

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The Branch Conference is over for 1997. It was again a remarkably successful affair which is due to the hard work of the Conference Committee led ably by the Convenor Daphne Cross and supported by Marian Maughan as the Conference Project Officer.

The Keynote Speaker, Dr Elizabeth Constable introduced us to some interesting and insightful examples of ethical dilemmas within the Western Australian Parliament. What was particularly significant for me, was the comment she made in relation to the news media reporting of important controversial and ethical issues from the Western Australian Parliament. It was apparent from her comment that it is as difficult for her, to ensure that the media report accurately, or indeed report at all, on events of public importance. Significantly, the media appears to have lost any vestige of comprehensive and fair reporting and is left presenting quick grabs that titillate, entertain and ensure that the commercial wheels of the media is their upper most consideration.

The media have, without a doubt, been shapers of public opinion and views. It behoves most of us to be cautious in how we view, listen to and read details reported within our media. It is very easy to get a distorted impression and base behaviours and opinions on that distorted impression. Social issues have received considerable press in recent times. The shock, horror response to one of our major social problems, substance abuse, has over the last couple of weeks dominated most media outlets. The issue of substance abuse has been something all of us in our profession have been well aware of for considerably longer than the last two weeks. Unfortunately, the issues have become politically tainted and politicians have postured principally around their own entrenched ideologies, rather than looking at the substance abuse problem in its present totality.

The differences of views about whether substance abuse, and in particular narcotics abuse, can be policed and thereby defeated, as opposed to decriminalised, tolerated and regulated are in evidence. Unfortunately, as is too frequently the case, those who know most about drug addiction, addicts, and the appalling social and human chaos and suffering are never involved in the real debate or the real decision making.

We certainly face difficult times, particularly in relation to our young people. Unfortunately, we don't appear to be tackling the

real underpinning issues that create the visible and horrifying outcomes of death from drug abuse, or death from suicide that is rising within our community. Until we are able to work together in a common sense approach to provide a community that for all of us is compassionate, fair and whose privileges are accessible to all, we will not reduce the pain for those who are either less well of, or who are concerned about their futures to the point of self destructive behaviour.

While the political posturing and dithering continues, so does the suffering and pain of those who are caught up in the web of drug abuse.

BRIAN WOOLLER

EXCHANGE OPPORTUNITY HUNTER VALLEY

Have you ever wanted to gain professional experience of working in another State but don't want to commit yourself to a permanent move? I am interested in doing exactly that and am looking into the possibility of arranging a work exchange. I am employed by Hunter Area Health Service as a Senior Social Worker in a Community Health Centre.

The workload is extremely varied and includes a wide range of casework, groupwork and some community development opportunities. The generalist team is very supportive and is comprised of nursing and allied health workers. Maitland is the focus of the Hunter Valley being a half hour's drive to the coast at Newcastle or the vineyards of Pokolbin, and just an hour and a half from Sydney.

If anyone is interested in discussing this further please contact Kathryn by phone on (02) 4933.8880 or email at phelan@hunterlink.net.au. Ideally an exchange of 6 to 10 months duration during 1998 would be my goal.

I look forward to your responses.

Immigration and multiculturalism in Australia

by Prof Jayasuriya

It is indeed a pleasure and a surprise to be asked to launch this book *Immigration and Multiculturalism in Australia* by Professor Jayasuriya. A surprise because my links with the University of Western Australia and Laki, which go back many years, are infrequent now.

A pleasure because of my regard for Laki as an independent thinker in this field, and because the issue of immigration and multiculturalism have been with me for all my life as a priest (38 years) and are still with me. My early years - St Brigid's, Highgate, Catholic Care - a constant involvement. Even now as Chairman of Australian Bishops' Committee for Migrants and Refugees.

We belong to a select group of nations with similar concerns - US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. It may be a growing list as old nations come to terms with recent migration. Europe - its history of migration waves. Resistance in the names of economics but really in the name of protecting the identity between nation and ethnicity. Australia's history has been different from the beginning - even British colonialism meant an Aboriginal nation and a British nation brought together - not happily, not even now - but unique.

This book is small but dense. it covers a range of very complex issues that help form policy - immigration policy, education, social security, citizenship, economics, among others. In so far as it offers a profound critique of accepted attitudes it performs a valuable service.

