with a knowledge of, and feeling for, issues and nuances involving the church and, most importantly, an ability to communicate an idea quickly, succinctly and in a fashion that will interest a broad audience—not all of them by any means Catholics. Experts are prized, and almost as rare as cardinals who are ratbags. ■

Chris McGillion is the opinion page editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Both articles were originally given as addresses to the first Catholics in Media Consultation, held in Sydney in March. The posters are from *Eureka Street's* hoard.



THE CHURCH  
MARIE LOUISE UHR

# DO NOT PASS GO

**E**ACH YEAR, THE VATICAN DECLARES a Sunday in May as World Communications Day. This year the Pope's theme was 'The Media: a modern forum for promoting the role of women in society'. Archbishop John Foley, the president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, hailed the Pope's choice of theme as 'further proof of the Holy Father's interest and determination in defining the role of women in society and in the church, already expressed in his 1995 *Letter to Women*.'

I am concerned with the considerable efforts the Pope has already made to define women and limit their role in the Church.

I write as national convener of Ordination of Catholic Women (OCW), a group of women and men who advocate the ordination of women into a renewed priestly ministry in the Catholic Church; who believe that an ordained ministry of both women and men will make the church spiritually richer, more open to the lives of women and men, and more able to bring God's love to a wounded world.

Clearly the Vatican does not agree with us.

Two experiences stand out for the contribution they made to my becoming founder and first national convener of OCW.

The first was in Brighton, England, in 1984. The local parish church was clinging to pre-Vatican II practices as much as possible. It seemed quaint at first, amusing even. The critical moment came one day at Mass when, just before communion, the altar boys walked down and closed the gates of the altar rails. The sacred was within the gates, and the profane was without. And I was without: impure, female, laity. Many moments of feeling excluded or rejected were crystallised for me in that one moment.

The second event was a much happier one. It was being present at my first Eucharist celebrated by an ordained woman. The celebrant was Alison Cheek, an Australian-born woman, ordained into the Episcopal church, one of the Philadelphia eleven, and a tower of strength to the largely Anglican Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW) during the struggle for women's ordination here. I shall never forget the power of her presence, the quiet dignity, the gentle and loving



way she led us. And I shall never forget the ordinariness; simply a Eucharist at which the celebrant was a woman. Nothing could convince me that Jesus was not present at that Eucharist. Nothing, after that, was likely to convince me that Jesus prohibited the ordination of women.

In 1993, I decided that continuing to talk of changing structures, doing away with hierarchy, creating a society of equals was not enough. Rather, as Vaclav Havel learned in occupied Czechoslovakia, it is necessary to work for 'specific concrete things' and not indulge in 'vague ideological debates'. And as MOW found in working for change in the Anglican Church, the ordination of women is such a 'specific concrete thing'. It is not the be-all and end-all of changes needed. But it acts as a focus for many of the issues of equality or opportunity, justice, ministry, God and us.

Moreover, the very passion with which the case against women's ordination is argued by the Vatican indicates to me at least that they understand its importance very well.

**F**OR OVER TWENTY YEARS, the Vatican has been insisting, with increasing force, that it cannot ordain women. With concern over women's ordination growing after Vatican II, Pope Paul VI asked the congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to set out Catholic teaching on the issue. The Congregation produced its *Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood* in 1976, in which the Congregation concluded that the church did not have the authority to ordain women. As this statement did not stop calls for women's ordination, in 1994 Pope John Paul II issued the apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* to resolve uncertainty and to foster unity. He restated the Congregation's conclusion and declared that it was to be held 'definitively' by all the faithful.

Discussion and calls for women's ordination have continued, so, in late 1994, the congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a *responsum* to a question, or *dubium*, in which they said that not only was this teaching part of the deposit of faith, but added that it was taught infallibly.

The Vatican gives two main reasons for why it claims—with great force and determination—that the church does not have the authority to ordain women. One is from scripture and one from tradition. On summary, the Vatican insists that the institution of an all-male priesthood is founded on the words and actions of Jesus recorded in the Gospels which, it claims, show that Jesus called a group of men known as 'the twelve' to be the founders of an all-male priesthood. Moreover it believes that this interpretation is upheld by 2000 years of tradition.

This reading of scripture is challenged by scholars on a number of grounds. For instance, the gospels do not record Jesus ordaining anyone, male or female, to the priesthood as it is understood today; the 'twelve' can be understood as representing a re-establishment of the twelve tribes of Israel as sign of the reign of God which Jesus proclaimed; nowhere in scripture are 'the twelve' seen as leading the Eucharist: and there is little evidence of their leadership after the resurrection. In fact, when the Vatican commissioned the Pontifical Biblical Commission to examine the question, the Commission concluded (a conclusion ignored by the Congregation in writing its 1976 Declaration), as did the American Catholic Biblical Association in 1979 and the Catholic Biblical Association of Australia in 1995, that there is no biblical evidence to support the exclusion of women from the priesthood.

The second argument used by the Vatican is that from tradition: the church has never ordained women and therefore never should. This conclusion too can be strongly challenged. The biblical evidence for women's leadership in early Christian communities, along with increasing historical evidence for women's ordained leadership on Christian communities over the first six centuries, makes the blanket statement that women have never been ordained difficult to substantiate. Moreover, women such as Ludmilla Javorova assert that she and other women were ordained in the clandestine church in post-war Czechoslovakia (*The Tablet*, November 1995). The official church responds to Javorova's claim of her ordination by insisting that since women cannot be ordained, any such ordination would have been not only illegal but invalid. Since women's ordination cannot happen, it has not happened, and therefore has never occurred. Around we go.

**E**VEN IF ALL SUCH ORDINATIONS ARE IGNORED there still remains the question of the general attitudes to women held by church leaders throughout the last 2000 years. The writings of notable Patristic churchmen are replete with descriptions of women as the 'devil's gateway' (Tertullian); as 'so inferior to men that the only reason for their creation was procreation' (Augustine), and as 'made in the image of man and not of God' (Ambrosiaster). In the Middle Ages, Aquinas' writings both encapsulated contemporary understandings and shaped Catholic teachings for the next eight centuries. The Supplement to the *Summa Theologiae* states that women cannot be ordained

because 'women's state of subjection makes it impossible for the female sex to signify any eminence of rank'. A 1957 seminary text book proclaims in like vein: 'The reason why a woman cannot receive holy orders is because the clerical state demands a certain superiority since it involves ruling the faithful, whereas a woman by her very nature is inferior to man and subject to him ...' (Noldin 1957 vol III n465 31st ed, prepared by G Heinzl s).

The Vatican today does not put forward this long-standing argument about the subordination of women to support its claim that women cannot be ordained. The climate has changed. Now the same conclusion (No to women's ordination) is being asserted but for different reasons.

The Pope is not shy of making pronouncements on the nature of woman. In fact, like a man on an inner journey trying to make sense of women, he seems driven to release statements on who and what we are. And his overall conclusions, which we are not invited to discuss with him,

are that women are complementary to men and here to help them. In his Papal letter of 1995, he thanks women for their 'dignity'; says the church wants to contribute to upholding women's civil rights; admires those who have fought for basic social, economic and political rights even when that was consid-

*When the Vatican commissioned the Pontifical Biblical Commission to examine the question, the Commission concluded ... as did the American Catholic Biblical Association in 1979 and the Catholic Biblical Association of Australia in 1995, that there is no biblical evidence to support the exclusion of women from the priesthood.*

ered to be a sin; and deplors obstacles which prevent women from being fully integrated into civil life. He apologises if church members have, in the past, treated women unfairly; but makes no apology for today's church and today's subordinations, and promises no restitution.

He sees women not so much as human beings, but as beings fulfilling a series of 'roles'—the first and most important of which is that of mother. Women are made to give help to men. 'For in giving themselves to others each day women fulfil their deepest vocation.' (Papal letter, June 29 1995)

He stresses the complementary natures of men and women. There are good reasons for women to have a healthy suspicion of the notion of complementarity. Historically, complementarity has been invoked whenever social theories stress the equality of women and men. For example, emphasis on the difference in male and female nature emerged after the Greek aristocratic period

with the introduction of Athenian democracy, when State political and legal structures were excluding freeborn women from citizenship.

**C**OMPLEMENTARITY BECAME A POPULAR THEORY again in the eighteenth century, a time of powerful political moves for democracy and equality (of all men). It provided a solution to threats men felt to traditional power and privilege. The Pope's late 20th century brand of complementarity is used as a bulwark against demands from women from all over the world for equal participation in the church.

The present Vatican tells women who we are, thanks us for our 'femininity', bids us take part in civil life, and then not only declares that women cannot be ordained but forbids us to discuss the very question. We cannot discuss it with the Vatican. Nor can we discuss it with the Australian Conference of Bishops, who replied to our request by stating that such a meeting would be quite inappropriate'; and that an essential factor in the whole question is the proper role and authority of the Pope' (letter to OCW from Fr W.J. Wright, Acting Secretary replying for Cardinal Clancy, October 10, 1995). Banning open discussion is a strange way to reach the truth. Particularly as, at the same time, the official church proclaims the rights of all people to free and open discussion of civil matters.

This tension between what the official church encourages in civil society and secular press and what it forbids in Church and church publications is highlighted by the ordination question. A classic example of the force with which discussion is stifled occurred recently in Canberra. A Canadian delegation of the recent assembly of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations, had put forward a resolution that women's groups continue to debate women's ordination. On the opening day of the assembly the Pro-Nuncio Archbishop Brambilla told the president general that the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Sodano, insisted that the resolution was inadmissible. If it were not dropped, the Union would jeopardise its recognition by the Vatican as an official Catholic organisation. The resolution was withdrawn.



Although this caused great tension at the conference, the official Sydney archdiocesan paper the *Catholic Weekly*, which had previously declared that it would print no letters or discussion on women's ordination, ignored the incident. They excused this omission of any reference to something about which many Catholics were talking by referring both to their previous ban and to their Good News policy.

**W**HEN BISHOPS DECIDE THAT THEIR LOCAL PAPER will not print letters on an issue, the people of the church are officially prevented from taking part in public, in-house discussion. This banning of correspondence is an oppressive act and must be named as such. In addition, when the *Catholic Weekly* supports such a ban with the phrase 'The *Catholic Weekly*, as an archdiocesan newspaper reflecting the attitudes of the church ...' (*Catholic Weekly* June 5 1994) it is clear that, at least in its view, the voice of the Vatican is the voice of the church.

Cardinal Clancy seems clearly opposed to public discussion. After the recent use of the word 'infallibly', he was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as insisting that if debate would not stop, then any further discussion should be limited to professional theologians writing in learned journals and not in the public press (*SMH* Dec 15).

Such attempts by members of the hierarchy to block people expressing their thoughts ignores the fact that it is the laity who are principally concerned about this issue, and seems to assume that the laity have nothing of value to contribute to debate. Bishop Ullathorne's query 'Who are the laity?' received from John Henry Newman the sharp rejoinder 'the Church would look foolish without them'. It still would.

One immediate effect of Catholic press bans is that groups such as OCW receive greatly increased publicity in the secular media. For this media coverage we are grateful, even while we remain cautious about how we and the issue are represented, not wishing either our cause or the wider church we love to become objects of ridicule.

The rights of Catholics to discuss religious matters are included in the official documents of Vatican II (in *Gaudium et Spes* n62), affirmed by the 1971 Synod of Bishops which spoke of 'legitimate diversity within the church' (para 41), and enshrined in the 1983 code of Canon Law (212,3). Nevertheless, at present, what can be discussed is severely limited to what fits the present Vatican's definition of 'objective truth'. The present pontiff, when Archbishop of Krakow, insisted on freedom for political dissidents to dissent. Under his pontificate, bishops have been stood down from their dioceses; theologians have been silenced and removed from their posts: editors of Catholic papers have been sacked by the Vatican. It is not surprising then, that most people employed by the Catholic church, bishops and journalists and teachers, are afraid to write or speak their minds.

The Vatican insists that it alone knows the mind of God on questions that many committed Catholics see as outside the central credal deposit of faith. It is convinced, too, that it has the God-given authority to make rulings on these questions, without open discussion, for all people and for all time. Women, coeliacs, recovering alcoholics have all recently been barred from ordination. Divorced and remarried are barred from Eucharist. The emphasis is on excluding, on controlling.

**T**OO OFTEN THE CHURCH IS PREACHING a Gospel message of justice, equality, human rights and freedom of conscience, while at the same time equality, conscientious dissent and due process are being denied its own members. The double standard produces a serious problem of credibility.

Over its 2000 year history, the official church has pronounced with authority, and often in error, on 'matters as global and major as official anti-Semitism, usury, the Inquisition, slavery, the nature of the universe, and meat on Fridays' (to use Joan Chittister's lovely list), so it is hard to believe that our concern for the full humanity of all people can be seen as an error of faith.

By baptism women join the priesthood of all believers as priests, prophets and pastors. Those who feel impelled to work for the ordination of Catholic women are being called to live now, I believe, above all as prophets, to awaken the church to its present limitations.

*A 1957 seminary text book proclaims: 'The reason why a woman cannot receive holy orders is because the clerical state demands a certain superiority since it involves ruling the faithful, whereas a woman by her very nature is inferior to man and subject to him.'*

It is the time for a Hannah speaking boldly in the Temple: the time for an Esther, determined to go to the king and speak—'even if it kills me'; the time for the Syro-Phoenician woman, refusing to be silenced by the male disciples trying to protect Jesus from the troublesome woman. 'But', she said. 'But', we must keep saying. We must speak—and speak boldly. We are working to incorporate women into a nonhierarchical ministry of women and men, to create a church in which all are equally able to express their varied gifts. We have to confront the power and control of a hierarchy with its androcentric dualisms of clergy/laity, of sacred/profane, of male/female which are used to hold women in subordination.

It is a time to act. We must take strength from the courageous actions of our biblical foremothers; like the woman anointing Jesus before his death, going into the house where he was surrounded by those trying to drive her away, to carry out the political action of anointing him as king. We have to stand in the streets, stand outside our churches when men are being ordained, stand outside when only male priests are celebrating their priesthood, stand up in spite of the insults that may be levelled, in spite of the hurt that may ensue.

**W**E NEED TO RECALL LEONARDO BOFF'S WORDS: 'The new church, as in all renewal movements, first appears on the periphery. Given the power structure at the centre, the periphery is the only place where true creativity and freedom is possible.'

Around the edges of the church, marginal people, resident aliens are creating new life. The Vatican may prohibit women from celebrating Eucharist in official church liturgies, but, as many of us have experienced, women gather in small circles to break bread together in memory of Jesus. And many women are leading whole communities in liturgical thanksgiving. Women have always brought and will continue to bring Christ into the world. No power on earth can stop this.

I long for Christian ministries to be open to women and to men, to single, married, celibate, divorced; to people chosen from their communities for leadership regardless of sex, gender, race, or class; ordained for life or for limited periods; for universal ministry or for a small community: not just bishops, priests and deacons, but prophets, apostles, teachers, healers, workers of miracles, administrators, helpers. I long for a church which creates and celebrates whatever form of ministry liberates the whole community, a church in which all work together in true co-discipleship for the empowering reign of Sophia-God in our world. ■

**Marie Louise Uhr** is National Convenor, Ordination of Catholic Women. This is an edited text of an address given at University House, Canberra, on May 8, 1996.

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## Christopher Brennan (1870-1932)

*He spoke German,  
fluently, and French.  
One he got by study,  
the other from an inclination to drink  
absinthe, like the poets who were always writing  
among the cafés and the bottles and the crowds of women.*

*How do they do it? He liked women,  
though they seemed a little too German,  
at times, invading the domain of writing  
and bugging up his whispered amatory French  
the way that a few too many drinks  
would ginger up but addle the study*

*of his volumes of foreign verse. In the study  
he worked at a huge monument to women  
for an hour or two, then had a drink.  
Phew! Like a good German  
he had a method for everything, and like the French  
he wasted it on writing*

*poems about feeling like writing  
all through the night. His study  
lamp glowed out across the Quad. Famous French  
poets wrote to him, once or twice. Women  
from one end of Europe to the other admired his German  
manners. Ah, Heidelberg! Must be time for a drink.*

*Back to the heatstruck colonies. God, a drink  
would go down well, eh? Those oafs writing  
gibberish and hoping for a pass in German  
Romantic literature, look at them, as though study  
were enough! What about inspiration? The women  
of Sydney are not really suited to modern French*

*poetry. And now Mallarmé's gone loony—too French,  
if that were possible. One last drink.  
In a sheep-farming province, young women  
who wish to develop the discipline of writing  
should take up the study  
of German ...*

*He yearned to dream in French, but all he heard was German.  
He inclined to drink, and trudged through a torrent of study  
and when he reached for women, they became his writing.*

**John Tranter**

## Modern Times

*The bombs which have abraded  
a Sarajevo summer  
spell out the failure  
of our species to learn  
anything from history,  
a skerrick from science  
or a whit from high morality.*

*We've squirmed out to be  
neither a jot  
nor a tittle pacific,  
dry competition  
the name of the death.  
What will technology  
bequeath to our faint  
footling descendants?*

*Landmines in Cambodia.*

**Chris Wallace-Crabbe**

## Water

*Ah, but language feels to me  
rather like the taste of water,  
a flavour frankly beyond all naming,  
it is so general, clear and ready  
to flow out,  
filling our every need.*

*You cannot burn language  
or put paid to words in their glittering.  
Smog may well smudge over us all  
until those waters rise again,  
pellucid, eloquent  
and swirling*

*like a suite of beautiful drawings.  
It can drown you, too,  
the taste becoming a grave  
which is yet the root  
of every other sensation.*

**Chris Wallace-Crabbe.**

# I HAVE MULCHED THE PATCH WHERE MY FATHER LIES BURIED

I HAVE MULCHED THE PATCH WHERE MY FATHER LIES BURIED and hope to raise another in his likeness. He died ten years ago now—it has taken this long to put the idea into practice—and I would probably have put it off again this year but for the fact that I've missed him so badly of late. It is autumn, the leaves on the Liquidamber at the front gate are turning yellow; I live on my own in a tiny shack an hour or so out of town. They are extending the freeway soon so I'm told and the drive will then be cut by half; but that is no concern of mine, my car is on its last legs, I only drive to the shop and back and then only twice a week; soon I'll go nowhere, certainly not to town; my lungs are bad, the city stinks, I want no more of that. I'll leave the mulch to rot through winter, dig it in in early spring, by Christmas I should see the results of my work.

The patch is down by the back fence, near the sprawling blackberry bushes; I've cleared them a little to stop them interfering with my father's remains, but not too much, I like to pick the fruit when it ripens—they fall into your hand like jewels—and I've even baked a pie or two and turned them into jam. When I cleared the weeds before mulching it I found the remnants of the cross I'd made, two sticks and a piece of rotting string, and the old jam jar that held the first season's flowers. I worked with my shirt off, carrying grass clippings and leaves, and never doubted the wisdom of my plan. It's piled high now, rich, moist and earth-smelling, a foot thick at least; if you bend down low you can almost hear the first cells breaking down and sinking into the soil. I wonder should I add a handful of lime?—but I dare not ask my nurseryman lest he ask me what for and think me a lunatic when I tell him.

I've lived with that, it wouldn't be the first time, I'm a lunatic all right, and people are entitled to consider me as such. If I hadn't come up here I'd be locked away by now; god knows what the papers would have said. I didn't read them then, haven't read them since, accept the title of lunatic with equanimity and do what I can now to live the part.

On fine mornings I sit and shoot birds with my pistol. They gather at the feed box I made; all kinds of birds, big and small, dull and brilliant, they don't mind me, they are almost tame, I have only to pick off one of their number and five minutes later they are all back again. I don't know where the bodies go, I never move them myself; I go inside for lunch and when I come out later the lawn is clean save for a feather or two and a tiny drop of blood. Life is a conundrum, you can't



escape it. At first I thought it was the cat, but I've discounted that theory now. No, what happens is this: the bird falls from the tree and mulches the ground and while I eat my lunch a new bird flies up from the spot, a replica of the first, to take its place at the feed box with the others. And it was this small and in the end perhaps imbecilic discovery that first turned my thoughts in a new way to my father and his patch.

I remember little of the death. To be honest I don't understand the concept and never really have. One nurse took a shine to me though, I remember that, though for the life of me I can't understand why; she only ever saw me in my white cap and gown and I must have looked ridiculous. But I could tell by her smile and her friendly questions that, even dressed as I was like an idiot, there was something about me that impressed her. Perhaps it was my manner, for I was strange even then—though not quite lunatic—and could often be found wandering the corridors reading the paper while Death as they say hurried ahead of me like a shadow, dropping in on various wards and whisking the tired souls away. I read the sports page mostly, and occasionally the comics; the great events on the front page all but passed me by. There was something about Israel, or was it Lebanon? I can't remember. Peacefully in the night was the way they put it, and I still enjoy the expression even now. I'll often lie awake in my bed while the earth sighs softly beneath me and the

black sky rolls around like a languid whale and say it over in a whisper to myself: peacefully in the night, peacefully in the night. Apparently they were telling me he was dead.

**T**HE REST WAS ALL TOO EASY. The coffin was open for viewing; the last members of the immediate family had left the chapel weeping; three grey-suited men stood off to one side, hands cupping their genitals, waiting for me to go. I looked over the edge of the coffin into my father's bloodless face. They'd parted his hair on the wrong side, I don't know why, it was parted on the side he'd always parted it on the last time I'd seen him alive, when the nurse in question had led me in I could almost say by the hand. One of the three men coughed lightly and another shuffled his feet. Another said softly leaning forward that I should really leave the chapel now as too long spent with the departed would only do more harm than good. I said they'd parted his hair on the wrong side and he apologised with a blush. I said I was not used to death and he said he understood. Then with the upper hand I asked him could I stay a little longer alone with my father and might I close the coffin lid? There was of course some dispute about this, it not being formal practice, but eventually he relented, took a screwdriver from his companion, handed it to me, and all three then bowed and left.

I drove out west with the sun in my face, my father strapped into the passenger seat beside me; mile by mile the suburbs thinned and gave way to burnt-brown paddocks. Huge steel pylons marched beside us. Dead gums dropped their branches as we passed. Cows looked up, their jaws frozen sideways. Starlings escaped from the fences. For hours I drove, I wasn't sure where, a vague half-remembered map in my head, until, somewhere far from the city, I turned off the highway onto a narrow dirt road. Behind me the car threw up great clouds of dust, enormous and eerie, billowing in the fading light. I saw a track between two huge pines and followed it for a mile until I came to a gate. In the high-beam of the headlights I could just make out the shape of a small broken-down shack and some cleared land beyond. I took a shovel from the boot and walked down into the dark.

I told my mother I'd taken my father and she seemed to understand. I was standing in a phone box in the middle of the night a few days later and only had one more coin. You're a funny one, she said. I had to laugh. Then I wept. A crescent moon against an ink-black sky. She said don't worry love, it's all right, you do what you have to do. I told her I had to own the earth where my father now lay or the thing wouldn't be complete, that he wasn't dead but merely resting, that I must stand vigil until he wakes again, that he will need slippers, a newspaper, cold beer and tablets. Don't worry love, she said, I'll see what I can do. The red light flashed and the phone went dead. I must have looked strange out there in the dark, sitting on a concrete-slab floor in a box of white light, my head in my hands, weeping. The documents were sent care of the local post office and I took possession of the shack soon after from the uncle in town who'd forgotten he owned it and didn't need it anyway, since he had, so he said, two more by the beach as well.

It is August, the last of the winter rains are falling outside. I sit by the fire and toast bread on a fork. The fridge is stacked with beer, soon my father and I will drink it cold from frosty glasses as we sit on the veranda watching sunsets and dawns. Down by the back fence, where the first buds are already forming on the blackberry bushes, something warm, alive and thirsty is stirring in the earth. ■

**Wayne Macauley** was the 1995 winner of the Melbourne Age short story competition.

# Money matters

*The Future of Capitalism*, Lester Thurow, Allen & Unwin, NSW, 1996.  
ISBN 1 86448 108 0 RRP \$29.95

**F**OREIGN POLICY ANALYSTS around the world have been trying to map a New World Order ever since Francis Fukuyama wrapped up the Cold War with the *End of History* and the omnipresent triumph of liberal capitalism. Will China be the new global power? Will Japan break away from the United States? Can Western Europe cope with Eastern Europe? What will replace containment as America's main security strategy? A re-evaluation of national economic competitiveness has also occurred as a result of the security debate.

Internationally, Japan's economic superpower status, the emergence of Chinese capitalism, the prosperity of the Asian Tigers and the vitality of a German-led Europe have watered down US economic clout. Domestically, this has been reflected in high American budget deficits, 7 million unemployed, and a growing current account deficit. Moreover, there are now around 34 million unemployed in the OECD nations.

In an attempt to increase economic growth, Western governments have embraced global trade, tighter budgets, deregulation and a rollback of the social welfare state. This is the free market alternative that has dominated Western bureaucracies since the late 1970s. A more pragmatic solution, encompassing both Left and Right, has been to advocate a degree of state intervention in the economy—on equity and productivity grounds.

In his latest work, *The Future of Capitalism*, MIT's Professor Lester Thurow has attempted to chart this new global economic order by siding with those who look to government for the keys to successful business competition. He does this stylishly and in a cosmopolitan fashion, quite removed from the banal



Lester Thurow

positivism of the standard non-fiction economic thrillers.

Yet Thurow is not what the Australian political world would describe as a 'wet' or a 'left-wing interventionist'. Far from it. His writings are littered with positive references to 'hardnosed' capitalist calculations about costs and benefits and the logic of the marketplace. And when he does make the case for government assistance, mainly in the form of expenditure on education, infrastructure, and research and development, it is defensive and excessively at pains to combat the anti-state arguments advanced by conservative economists.

Lester Thurow belongs to the same generation as some of the key economic officials in President Clinton's Administration, namely Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, and Chairman of the National Economic Council Laura Tyson.

They are pragmatic thinkers who know the world has changed and have responded by writing unorthodox economic books about the New Global Economic Order. Unlike their free market opponents, their thinking is characterised by a certain dual-

ism: a combination of policy flexibility with a strong affection for the material powers of American capitalism. Thurow has a similar mindset.

To Thurow's credit as a political economist, he characterises the problem of first-world nations in economic and political terms. Declining real wages and increasing inequality are unacceptable in democratic societies that still have economic growth. The reader is dazzled with startling facts about real wage decline in the US and increases in wealth inequality over the last two decades or so, and also that there has been no growth in European employment levels for 25 years.

Between 1973 and 1993, for example, real average median earnings for males in the US fell by 11 per cent, with the reductions becoming larger for lower income earners. Real wages fell by nearly a quarter for workers in the lowest 20 per cent. And about 64 per cent of all the gains in male earnings during the 1980s went to the top 1 per cent. By the turn of the century, Thurow estimates that American workers will earn what their predecessors did in the early 1950s in real terms.

**W**EAALTH INEQUALITY has also returned to levels not seen since the 1920s. In the early 1990s, the share of wealth of the top 1 per cent of the population—about 40 per cent—was nearly double what it had been in the mid-1970s. What has kept the male American worker going is that women have entered the workforce to supplement household income—but the downward trend continues.

The backdrop for this decline is a world where both technology and ideology have changed. Transport and telecommunications have revolutionised business relations and led to the decline of the Keynesian



national economy and effective systems of regulation. Waning US global power no longer unifies the global capitalist system, leading to ethnic rivalry and genocide, and regional-power rivalry.

**C**OMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE is dead. Global markets mean anything can be produced anywhere, and countries once reliant on relative superiorities in their supply of labour or capital, mineral deposits or agricultural fecundity, find their situation challenged. Through factor price equalisation, the vast supplies of cheap, well-educated labour from the old communist world and immigration have put downward pressure on first-world wages. Trade and skill-intensive shifts in technology have added to this.

In a global economy, what counts is the national willpower to create competitive advantage and an energetic elite to pursue it. Thurow makes use of a philosophy of history to describe the forces behind economic change, which he sees stemming from the interaction of technology and ideology. It is a philosophy that mixes biological with geological metaphors on the assumption that economic laws are hidden and slow, but decisive and objective. Ideology and technology are comparable to the geological concept of the 'magma', which drives the 'tectonic plates' that move slowly but generate enormous natural wonders such as volcanic eruptions.

The crisis of the Mexican peso in 1995 is an example of such an eruption in the social world. The run on the peso originated not merely in the day-to-day decision-making of Mexican policymakers or New York mutual funds managers, but in the long drip of global structural change brought about by shifts in the tectonic plates.

The tectonic plates of our own time are the end of communism, the vast and competitive wealth offered by brainpower industries, the general ageing of the population, global labour and capital markets, and the end of American dominance. The situation of first-world economies is likened to that of the dinosaurs before their extinction. The end of the dinosaurs left the mammals at the

top of the species list because they were better adapted to a system of 'punctuated equilibrium'.

Just as dinosaurs are thought to have been ill-adapted to the clouds of deadly sulphur gas that saturated the atmosphere after a comet hit the earth, so seekers after economic wealth in the postCold War world must learn the new conditions of prosperity.

Thurow agrees with John Maynard Keynes that capitalism is not a self-regulating mechanism:

'When capitalism's normal decision-making processes are used, capitalism never looks more than 8 to 10 years in the future and usually looks only 3 to 4 years ahead. Capitalism desperately needs what its own internal logic says it does not have to do.'

Unlike Keynes, Thurow does not believe a return to prosperity can be achieved using government expenditure financed with budget deficits. Since the late 1970s, strong growth has been deliberately stymied by anti-inflationary fiscal policies and tight money. Fiscal and monetary policy alone cannot generate the development of industries in biotechnology, robotics, software, or aircraft—all the areas Japan's Ministry for International Trade and Industry nominated as the ones of the 21st century.

Instead, structural incentives need to be put in place to create new skills and to nurture new industries where really durable wealth lies. The policy problem of the 1990s, then, is the relation between the skills required to run the brainpower industries of the future, the costs of developing these skills and how the system must be changed to do this.

'In an era of manmade brainpower industries,' Thurow argues, 'capitalism is going to need some very long-run communal investments in research and development, education, and infrastructure.'

'Knowledge has become the only source of long-run sustainable competitive advantage, but knowledge can only be employed through the skills of individuals'.

To fund these investments, governments must cut back budget deficits that reduce the level of national saving, a familiar argument to Australians aware of the Howard government's aim to cut \$8 billion from the federal budget. At more than 15 per cent of GDP in the mid-1970s, the OECD savings rate is now at 7 per cent of GDP, a situation brought about by lower public saving, consumer credit and the high spending rates of the elderly. This has crowded out the opportunity for productive investment—a standard fiscal argument.

Where Thurow differs from the Howard government's thinking is that he believes the private sector will not take up the extra savings released by budget cuts to invest in brainpower industries. Why? Because the market's time-horizons are skewed too much to the short run to ensure the right level of investment in skill-creation.

Thurow does not spell it out, but behind his ideas is the strong drum-



beat of the Japan Model of state-guided economic growth, and even the example Germany has set in what he labels the 'Rhine Model' of economic management. The problem is even if the US adopts a program of skills-creation and strategic industrial targeting, who is to say other countries will not follow? In a global system even this type of political knowledge about economic organisation becomes globalised.

*The Future of Capitalism* also harks back to the traditional values John Howard feels comfortable with, like hard work, saving to invest, and individual discipline—but with greater understanding of how ‘ideology’ fits into the wealth-creation process. This is nicely shown in Thurow’s call for a new ideology to ‘excite’ the populace, to legitimise government expenditure and to create a motivated and disciplined workforce.

During the Cold War, infrastructural and educational investments were made in America with cleverly disguised legislation like the GI Bill, the National Defence Highway Act and the National Defence Education Act. In the name of defending the West from the Soviets, these acts of state intervention stimulated employment and increased the number of PhDs in science and engineering. Thurow argues that we need more state intervention, justified with a new ‘builders’ ideology.

Yet the call for a new ideology of work seems a little fanciful and preppy—something to impress a graduate seminar at MIT, perhaps, but to cause only a few laughs on Wall Street or the at the Treasury. Surely such ideologies are not invented in any direct sense by state officials, academics or popular thinkers. They are historical and unique.

Thurow himself believes we already know the right policies to turn back inequality. What we need is an ‘awareness’ of a crisis situation. What is absent from his analysis is just why, as he admits, the major political parties in the US are doing nothing to address the real economic problems.

His own philosophy of history accepts the role of politics in the economy. Economic policies are not implemented on purely rational grounds alone or apart from considerations of power. If the US fails to provide the right incentives for ‘brainpower’ industries, it might have more to do with the impediments to effective state action by powerful business interests than the enlightenment of individual citizens. Understanding that will require a different book. ■

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# Penal turpitude

**W**HY PRISON? is the provocative question posed by the editors of this book. When you come to think about it, it’s a pretty peculiar institution. ‘No matter how empathetic one may be to the reformers’ impulse to find a substitute for garrotting the condemned, the fundamental question still remains: why invent a system of incarceration, why substitute confinement in segregated spaces and design a routine of bell-ringing punctuality and steady labour?’ writes editor David Rothman. ‘Why channel the impulse to do good into something as strange as the prison, a system that, over 150 years later, can still prompt an inmate to want to meet the man who dreamed it all up, convinced he must have been born on Mars?’

The prison system has been going for such a short time? That’s right—far from being a constant, the notion of imprisonment as punishment *per se* (as opposed to a staging post for those awaiting sentencing, execution or transportation) is a relatively new one. While incarceration has been practised since Biblical times, punishment has historically been more likely to take the form of execution (whether by garrotting or more exotic methods, such as precipitation—being chucked from cliffs—or lapidation—stoning), torture, exile, slavery, ritual humiliation, branding, whipping or fines, to name but a few instances of the rough justice meted out to malefactors through the ages.

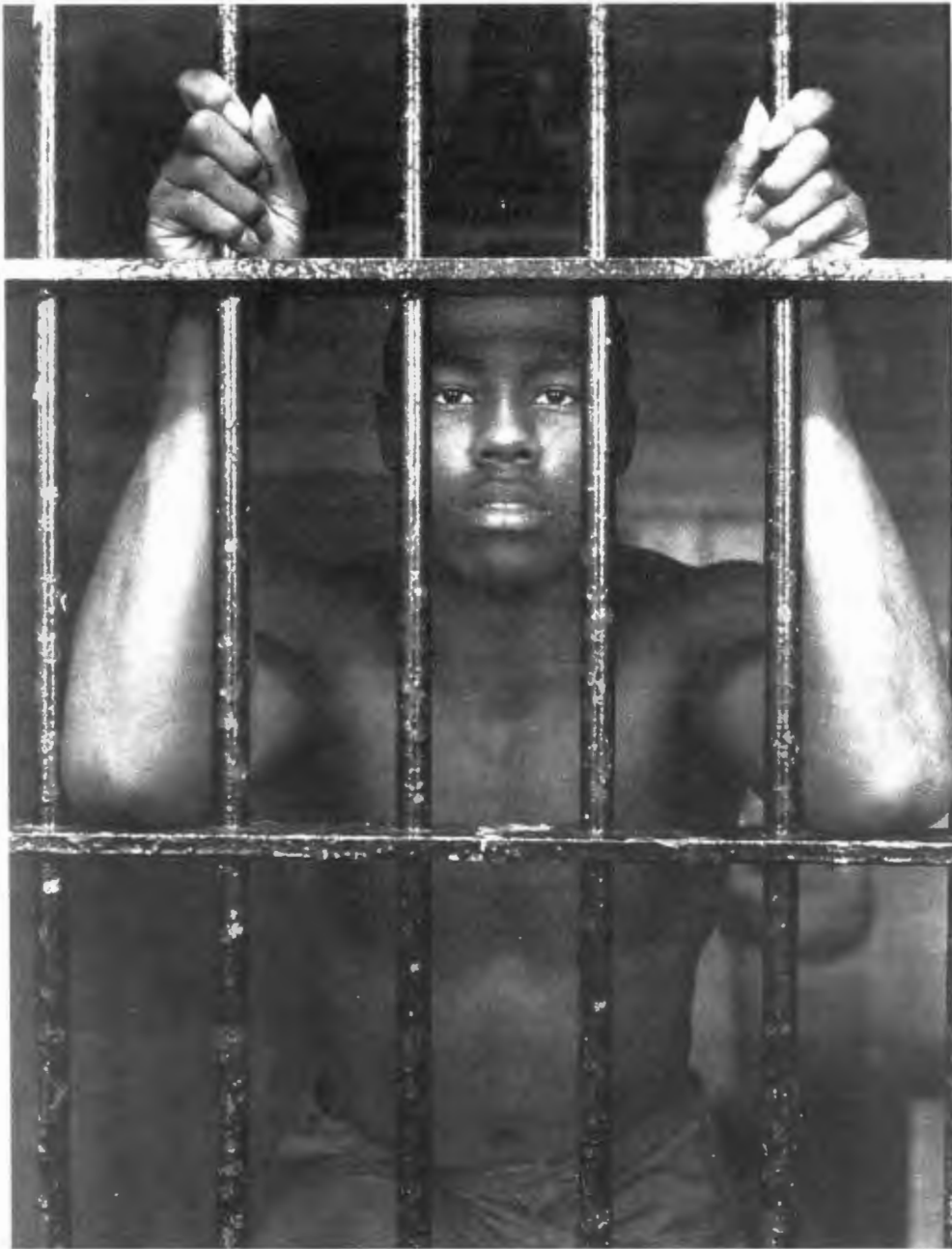
But by the mid-18th century, more enlightened attitudes, together

**The Oxford History of The Prison**, Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (eds.), Oxford University Press, 1996. ISBN 0-19-506153-5 RRP \$39.95

with the need to deal with a growing army of vagrants, saw the rise of the bridewell, or house of correction. Bridewells were distinguished by their purpose of reclamation as well as punishment, due to the influence of England’s most influential reformer, John Howard, whose 1777 book *The State of The Prisons in England And Wales* pushed prisons to centre stage at the expense of more traditional punishments. His proposals that criminals be classified according to their crimes, kept in cells and put to work under strict discipline resonate to the present day. Yet despite his best efforts (and those of Quakers William Allen and Elizabeth Fry to abolish physical punishment in favour of saving felons’ souls), change came slowly. Well into the 19th century, transportation was still seen as a cheaper alternative to building penitentiaries, leading to the strangest episode in the entire history of confinement: the convict colony.

‘Only once have convicts been sent to found the society in which they were to endure their punishment,’ writes John Hirst, the sole Australian contributor to *The Oxford History Of The Prison*. ‘... It (Botany Bay) is a society without parallel, a strange late flowering of the *ancien regime* in crime and punishment.’ And, according to his





*Gaols are hellishly expensive ... an economically rational solution might be to offer offenders half the cost of imprisoning them as an incentive to stay on the straight and narrow.*

latter part of this century has also seen a hardening of attitudes towards convicts, particularly in the United States, a country with the second highest rate of imprisonment (after Russia) in the world. It has culminated in the most radically retrograde innovations in the history of penology: the private prison, embraced in recent years by several Australian States despite the dubious morality of a system which deprives citizens of their liberty only to surrender responsibility for them to operators with a vested interest in increasing rather than reducing the prison populations; whose sole

*raison d'être*—however efficiently or humanely executed—is making money out of warehousing human beings.

All of which begs the question of what should be the *raison d'être* of imprisonment. Why prison indeed? What is the point of banging people up with their chamberpots for years on end, as Rumpole would say? Deterrence? While prison may deter some from wrong-doing, it only teaches others how to be more effective criminals. Reform? Caging transgressors is a bizarre way of retraining them for a life of law-abiding liberty. Incapacitation? True, imprisonment takes felons out of circulation for a

account, a strangely benign one. Convicts, who comprised three-quarters of the colony's original population, had legal rights denied to prisoners elsewhere; they could give evidence in court, own possessions and sue to protect them (the first civil case in New South Wales was brought against the master of a transport by two convicts whose luggage was lost *en route* to the colony!); they formed the mainstay of the colony's police force and they were not confined, leaving their 'barracks' for work and recreation. 'This is its most surprising characteristic,' says Hirst, 'that a society peopled so largely by convicts nevertheless maintained the

rule of law for all, imposed no disability on ex-convicts, and gave them the opportunity for economic success through employment of convict labour.'

**A**FTER THE ABOLITION of transportation, gaols became places apart, increasingly remote from the public mind. They continued to evolve throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, with the creation of separate institutions catering for the criminally insane, juveniles and women (usually transgressors against conventional sexual mores); and the development of low, medium and maximum security prisons. Yet the

*Above left: a nineteen-year-old inmate of Stateville Correctional Center, a prison near Joliet, Illinois. The photograph was taken at Statesville's maximum-security section by Lloyd DeGrane in the early 1990s.*

while, but you've got to let them out some time, and then what? (Although to follow this idea of protecting society to its logical conclusion, you'd never release *anyone*, even—or especially—petty offenders such as shoplifters who are demonstrably more likely to re-offend than, say, murderers.) Retribution? Once

locked up than to supervise their labours. 'The mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilisation of any country,' as Churchill famously told the House of Commons in 1910. So what does that say about us?

fascinating discursions, such as W. B. Carnochan's chapter on the writings spawned by imprisonment, including Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Dostoevsky's *Memoirs From the House of the Dead*, Victor Hugo's *The Last Day Of A Condemned Man*, Wilde's *The Ballad Of Reading Gaol* and *De Profundis*, Jacopo Timmerman's *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number*, and virtually everything Genet wrote ... prompting the thought that prison reform will ultimately be literature's loss. Even de Tocqueville's seminal *Democracy in America* was inspired by a tour of American prisons, as was Charles Dickens, who had this to say of incarceration American-style: 'I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body.'

**T**HERE IS ALSO the

problem, as this roll call of writers suggests, of imprisonment's role as a means of social control and suppression of dissent. While gaols house the worst, they have also been occupied by some of the best and brightest, including Thomas More, Bertrand Russell, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Sakharov, Ho Chi Minh, Wei Jingsheng and Aung San Suu Kyi.

Yet with all that they've got going against them, prisons are increasingly popular: 'The irony is that the less effective the prisons are in reducing crime, the higher the demand for still more imprisonment,' writes co-editor Norval Morris. Perhaps the question shouldn't so much be why prisons, as what is a feasible, effective and humane alternative? ■

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*Penology on the Tasman Peninsula, 1845: this narrow neck of land connected the Peninsula to Van Diemen's land. It was guarded by a line of dogs and illuminated at night by oil lamps.*

*Lithograph by C. Hutchins, after a sketch by Captain C.S. Hext, circa 1845. (From John Hirst's chapter 'The Australian Experience')*

you've abandoned the Talionic concept of an eye for an eye, how do you establish the equivalence of a burglary, rape or murder to a stretch in stir?

**A**ND IT'S NOT JUST PRISONERS who pay for their crimes; gaols are hellishly expensive, prompting the suspicion that an economically rational solution might be to offer offenders half the cost of imprisoning them as an incentive to stay on the straight and narrow (not that one wishes to appeal to economic rationalism on this issue, or we'll return, as the Yanks are doing, to the cheapest option of all: capital punishment). The obvious solution—making prisoners work for their keep (or, as is the practice in some Scandinavian countries, to recompense their victims) is largely ignored, simply because it's cheaper to keep crims

This and other questions remain unanswered by *The Oxford Book of Prisons*, which (as it must, given the nature of its subject) raises more problems than it resolves. While penal practices in South America, the Middle East and China are mentioned in Aryeh Neier's chapter on political prisoners, this volume by and large confines itself to the West, in particular Britain and the United States. The 13 scholars, mostly American, who contributed its 14 chapters do not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the philosophy of punishment as such, nor, despite the title, is this a history proper. The concentration camp—that most egregious example of mass imprisonment in the 20th century—is signally missing from this study.

Instead, it offers detailed analyses of various aspects of modern penology, together with some



# All the way with LTJ

**The Real Jesus. The misguided quest for the historical Jesus and the truth of the traditional Gospels.**  
Luke Timothy Johnson, Harper, San Francisco, 1996. ISBN 0 06 064177 0 RRP \$US22.00

**L**UKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON has gone to war. The dust jacket carries support by other scholars for his attack on the 'purveyors of trendy historical Jesus marketing hype', on 'the Jesus of cheap scholarship' and on 'self-promotion resting on tendentious scholarship'.

To paraphrase Evelyn Waugh, one hears the unmistakable sound of breaking glass—the detritus of the academic class at play. The targets of Johnson's criticism are about to get nuked, and for many observers, this will clearly not be before time.

So, who are Johnson's targets in this short but thought-provoking book? And do they deserve to be bulls-eyed?

Johnson attacks a group of writers who claim to discover by historical research a real Jesus, radically different from the Christ of the Gospels. Johnson is particularly exercised by those who market their products to the media, among whom he includes Australia's own Barbara Thiering, Bishop Spong and the participants in the Jesus Seminar. He includes in his polemic other writers, such as John Dominic Crossan, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Marcus Borg and Burton Mack.

Johnson's thesis is that we can never discover the real Jesus by historical research. Nevertheless, many writers, mostly teachers in university departments of religion, have made it their theological agenda to replace the authority of the church and of doctrine with that of independent historical scholars. He claims that their methodology is faulty and their scholarship slipshod.

Johnson bases his case on the acknowledged fact that, apart from a few remarks made by distant critics, our historical access to Jesus Christ is limited to the documents of the New Testament. These are written by believers to express their faith in

the Christ who has risen and is acknowledged as Lord.

The search for the historical Jesus depends on a number of hypotheses about the four canonical Gospels and apocryphal Gospels. When Matthew, Mark and Luke are compared, the most economical hypothesis to account for their similarities and differences is that Mark was written first, and that Matthew and Luke drew on Mark, while also having common access to other material. This material, which exists only in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, has been named Q.

If we accept all this, it becomes possible also to discern the ways in which Matthew and Luke edited Mark, and tempting to associate the differences of their presentation with the needs of the communities for whom they wrote. The similarities in the structure of many sayings and stories, too, suggest that before the Gospels were written, there may have been collections of the sayings and actions of Jesus. Perhaps these were moulded for the changing needs of various Christian communities.

If all these various hypotheses are accurate, it becomes theoretically possible to distinguish the sayings and actions of Jesus from those which were attributed to him by the communities. Scholars have enunciated a number of criteria by which to evaluate the sayings, such as multiple attestation or originality, but both the relevance of the criteria to any given text and the results are extremely subjective and hypothetical. At best, they yield a group of sayings

which on historical grounds can more probably be attributed to Jesus.

For that reason scholars do not use such research to correct the image of Christ in the Gospels. Johnson's targets are ready to do so because they are predisposed to reject the Gospels. They believe that initially there circulated contradictory accounts of Jesus, but that the real Jesus and his message were soon



## Sidelines

**The Jesus Papyrus**, Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona, Weidenfield & Nicolson, London, 1996. ISBN 0 297 81658 6 RRP \$34.95.

**The Hiram Key**, Christopher Knight and Robert Lomas, Century, 1996. ISBN 0 7126 8579 0 RRP \$39.95

**T**HESE BOOKS BOTH CONTAIN a discovery, a conspiracy, and a shocking truth. The truth of *The Jesus Papyrus* only 'upsets the whole theological establishment.' Thiede, a German papyrologist, has argued a first century date for a tiny fragment of papyrus of Matthew's Gospel. D'Ancona, a journalist with the *London Daily Telegraph*, sees this dating as confounding the historical scepticism of biblical scholars. The Gospels, he argues, can be treated as eyewitness accounts of Jesus' words and deeds. Well, maybe, but, again, maybe not—at least on the basis of this evidence.

*The Hiram Key* promises a greater truth which will 'shake the Christian world to its very roots'. This wind, however, blows from a different direction. The two authors, one of whom worked on guidance systems for Cruise missiles, trace the origins of Freemason rituals unerringly back to a murdered mummy from the Egypt of the 16th century BC, and forward through the Old Testament, the real Jesus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Knights Templar, the Shroud of Turin and the architectural detail of sundry chapels. The Catholic church was responsible for the conspiracy to conceal the large truth. As they say, fact is sometimes stranger than fiction. ■

—Andrew Hamilton

corrupted, and ecclesiastical authority imposed the Jesus Christ of the Gospels and Creeds. They pursue historical enquiry to reverse this process and reveal the features of the real Jesus. They prefer to the New Testament document sources like a dissected Q and the Gospel of Thomas.

Their reconstruction of Jesus usually has two stages. First, they deconstruct the Gospels and other early Christian texts, and show how the approach to Jesus Christ there has been influenced by the situation, needs and interest groups in the communities in which they arose.

Secondly, they seek a key to free Jesus from his captivity in the Gospels. They find similarities with Cynic philosophers or Jewish miracle workers, reformers or religious visionaries, and then sift the Gospels to identify Jesus as belonging to one of these groups. The face of the true Jesus thus stands revealed.

Johnson argues that this process

pels are shaped by the interests and distortions of their communities is also doomed to failure because the Gospels provide the only source of information about their communities. For the same reason, to separate strands in a scholarly construct like Q is like dissecting a ghost. The results will reflect the prejudices of the investigator. Furthermore, without knowledge of the communities, the authors, location or time of composition of the Gospels, it is difficult appropriately to subject them to psychological or sociological methods of analysis.

**J**OHNSON THEREFORE argues that these ventures produce a fictional Jesus, and not the real Jesus. The latter is the risen Lord who is known in faith in the Gospels. He accordingly finds in the claim to discover the real Jesus behind the Gospels a mixture of immoderate pretension, faulty methodology, and dominant theological prejudice.

Johnson's book is significant,

Teachers of Scripture, therefore, would do better to accept the documents of the New Testament at their face value—as documents that proclaim faith in the risen Jesus Christ, and discipleship based in obedience, service, sacrifice and love. Christ is known in faith, and is not commended by historical research, but by the lives of those who accept him as Lord. It is right to be critical of the New Testament documents, pointing out areas where they fail to do justice to the faith they proclaim. But any attempt to find a historical Jesus free from later corruption should be abandoned.

I find the negative part of Johnson's argument persuasive. The academic jungle which he defoliates is shown to house some very irregular soldiers. If his labours mean that each Christmas and Easter, reporters will no longer take theologians from our prayers to ask comment on some new and dubious theory about Jesus, we shall all be in his debt.

I was less persuaded, however, by the reach of Johnson's polemic against the use of history. It is important that faith not be unreasonable. It would be unreasonable if there were gross discontinuity between the description of Jesus' ministry in the Gospels and the actual shape of Jesus' life. Johnson himself provides arguments for this coherence, and historical analysis of the Scriptures carries on the same necessary, if secondary, detailed conversation with the texts.

Secondly, historical writing serves an important function within christian faith. It performs in contemporary western culture the function that stained glass windows, devotional lives of Christ, series of meditations on the Gospels and devotions like the Rosary or the Sacred Heart, have done in other cultures. These things have provided a powerful narrative image of Jesus Christ, which captures the imagination by setting the story of his life vividly and credibly within a recognisable world of the Gospels and against the believer's own world. As we say, Jesus Christ comes to life. Without such a hold of Jesus Christ on the imagination, faith and discipleship are relatively weak and tend to be interpreted simply in terms of



is flawed because it is impossible to go behind the Gospels. The priority of Mark's Gospel, the composition of the Gospels from small oral units, and theories about the editing of the Gospels form part of conventional wisdom, but are nonetheless hypothetical. Even when handled punctiliously by scholars like John Meier in *Jesus, The Magical Jew*, the judgment of the authenticity of particular sayings can yield no more than probable conclusions. Nor does the sum of the words attributed to Jesus by this method yield a more satisfactory picture of Jesus than might a collection of legal documents, stripped of friends' reminiscences, give of ourselves.

The effort to show that the Gos-

however, because this target is wider than a group of popular religious writers. He argues that the root of their error affects the teaching of Scripture in the church. Church scholars have generally accepted the presupposition of modernity, namely that empirical historical knowledge is privileged over other forms of knowing. Historical analysis does not nourish faith. It inhibits ministers raised on it from speaking to the deeper religious predicament of their people. Thus he is concerned to question also the preference given to historical method in scriptural exegesis. For that reason churches where it is dominant are weak, while groups that resist modernity uncritically grow in numbers and influence.



right belief or in moralising behaviour. Indeed, it is arguable that the need for such images gave birth to the Gospels in the first place.

In modern culture the creation of powerful and credible narrative images is done best by the style of historical reconstruction. The stylistic devices of shifting evidence and describing historical background through metaphors drawn from sociology or anthropology, do not guarantee the verity of the image, but they can contribute to verisimilitude. They enable believers to transcend, not traditional faith, but stale images of Jesus Christ. They present Jesus vividly against a well-imagined world of his day, and implicitly against our own world. The theological defect of the works which Johnson attacks is not that they are reconstructions, but that they supplant rather than support the Christ known in faith in the Gospels.

Thirdly, I found passionless the description of faith and discipleship which Johnson commends. So busy is he to excoriate politically motivated deconstructions of the figure of Jesus, that he seems to make faith and discipleship a matter of individual attitude and destiny. But the Gospels present in circumstantial detail the public character of Jesus' ministry, its significance for his public world, and the public

consequences and demands of following him.

We are entitled to expect, then, that scholars who speak of discipleship will instantiate its claims in

makes larger claims than its method allows; it dogmatically omits what the Gospels say about Jesus' Sonship of God and future judgment; its reconstruction is highly speculative.



terms of their public world. For they are the beneficiaries of a world in which education is increasingly privileged. It is also supported by technological developments which extend further the division between rich and poor within societies on the basis of education, and further marginalise the destitute in nations where there is no access to educational resources. What might Johnson make of discipleship in such a world is unclear. But some of the works which he criticises do recognise the challenge.

Marcus Borg's *Jesus: A new vision*, for example, has many of the defects which Johnson points out: it

But it has merits which Johnson's account lacks. It depicts powerfully the conflict between Jesus and some of the institutions of the day, presents him as a man of prayer, and conveys vividly some of the demands of discipleship in Jesus' day and our own.

Johnson, then, takes out his targets but, as once did another Johnson, he risks losing the battle for minds and hearts. I do not grieve for those attacked, but I anticipate that Johnson's own positions will be attacked massively in return.

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#### BOOKS: 4

MARGARET SIMONS

## Selective amnesia

*The Culture of Forgetting*, Robert Manne, Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 1996. ISBN 1 875847 26X RRP \$14.95

**R**OBERT MANNE BELIEVES that we live in a universe imbued with absolute and inherent moral values. Historical events hold moral meaning, and when the event is as momentous as the Holocaust, failing to grasp and heed that meaning is at best stupid, and at worst evil.

'I had assumed that we all knew that no one worth reading would dare to write about the Holocaust without humility and high seriousness, without a recognition of what was at issue here not for Jews but for

all human beings ...' he writes.

The book's title resonates with Auschwitz survivor, Primo Levi's tale of a recurring nightmare in which he is talking to his family and friends about his experiences, only to find that they do not follow him, and are indifferent to his story.

The Demidenko affair brings to life Levi's prophecy of the world's forgetting and indifference, Manne says. Demidenko's book denies not the Holocaust itself, but its meaning—its evil. The horror is, she was

rewarded for this denial due to 'a seductive fluency in her, and an almost inexplicable paralysis of moral critical intelligence or attentiveness in her elders'.

Several times Manne uses an odd but telling little phrase: 'moral tact'. *The Hand that Signed the Paper* and its author lack such tact, he claims.

It would be wrong to take this use of the word 'tact' as implying a breach of mere social consideration and nicety. For Manne, the rules of good behaviour are far more impor-

tant than that, and his criticism goes much deeper. His dismay about this book and its clutch of awards is passionate. He believes that in a truly civilised society, the book would not have been published. The Demidenko affair, he argues, is evidence of a culture that has run adrift from its moorings.

It can be hard to review a book with which one fundamentally agrees. While I suspect Manne's view of the moral moorings of our culture differs from my own, there was little in either his emotional reactions to 'The Hand' or in his arguments concerning its worth which did not echo my own views.

**I**N PARTICULAR, his reactions on first reading the book struck a chord.

I experienced the gulf between my reading of 'The Hand' and that of others as puzzling, dismaying and disorienting ... I was physically relieved when I discovered that friends responded as I had. I could feel my relations temporarily cool with those...who read it differently.

So perhaps it was good, given my sympathy for Manne's conclusions, that while I was reading this book I also happened across two pieces of Manne's journalism on topics where he and I fundamentally disagreed.

The first was on the Northern Territory's euthanasia legislation. The second was on the reasons for the revival in popularity of the works of Jane Austen.

Manne is against euthanasia for much the same reasons that he is horrified by 'The Hand'. He reveres the sanctity of human life, and is revolted by organised, state-endorsed moves to end it. However, his newspaper column arguments focused on nit-picking early drafts of the legislation. He did not attempt to argue the fundamental moral point. Rather, he proceeded with leaps from narrow points to general ones.

In the other article, Manne argued that one of the reasons for the renewed popularity of Austen's works was a growing recognition of the importance of good marriages, which was also, he said, Austen's preoccupation.

I found this argument rather staggering, given that Austen hardly ever portrays anything that could be

described as a good marriage. Her books tend to end with the heroines' marriage ceremony. The established marriages portrayed are deeply flawed.

More importantly, it seemed to me that Manne was blind to the irony and bitterness with which Austen wrote about a society in which a truly good marriage was out of the reach of most women, and yet was their only escape from lives of intense emotional and intellectual frustration.

In these two newspaper columns it seemed to me that Manne took the material that served to reinforce his opinions, and ignored or was blind to a great deal else. He did not seriously entertain points of view that conflicted with his own understanding of the 'moral moorings', even to argue against them.

It is of course unfair to use two pieces of short journalistic polemic as a basis for criticising a book which is far more considered, better argued, and better researched. However, given that my own reaction to 'The Hand' meant that I was apt to cheer Manne on as I read, the articles gave me some perspective on the book's possible faults.

Manne argues lucidly and convincingly that it is appropriate to bring historical criticism to bear on 'The Hand', and that it fails both as history and as fiction.

Yet on the fundamental philosophical moral issues—of the kind of moral universe in which we live, and the duties owed by a writer of fiction to society's moral values—Manne does not argue. He assumes.

Here Manne is at variance with Andrew Riemer, who in his earlier book on the affair entertains moral nihilism as a respectable literary position. Riemer wrote, and Manne quotes him: 'To tell the story of one of the greatest acts of genocide the world has known from the perspective of its perpetrators may perhaps have been no more than an acknowledgement that there are no absolute values.'

Manne does not attempt to argue against this point of view directly. The clash between those who believe in moral absolutes and those who do not is, after all, one of the oldest and most irresolvable conflicts

in moral philosophy.

Rather, Manne attempts to demonstrate the unacceptable consequences of nihilism by an analogy. What if a novel had been written about the murder of the Tasmanian Aborigines, from the point of view of the men who led the hunting parties? What if this novel won major awards? Would it be the case that this novel was worthy simply because it demonstrated that there was no moral view point from which the murders could be condemned? And would the descendants of the murder victims, when they protested, be accused of conducting a witchhunt, as Demidenko's critics have been?

Repeatedly, Manne assumes that fiction should serve a broad moral purpose. He criticises 'The Hand's' reviewers for never asking 'what human purpose' was served by diverting sympathy from Jewish victims to Ukrainian perpetrators.

It is not the attempt to write about the Holocaust from the point of view of the evil-doers that is wrong, Manne argues. The thing that is wrong with 'The Hand' is that the narrative sensibility is one of 'terrible indifference' and 'absolute coldness' in the face of the evil brought to life in the story.

**H**AD DOSTOEVSKY ATTEMPTED to write about the Holocaust, Manne says, we would have been brought into the presence of evil, but we would never have been in doubt about the moral ground on which the author stood. This moral stance—the fact that we share moral ground with the author—is, Manne seems to be saying, what makes Dostoevsky fine, and Demidenko vile.

Clearly this is a view out of step with contemporary literary criticism, but then I agree with Manne that contemporary literary criticism emerges from the Demidenko affair looking shabby and flabby.

More importantly, I suspect this characterisation of Dostoevsky's explorations of evil, and of the whole issue of fiction and moral responsibility, is as much an oversimplification as it is to say that Jane Austen was in favour of marriage.

So much for my reservations. In general, I found Manne's book the



most penetrating and lucid account of the Demidenko affair and its implications published so far.

Largely this is because Manne is the first author on the topic who has gone beyond personal opinion, and actually done some research. What a difference a little legwork makes.

The book is divided into two. The first part is a factual account of the genesis and publication of 'The Hand', and the controversy that followed its publication. The second part is Manne's argument about the book. The division is deceptive. Reportage and argument bleed into each other. Manne never pretends to be impartial. Nevertheless, we learn new facts of importance to the debate.

Manne has established that the text of the book as submitted to Allen and Unwin contained even more blatantly anti-Semitic material than the published version. Manne also presents convincing evidence that far from being fearful of criticism, Darville-Demidenko both sought for and expected 'serious strife' over her book, and experienced some sense of anti-climax when its initial reception was so bland.

We find out that when guests were invited to the Darville home, Helen maintained her Ukrainian persona in front of her parents, who appeared only slightly discomfited, politely changing the topic or leaving the room. Manne also provides the first cogent analysis and debunking I have seen in print of the historical accuracy of the belief that Jews were responsible for the Ukrainian famine.

To what extent should a novelist be subject to historical criticism? Manne attacks the abstract way in which this question is normally posed. The answer, he says, depends on the circumstances. We will be more critical of historical inaccuracy in a book which deals with recent events than with one set long ago.

In the case of 'The Hand', which deals with such recent and momentous history, and which offers a didactic and highly questionable history lesson, historical criticism is not only appropriate but essential.

Manne then goes on to list numerous pedantic historical errors,

before moving on to the book's central historical thesis. 'The Hand' misrepresents, not only through its characters but also in its narrative voice, the history of Ukrainian anti-Semitism, and the extent of Jewish responsibility for Bolshevism and the Ukrainian famine. Within this context, it fabricates claims about historical characters, with the claim that Ivan the Terrible's family were killed by Jews being only the most obvious and obnoxious example.

In other words, 'The Hand' distorts history in order to serve what Darville herself has claimed in interviews to be her primary purpose:



to depict war crimes trials as vengeful and wrong. Manne is devastating in describing the almost universal blandness of the initial reviews of 'The Hand'. These reviews, looked at in retrospect, are enough to destroy any shreds of faith one might have had in the critic's craft.

It is hard to believe, but not one of the early reviewers raised the issue of anti-Semitism. Not one reviewer queried what responsibility, if any, a novelist has to historical fact. Not one reviewer mentioned the inconsistencies of voice throughout the book. The reviews, with one or two exceptions, were mildly favorable, bland, blind, and devoid of any sort of intellectual rigor.

It is true that behind the scenes what might be described as the literary establishment was divided. Stephanie Dowrick at Allen and Unwin had, after some initial encounters, refused to handle Demidenko or her book. Brian Castro and Lynn Segal refused to edit it. There were other battles, and other

arguments. But as far as the public were concerned, there was scarcely a ripple on the peaceful literary pond. It was only when the book won the Miles Franklin Award and began to be read by those outside the literary world that any of what are clearly the key issues were publicly raised.

Manne argues that this shows the cultural unpreparedness of the liberal literary world to recognise and deal with such big issues. It is hard to disagree.

**M**ANNE, IN SPITE of his research, is hobbled by a vaguely contradictory stance. In his preface he claims that he has not been concerned with Demidenko-Darville's private life, nor with why she chose to turn herself into Helen Demidenko. Yet a few pages later in the prologue, he acknowledges that the question he had to begin with was 'what were the cultural forces that had drawn Helen Darville into becoming Helen Demidenko, and rewarded her for doing so?'

I suspect that the truth is that Manne's forays into Demidenko's history were limited more by time and publishing deadlines than by principle about prying into her personal history. He did not shirk the work of interviewing her past teachers and her ex-boyfriend, for example.

It seems to me that if we are to understand the most important aspects of this controversy then we do indeed need to know more about Darville's motivation and history.

In spite of all the words that have been written, in spite of Natalie Jane Prior's breach of Darville's trust, and in spite of Riemer's strangely unproductive interview with Darville, there remains a frustrating opacity about the person at the centre of this affair.

This is an honest, rigorous and closely argued book, but the question Manne acknowledges as central—what cultural forces drove Darville to reinvent herself, and rewarded her for doing so—remains unanswered. ■

**Margaret Simons** is freelance journalist. Her second novel, *The Truth Teller*, is published this month by Minerva.

# Straight Shooting

There was a time when a girl could count on finding a strong man in a detective book, if nowhere else. Even with the rise of the new-age chap, unsure of his sex, unconvinced that he wanted to be a boy at all, there were always illicit pleasures to be had in that man's world of crime, where men were men and a woman was just a nice bit of skirt, a flash of lurid colour on the edges of the novel. And certainly after the subtle delights of Jane Austen's Mr Darcy and Colonel Brandon—they of the quivering brow, the searing gaze—one cannot be blamed for wanting a man to look up to, firm of resolve, impeccable in integrity, remarkable in fortitude and who sits well on a horse.

With his anti-detective, Murray Whelan, Melbourne author Shane Maloney is therefore bound to disappoint the female reader only recently primed by Austen. Maloney has written two novels, *Stiff* and now *The Brush Off*, which are both set in Melbourne in the eighties under a Labor Government and which feature the chronically insecure and accident-prone Whelan, lowly advisor to a Victorian Labor Minister, who has just been reshuffled to the arts portfolio, along with water. Whelan's job is precarious; his economic fate hinges on his success at keeping his master out of trouble in the viperous community of the Melbourne arts. A regular sex life is for Murray but a fading memory. His wife has left him for the greener and more lucrative pastures of the femocracy in the Commonwealth Government, his custody battles have already been lost and he has been reduced to the infrequent flying visits from Canberra of his son Red. He is anxious that his access to his son will be soon be denied altogether. A phone call from his peripatetic erstwhile is always cause for alarm.

**The Brush Off, Shane Maloney,**  
Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1996.  
ISBN 1 875847 14 6 RRP \$14.95

There are strong echoes of Le Carré's poor old emasculated Smiley here. Whelan, however, is still on the prowl and not without his charms. He is shrewd, self-deprecating, and a greater mocker of the world of politics and big business, and the monsters it has produced, even though he is still captive to them. He is a street-wise and eloquent commentator on Melbourne life, both high and low.

In the opening pages of his second novel, *The Brush Off*, things seem to start well for Murray. The scene is primeval, fecund, steamy and sexy. It is Melbourne's botanical gardens late at night. After a boozy arts party, Murray finds himself in very hot pursuit of the luscious Salina, the visual arts editor of the avant-garde art magazine, *Veneer*.

A grove of bamboo reared up, the canes as thick as my arm, a kung fu forest. She lay on a bed of leaves, waiting.

So far, so good.

I threw myself on my



Right: a Newtown, Sydney, mural. Photograph by Andrew Stark

back beside her, and she straddled onto me, unaware of the effect this produced. 'Pinus radiata', I said. 'Grevillea robusta'.

Atta boy, Murray. His shirt is open, fingers tug at his belt:

'Where is it?', she gasped. 'In your hand. It's in your hand.' 'Not that, stupid. A condom.'

But he doesn't have one.

'What sort of boy did she think I was?'

En route to her apartment they come upon a rescue operation outside the National Art Gallery. A body is being recovered from the moat, it turns out to be Salina's fiance and Murray gets the brush off. The story which follows is in many ways a conventional who-done-it and did-anyone-do-it-at-all. Murray becomes the intrepid but often inept detective, tripping over further bodies, caught up in an intrigue of political and corporate corruption. Further women appear, usually formidable and scheming. Murray, the wet, is generally unable to compete with the padded shoulders, the designer suits and the mobile phones of the femocrats.

Though it will be slotted into the detective genre, *The Brush Off* is a fine piece of writing. It is good on plot, person and place and it is often very funny. Maloney is a literary writer who some will feel is wasting his time in the detective business.

He takes characters that are stereotypes (the public servant, the minister, the arty type) and depicts them with subtlety and originality and compassionate humour. He also writes a ripping yarn.

But he does not cause a girl to swoon.

Murray, the single-dad, the condomless Lothario, the small-time Labor apparatchik, is no match for Mr Darcy, though he is a decent chap. In this new world of strong women who want to be women, and men who aren't glad of it, Murray is perhaps the new man. And for this old-fashioned but recidivist feminist, he'll do just nicely. ■

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# The play that got away

**D**AVID WILLIAMSON HAS long been described as Australia's leading playwright. He has had a new play premièred by a major Australian theatre company almost annually since the early '70s.

As soon as one Williamson play finishes its run, another seems to take its place. To add to his dominance of the national repertoire, four or five revivals of earlier plays appear each year. Sobriquets like 'the Tall Poppy of the entertainment industry' and 'story-teller to the tribe' are regularly applied to him.

Williamson's output has been surpassed in the last few years however by the amazingly prolific Louis Nowra, who is presently writing new plays at the rate of up to three a year. Some (like *Cosi*) have had repeat productions and many of Nowra's earlier plays, like Williamson's, are regularly seen in revivals. One of his latest (*Miss Bosnia*) is stirring up a hornet's nest of controversy in its MTC season, its third since La Boite premièred it last July.

Louis Nowra, of course, doesn't have a mortgage on controversy: Williamson has also generated his

fair share, and not all of it from the stage. Not overjoyed by the critical response to *Emerald City* in the mid-1980s, he reportedly decked a Sydney critic in a theatre foyer. Then in 1990, there were the almost-simultaneous openings of *Siren* in Sydney and Melbourne: both the Sydney Theatre Company and a consortium of Kinsella's and Elston, Hocking and Woods, acquired the rights and scheduled openings on the same night. But an ensuing row between the two producers resulted in a compromise: the Sydney opening would go up at 8pm and the Melbourne one at 8:15! The critical response was lukewarm at best.

The following year, Williamson fired off fax messages to a number of major critics pleading for a fair go for his forthcoming *Money and Friends*, which duly opened to [well-deserved] glowing reviews ahead of a hugely successful national tour.

The QTC's advance publicity for his next play, *Brilliant Lies*, raised a few hackles (billed as it was as a comedy about sexual harassment), but last year's *Dead White Males* produced even more controversy,

culminating in Williamson being given half a page in the *Age* (complete with Spooner cartoon) to rebut that newspaper's pejorative review of the play the previous day.

But the story doesn't end there. After the opening night of the Sydney Theatre Company's production of his latest play, *Heretic*, in March this year, Williamson was so incensed by Wayne Harrison's production that he was reported to be contemplating legal action against the company.

**M**ORE CONTROVERSY was to follow. John McCallum's thoughtful and insightful review of *Heretic* in the *Australian* apparently raised the ire of veteran Canberra academic Derek Freeman, whose life inspired Williamson to write the play. Some days later, the paper printed a right-of-reply letter from Freeman. Not surprisingly, the Sydney Opera House season is practically sold out.

I couldn't resist the temptation to fly up to Sydney to see what all the fuss was about. The in-flight magazine features a full page photograph of Williamson accompanied by a

*Elizabeth Alexander and Peter Sa'ena-Brown in the Sydney Theatre Company's production of Heretic.*

breathy piece about the way 'Australia's most popular and prolific playwright continues to satirise those he sees as excessive or pretentious'. There were quotations from Williamson about 'the 'animal' in humans which ... cannot be conditioned out of us.' Sonia Voumard's article gave barely a hint of the controversy that was to follow, although the casual Qantas reader might have spotted that among the 'foibles and excesses of the middle class' that the playwright is satirising here is one of his favourite recent *bêtes noires*: political correctness.

**A** NUMBER OF Williamson's recent plays have tackled the Big Questions. *Heretic* goes straight to the question of what constitutes human nature: are we determined predominantly by our biological and genetic nature or by environmental and cultural forces? The play is set out as battle of wills and minds between the Australian anthropologist Derek Freeman and Margaret Mead, who—as a very young researcher in the Samoan islands—published 'proof' that we are culturally and environmentally constructed on the basis of her rather anecdotal evidence that there was no sexual shame or competitive jealousy among young people in that island paradise. Williamson shows how Mead's views became the dominant ideology in anthropology, leading inexorably to the love-ins and sexual liberation of the swinging sixties. He also shows the extreme difficulty experienced by Freeman (the heretic of the ironic title) in his scientific and scholarly attempts to refute Mead's widely-followed theories.

In one telling scene, Freeman's somewhat neanderthal head of department lays down the law by announcing stolidly that anthropology is the study of the social behaviour of *humans*, not an investigation of *animal* life. 'That is biology', he says; 'there is too much biology in your work.' Elsewhere, we are shown how Freeman's genetic theories could be exploited by the racist and xenophobic right. It seems clear that Williamson is on the side of the heretic, although it is not easy to tell in this production.

This is an adventurously structured play of important ideas and there are increasing signs that Williamson is breaking technical shackles in search of a new form. He hasn't altogether succeeded, but it is exciting to see him going for it. There is probably too much reliance here on third-person, past-tense narration, for example; whereas *Money and Friends* doubled one of the central characters with a narrator figure, *Heretic* has no fewer than four such figures. On the other hand, I felt that, despite the apparent championing of the heretic Freeman, the dice are less loaded in favour of one protagonist than in some recent plays (such as *Sanctuary*). Mead gets a lot of stage time and space to argue her case. Or perhaps this apparent leveling of the playing field is a result of Wayne Harrison's production...

And what a production it is! I haven't seen one in years so wildly inappropriate to and out of sympathy with the spirit and ideas of its play. I know it's a dream-play, but John Senczuk's Escher-inspired set is so lurid that it all looks like a bad acid-trip. His Samoa, for example, is represented by a purple palm-tree with bright yellow fronds against a dazzling ultramarine-blue sky. This is seen through a rhomboidal picture-frame opening at the back of Freeman's fearsomely raked study, which is in turn floored with black-and-white tiles whose irregular perspective is designed to drive us to distraction.

**T**HE PRODUCTION'S approach is a throw-back to the cartoon style of Nimrod's 1970s heyday. The whole show is tarted up with bizarre gimmickry. At the first (and indeed any) mention of the 1960s, we are treated to a microphoned chorus dressed as refugees from *Hair* singing 'This is the Dawning of the Age of Aquarius' and other hits of the era. At one point, young Freeman announces that 'We're going to London', so a pop-up cut-out caricature of a red London bus (destination: Carnaby St, where else?) parades across the back of the set. At another, Freeman turns up in a yellow submarine!

But the crowning (clowning?) glory of these opportunistic embellishments comes in young Derek's

crucial scene with his boss. He is referred to once or twice as the ape-man, so what does Harrison give us? A hapless Peter Carroll done up in garish green tartan trousers and flaming red shirt, scratching his armpits and chest while whimpering and gibbering like a camp chimpanzee. Any serious sense of the biology/anthropology debate is utterly and bewilderingly lost to the cheap laugh. Then, to complete the rout of a play of ideas, the scene ends with the Head of Department swinging across the back of the stage on a rope, clutching a bunch of bananas, en route to his refuge in the technicolor palmtree. ('Talk about telegraphing the joke', I groaned audibly. 'Shush' went the Opera House tourists.)

In the midst of this meretricious mayhem, actors like Robin Ramsay (a last-minute replacement for the ill Simon Chilvers, as old Freeman), Paul Goddard (as young Freeman), Jane Harders (as Monica) and Elizabeth Alexander (as Margaret Mead) do what they can to salvage some sense from it all. Henri Szeps is an appealing and at times amusing narrator while Peter Carroll (one of the finest actors in the profession today) is obliged to run through half a dozen campy cameos like a stylish performing seal. Not even good actors can wrest a potentially fine play from the grip of a director who manifestly has no faith in it and little sense of the subtleties of its argument.

Don't be surprised to see, some time in the future, a David Williamson play satirising the excesses and pretensions of a certain theatre director (fictitious, of course). But it's an odds-on bet it won't be premièred by the Sydney Theatre Company! ■

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*Heretic* is doing the rounds at: Glen Street Theatre, Sydney, 28 May-8 June; Canberra Theatre Centre, 12-15 June; Perth, 20 June-6 July; Bunbury, 9-10 July; Kalgoorlie, 12-13 July; Melbourne Theatre Company 18 July-24 August; Monash University's Alexander Theatre, 27 August-4 September; Geelong Performing Arts Centre 6-7 September; Gold Coast Performing Arts Centre 11-14 September.





## Express yourself

*Trainspotting* dir. Danny Boyle (independent cinemas). Mention the words 'heroin addict' and you are guaranteed a reaction of disgust or pity. The drug is so demonised that it becomes difficult to avoid thinking of users as desperate people living in depravity. By dispensing with the well used addict-as-victim formula, *Trainspotting* creates a different portrayal of users in a story that is darkly funny, and—strangely—very hip.

It's Edinburgh during the Thatcher era and a group of no-hopers, freaks and junkies are negotiating life by assiduously avoiding it. Renton (Ewan McGregor) can't see any point in choosing a vacuous lifestyle while he can have a 'sincere and truthful junk habit' instead. He tries to give up but is forced to go back to using—not because he craves the stuff but because the banality of life is too much to handle straight.

Many of his friends share similar views. Spud and Sick Boy are committed users, the latter only getting off the horse to annoy Renton by showing him how easy it is. For others, however, it's less of a game. Allison has a child to one of the guys—she's not sure which one—but it dies in the cot. Tommy, the only fit and adventurous one of the lot, starts to use after his girlfriend dumps him.

Renton detoxes amidst an hallucinated daze, and tries to make a clean break by leaving for London.

He's thwarted by his psychotically violent friend, Begbie, who tracks him down and, with Spud and Sick Boy, ropes Renton in for one more throw of the dice.

Ultimately, *Trainspotting* is not a challenging film, despite the fact it depicts heroin users as intellectuals. Its purpose is to entertain but with an unusual source for the jokes. It doesn't create martyrs. In many ways,

*Trainspotting* is like a revision of the freak show at the country fair, with the bearded lady and two-headed goat in the audience laughing at the nuclear family up on stage.

—Jon Greenaway

## Shake it baby

*Twister* dir. Jan de Bont (Greater Union). This is one hell of a way to save a marriage. Bill Harding (Bill Paxton) is an expert on tornadoes. He wants his estranged wife, Jo (Helen Hunt), to sign divorce papers so he can marry a therapist (Jami Gertz). Jo is also keen on Tornadoes. Bill catches up with her on the plains of Oklahoma as the sky is about to unleash some decent 'Twisters'. Her team has developed a machine called Dorothy to measure the movement of tornadoes, hopefully with a view to predicting their behaviour. But in order to work the machine has to be put right in the eye of the storm, not an easy task. Bill is like an old surfer who finds himself unexpectedly at the beach. He rolls up his sleeves. The therapist and the divorce papers will just have to take a back seat for the moment.

Helen Hunt's unmelodious voice is familiar from *Mad About You*, a claustrophobic sit-com set largely in a small flat. Bill Paxton has previously faced challenges to ingenuity and determination in *Apollo 13*. I suppose between the dark side of the moon and a three-room flat, the wide open spaces of Oklahoma are pretty much the half way meeting point.

But the real star is the effects department. It's wonderful to see a marriage re-ignited and the idealism of science suitably extolled against the evil men in black Range Rovers. But even better to see a herd of cows thrown across a road, a petrol tanker tossed effortlessly away and the best darn flying house since the Wicked Witch of the East copped it in *The Wizard of Oz*. Funny to see a film about the vagaries of nature in which everything works out just so perfectly.

—Michael McGirr SJ

## In cold blood

*Fargo*, dir. Joel Coen (independent cinemas). It can seem a funny thing to try and tell a 'true' story in the cinema. But with the Coen brothers doing the negotiating even a celluloid half truth makes a damn good yarn.

Tracing the actual events of a 1987 crime, *Fargo* drops you into the cold heart of a Minnesota winter, where snow has obliterated even the horizon line. We find Jerry Lundegaard (William H. Macy) so

### EUREKA STREET FILM COMPETITION

Here's one for the Cary Grant fans. If you can come up with a suitable caption for this scene from the flyboy-flick *Only Angels have wings*, you and a friend will be winging it off to the movies with \$30 in the pocket.

Many outstanding entries were received for the April competition, however the indefatigable Tony Baker of North Adelaide has taken it out again with this synopsis of *The Monster and the Girl*:

'What's left of the Labor front bench endeavours to rescue their nominal female from the dread clutches of the swinging voter.'



deep in financial trouble that he hires two thugs (Steve Buscemi and Peter Stormare) to snatch his wife, calculating that his wealthy father-in-law will cough up enough to pay off both thugs and creditors. But as quickly as a picturesque snowscape can become a howling blizzard, the scheme careers out of control. Little wonder, given that Jerry lacks leadership qualities, the father-in-law's a monster and the thugs as stupid as a bag of rocks. Chief of Police Marge Gunderson, seven months pregnant, and hot on the case, runs rings around the lot of them.

It's characterisation that carries this film. Frances McDormand, as Chief Gunderson, goes a way towards renewing one's faith in the depiction of professional women in the cinema. Macy brings restrained sadness to his role as the hapless Jerry Lundegaard. Buscemi and Stormare, as the mismatched thugs, provide startling portraits of stupidity and pathology.

Joel and Ethan Coen's script highlights the regional dialect and rhythms so faithfully that *Fargo*, primarily a story about a crime, also yields the Coen brothers' unique view of their Mid West, even including the restaurant where Ethan Coen washed dishes in his youth.



With all *Fargo's* real-life references and local accuracy one could almost believe it to be true. But it's a wise person who doesn't believe everything she sees at the movies and a wiser one still who is alive to the alternative truths to be found in the heart of fertile imaginations.

—Siobhan Jackson

## Bea bop

*Lilian's Story* dir. Jerzy Domaradzki (Hoyts and independent). *Lilian's Story* is an adaptation of the novel by Kate Grenville which, in turn, is based on the Sydney character of decades ago, Bea Miles. The film's Lilian is released from a mental institution after 40 years and experiences an awakening and the possibility of an acknowledgement and healing of memories. But the experience is 'fractured' because we learn, only gradually, what is behind Lilian's pain.

*Lilian's Story* is a finely crafted film. Polish director Jerzy Domaradzki (whose previous Australian feature was the Gary McDonald comic drama, *Struck by Lightning*) brings a particularly continental sensibility to this Sydney story. In interview, Domaradzki relishes talking about universal themes while offering quite particular insights into life in Sydney. Cinematographer Slawomir Idziak chimes with Domaradzki's style. Devotees of Kieslowski's *Veronique* and the *Three Colours* trilogy will notice similarities of lighting, filters for the past, and the lightning enhanced character portraits.

Ruth Cracknell as the older Lilian dominates the screen, overwhelming the audience as well as other characters. Her Lilian recites a great deal of Shakespeare, in a declamatory manner rather than in an interpretative style. Toni Collette is much more self-effacing as the younger Lilian. The contrasting performances of the actresses, reveal what 40 years of repression can do, crushing yet steeling determination within.

Barry Otto has a double role. He is the respectable but shockingly violent father and the brother who has retreated into meekness. John Flaus brings his impeccable Ocker accent to a nicely contrasting sketch of Lilian's former beau. The supporting cast contribute to the 'fractured' atmosphere, the different worlds of Lilian's story: the

institution, Kings Cross streets, taxis, the courts and prison, shops.

*Angel Baby*, *Cosi* and, now, *Lilian's Story*, with Australian humour and pathos, have recently confronted us with what it is to be normal. They raise questions but don't give answers.

—Peter Malone MSC

## Tell it like it is

*War Stories* dir. Gaylene Preston and *Hoop Dreams* dir. Steve James (independent). Social documentary does not usually make a big impact in the cinemas. The odd piece might get a run during an obscure film festival before it ends up on the ABC at 10:30 on a Saturday night. However two recent efforts deserve better.

*War Stories* features seven New Zealand women whose stories of lovers and husbands, of death, dishonour and sacrifice, and of extraordinary deeds, effortlessly pour out onto the screen. Each of the women seem to have the disarming air of someone who is not quite sure that these things really did happen to them. A favourite of mine was Auntie Jean, a Maori woman who was both washerwoman and camp mother at a station through which 46,000 American soldiers passed. With a backbone the size of an overgrown brontosaurus and an unselfconscious sense of humour, she's easy to imagine as the matriarch of a camp of homeless young men.

Neva lost two fiancés to the war, was sent overseas as an Army servicewoman, and was lucky to avoid being raped in Palestine. When she returned, her neighbours all thought she had been on little more than an extended holiday. The history of war extends well behind the front lines.

Inner city Chicago in the '90s is a long way from wartime New Zealand, but the two young basketball heroes, who share four years of their teenage lives with the film-makers, display the intensity of people who have been forced to struggle. Arthur Agee and William Gates both dream of playing in the NBA. Their lives cross at St Joseph's College, the former school of Isiah Thomas. While William is an instant star, Arthur



must leave during his first year because his parents can no longer pay the balance of his fees left after his partial scholarship. From then on, their basketball careers take different paths.

William, a shy and retiring soul, must carry the expectations of those around him—particularly his family—that he is destined for great things. Self-conscious off the court, he plays with tremendous confidence on it until injury dents his self-assurance. Arthur constantly has to fight his lack of discipline and fractured family life. His father leaves home at one stage when his drug habit gets out of control. Not blessed with the natural talents of William Gates, he makes up for it with a burning desire to be like his idol, Isiah.

The documentary's mark of quality is the way it pulls back the curtain of hype. Talented black kids from the ghettos are dragooned onto the production line from the age of 12 and 13 and filled with dreams of success. The vast majority don't make it and are cast aside like empty Gatorade bottles.

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Both *War Stories* and *Hoop Dreams* take care with their subject matter. By doing so, they reveal the greater depths of human experience.

—Jon Greenaway

## Broad church

*Primal Fear*, dir. This a film to please the punters: a little murder, a little intrigue, a little courtroom drama, a little sexual tension, add to this a couple of chase scenes, corrupt government officials, lawyers worrying about their moral fibre—that's the irony bit, some thinly veiled digs at the Catholic church, the psychiatric profession and the legal system, a gasping twist at the end and there you have it—a great 'formula' for a movie.

It would have looked great on paper and, to be fair, it's not a disaster on screen either.

Richard Gere plays Martin Vail, a publicity hungry attorney who defends Aaron Stampler (Edward Norton) on the charge of murdering the much loved Bishop of Chicago. Janet Venables (Laura Linley) is Vail's ex-lover and coincidentally State Prosecutor in the case.

Norton gives a fine performance as the simple Kentucky altar boy destined to hang for the murder. Richard Gere is—well—Richard Gere, and Laura Linley, an actor growing in stature with each performance, gives a nicely measured performance.

*Primal Fear* is not, as some have suggested, anti-Catholic. However, its one-dimensional use of sexuality and child abuse in the clergy as the back drop for a courtroom-murder mystery-drama, is a bit insensitive. Especially at a time when these issues are causing great pain to many people.

—Nick Grace

## Othello, again

*Othello*, dir. Oliver Parker (Hoyts). A nip here, a mighty tuck there, and cast Laurence Fishburne as the Moor: Oliver Parker's debut version of *Othello* has enough glamour to render entirely credible the black

general's hold over one court plus a garrison full of wily, treacherous Venetians. It's a compelling film. Shakespeare it ain't, quite (Parker pares the play of half its words), but the surgery makes this a more plau-



Laurence Fishburne as the Moor.

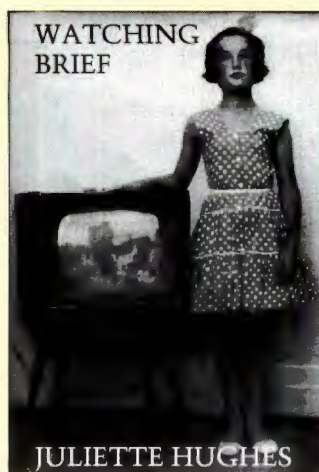
sible version than its cinematic predecessors. It's less troublesome. The intractable bits have been lobotomised away. Fishburne's erotic Othello is indeed a man more sinned against than sinning. His Desdemona (Irene Jacob, Krzysztof Kieślowski's star of *Three Colours, Red*) is strong and loving (but also so smart that you rather wonder why she hangs around after the willow scene).

The films multi-accented cast gives a depth to the tale—you actually believe in the Duke (Gabriele Ferzetti) and in Brabantio, the betrayed father (Pierre Vanek). Their performances have a dimension of puzzlement that Shakespeare might have coveted in his English cast. Shooting in the Castle of Bracciano, north of Rome, Parker uses the lavish location sparingly, and lets the words (the ones left in) work.

And then there is Kenneth Branagh—the best Iago I will live to see. Branagh makes his mouth a black cavern that spills suave blandishment one second and hell the next. His exchanges with the ludicrous Roderigo ('Put money in thy purse') are electric and absurd—this is cranky, unaccommodatable great art. Branagh is well met in his wife: Anna Patrick's Emilia (she looks like Cher, and has an English tongue to match) gives focus to the rush and rhetoric of the final act.

—Morag Fraser





## Hyping reality

**I**T'S A COMMON THING FOR ACTORS in soap operas to be accosted in the street or shops by members of their audience, who address them unselfconsciously as the characters they portray. It can be hard for the baddies—they are frequently taken to task for their fictional misdeeds.

The line between reality and illusion is getting thinner these days. Words like truth and fiction collapse into each other when we rely on virtual experience. And television, the virtual experience we have all had over the last forty years, creeps into your mind saying, I am truth, you have seen it with your own two eyes. But what are we seeing?

There are people who spend a great deal of their time subscribing to the internet newsgroup alt.tv.x-files, where fans of the show debate over its themes and symbols and general connectedness to the business of life as read by conspiracy theorists. They note throwaway lines and in-jokes, argue with each other over what was the best episode and swoon over the stars, Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny. There is another newsgroup, however, for people who find that level of enthusiasm too low. These are the devotees of alt.tv.x-files.creative. And the key word here is *creative*.

The posters to this group are keen to display their skills as alternative scriptwriters, so much so that the rules of the group demand a total abrogation of potential copyright should the writers of the actual show inadvertently use one of the group's ideas. But most of them aren't here to sharpen their literary skills, although some are obviously better than others: no, the biggest subgroup here is known as 'relationshipers'. It isn't enough for them to swoon over Anderson and Duchovny: *they* love Scully and Mulder, the two characters in the show. There is a great deal of cyberspace taken up with their frenzied imaginings of Scully and Mulder getting it together, although there is a fervent sub-subgroup that constructs steamy encounters between Mulder and his (male) boss, Skinner.

The line between life and art gets smudgier and wavier when we think of the 'real' life we see on the flickering box in the corner of the room, and yet the quest for hardhitting 'fact' has never been more publicised.

'Reality' gets a sort of cross-fertilisation from shows like *Mercury* and *Frontline*: both programs work hard to alert the viewer to the constructs that are placed on the news. Viewers become cannier, perhaps, as behind the scenes at the news desk is dramatised for them. *Frontline* was good for showing those who didn't already know, how their dose of

reality is packaged, presented and often distorted. *Mercury's* agenda is, I suspect, a little more focused, its *roman à clef* aspect even more pronounced.

Do the politicians, spin doctors and media bandit-barons care about the picture that is made of them? Not as much as they ought, I think.

It would be messy for a Victorian politician, say, to sue the producers of *Mercury*: so many implications to be spelled out—better to let the program languish among the chardonnay-drinking clients of the single-figure-rating ABC than to splash a juicy and tricky defamation case all over the tabloids for the swinging voters to see. The educational effect of both programs is maybe needed more where they will never be seen: on the commercial channels, where the mix of fact and hype is so potent.

The crisis over *Today Tonight's* temporary pulling of its investigation into Victorian Premier Jeffrey Kennett's business contacts was one example of how things can go wrong with a commercial current affairs scoop. Hardworking producers and journalists were aghast as the clichéd kibosh was applied (you'd think they'd never seen the first episode of *Mercury*, the way the poor dears carried on). A rather brave gesture was made; Helen Wellings and Jill Singer were instructed by the executive producer, Warren Wilton, to *tell the truth*: that 'senior management' were responsible for the ban, not the anodyne 'legal advice'. When the program was run the next day, the scoop was lost: all the newspapers in the state had run the story, probably using files they'd been sitting on for ages, *à la Mercury*. It was of course unthinkable that the six stories pillorying the Paxton family would have been pulled by Channel Nine senior management on the grounds of good taste, truth or even plain decency.

**A**ND WHILE ONE IS THINKING of decency, something was all wrong about the Ruby Wax documentary on Imelda Marcos. Interviewing Marcos was like shooting fish in a barrel—she was always going to betray her monumental narcissism and moral imbecility, even if the interviewer were benign. The only surprise in the program for me came when I realised I wasn't enjoying this at all. I was embarrassed by Wax's posturings and deceptions, her glitzy all-girls-together bonhomie that conned that silly, horrible old woman into thinking that she had found a friend.

To treat Imelda Marcos as a postmodern farce might please the cynics, but I'm afraid I couldn't abide a program that had me almost sympathising with one of the worst people on the planet. ■

**Juliette Hughes** is a freelance writer and reviewer.





## Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 44, June 1996

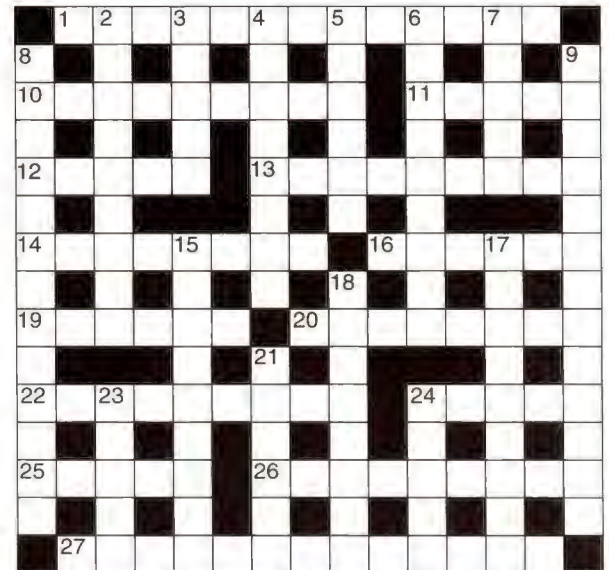
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

### ACROSS

- 1 Others mixed up with North and you, say, get angry about the Eureka flag. (8,5)
- 10 Hydrogen reactors reshaped for chamber or, possibly, symphony. (9)
- 11 Month English leader comes to NSW town. (5)
- 12 The courage of Jules Verne, perhaps. (5)
- 13 Chief I initially teach every conceivable trick about building designer. (9)
- 14 Is 'cat' CIA code for the pain of 12-across? (8)
- 16 & 18-down The shortest day, under 1-across, occurs in the season when the sun may shine on ice on the street. (6,8)
- 19 Stairs which do not include lifts, to start with, can cause conflicts. (6)
- 20 New Guinea scores unusual conference. (8)
- 22 Weird radio rats provide more heat than light. (9)
- 24 Many an irritation can bring about a fall. (5)
- 25 Eve gives the OK. So why not call her up?. (5)
- 26 Defying fate or Karma, Erin unexpectedly called on a performer of special rites to break the drought. (9)
- 27 You may speak of being homogeneous, yet the Eastern region suffers from the opposite—a total unrelatedness. (13)

### DOWN

- 2 Happening to pass the RSPCA place, I asked the officer in command to call about dog. (9)
- 3 Initial topic he gave me. (5)
- 4 Enchanted doorway leads to that garden. (8)
- 5 Re-create 'Sister Ace' making it a shade different from 'Sister Act'. (6)
- 6 Showing delight about Jo icing the birthday cake. (9)
- 7 Because evil came to the Common Era, we have suffered from that time on. (5)
- 8 Questions raised in the assembly may be for Rod to step in and remove to the other chamber. (6,2,5)
- 9 See poor Ern, awash with tears, in this dry and desert land. (7,6)
- 15 Private conversation about a repetition of notes, perhaps. (4-1-4)
- 17 Where there is a trading opportunity for stock, possibly. (3,6)
- 18 See 16 across.
- 21 Australian slang version I have waited for so long. (6)
- 23 Bird of peace about right for moving the crowd. (5)
- 24 English hairdressing item found in old English valley. (5)



### Solution to Crossword no. 43, May 1996



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