The book challenges "liberal multiculturalism", on the politics of universalism, based on "individual rights", as if ethnic structures somehow fitted easily into a modern egalitarian society based on respect for the rights of the individual. This, it claims, has been the expressed stance of Liberal and Labour Governments for the past 35 years - a desire to achieve overall uniformity of common sentiments and values.

We are asked to think more in terms of "corporate multiculturalism" and "structured pluralism" which acknowledges the emergence of specific ethnic structures or enclaves and a degree of conflict in achieving national cohesion and national identity. The politics of universalism become the politics of difference.

We are asked to look at the relationship between ethnicity and the sense of identity. Identity is established not simply by the ethnic group one belongs to but by negotiation with the surround-

ing complex cultural context in which an ethnic group exists.

The central position that Australia is a pluralistic rather than plural society is examined. Plural is not dynamic enough. Pluralism implies a process whereby ethnic groups become absorbed into the Australian ethos while preserving a separate identity. One historical example of this process is the way the Irish moved from the fringe to become part of and shaped the Australian ethos or identity, while retaining much that was specific to the group - its religion, customs, songs etc.

One expects that this dynamic process will continue with the increasing absorption of Australian society of people from Asian countries and cultures. Pluralism becomes a determinant of social philosophy and policy in a democratic society. This is an optimistic view - and the book is optimistic although it also looks at the difficult issues of the present time.

Racism is examined and its new expressions. Not based now on the expressed or implied racial superiority of the dominant group in possession over other racial groups, but on the concept of nationhood - or the nation, whereby cultural uniqueness becomes the reason for discrimination. It is a less obvious form of racism, but the cultural superiority is nevertheless implicit.

The moral dimensions of immigration policy are faced:

- has a nation the right to control who comes and who goes?
- what is Australia's ideal population?
- is immigration necessary to stop Australia's population from falling or from ageing?
- whose interests are to be served in immigration policy?
- is immigration to be based on economics, or does justice extend beyond our boundaries?

In discussing national identity, the author holds that migration continues to influence it and to shape it while maintaining its general character. It is less British, more open to influences from the United States and Asia, and with the explosion of worldwide communications, will continue to change, but no matter what the changes, it is still a national identity, uniquely Australian.

The author points to the "boxing Kangaroo" as an image of the flourishing and strident Australian nationalism, a characteristic that is now visible in all aspects of social life - "the arts, politics, media, education, industry and business". And dare I say that the same image befits the Author as well!

I recommend this book to serious students of pluralistic and multicultural Australia, and I believe its contents will, if they have not already done so, clarify the nature of our modern society and influence both immigration and domestic policy for the benefit of us all.

I have great pleasure in congratulating Laki on a fine achievement and in formally launching this book.

MOST REV. BARRY J. HICKEY
ARCHBISHOP OF PERTH

What we don't need is a great big melting pot

Laki Jayasuriya's advice for Australians to achieve a multicultural society is to 'forget the melting pot!'

Emeritus Professor Jayasuriya has just published a volume of selected essays, entitled *Immigration and Multiculturalism in Australia*, through the School of Social Work and Social Administration.

It aims to stimulate academic and public debate on ways Australia could become a more tolerant society. *'I think there has been an expectation by the public that multiculturalism means that all the different cultures will be added to the big melting pot and, eventually, all those differences will disappear. Well, it's time to forget the melting pot because that's not what it's about',* said Professor Jayasuriya.

'The White Australia policy was a legacy of Federation. Now, as we move towards the centenary of Federation in this country, there is a new scenario. Pluralism and diversity: that is our challenge for this next century.'

Professor Jayasuriya said he had used the theory of citizenship in his essays to give tangible expression to the pluralism and diversity of our society. *'A commitment by these people (migrants) to the democratic values of an egalitarian society is what we should be looking for; a solidarity through a common political notion rather than a common culture,'* he said.

'We will become a more tolerant society by acknowledging cultural differences instead of constantly denying them. The only common culture should be a civic culture and, in Australia, that is a commitment to liberal democratic values, which makes us distinct in this (Indian Ocean) region,' he said.

Professor Jayasuriya's book was launched by the Catholic Archbishop of Perth, the Rev Barry Hickey. *'In 1972, one of the first theses I examined was Barry Hickey's history of Catholics in WA. I was delighted that he should launch my book because he has had a continuing commitment to migrant reforms in WA for many years,'* he said.

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2nd Australian Cystic Fibrosis Conference, "The Cost of Caring", Burswood Convention Centre, Perth

Enquiries: Ph: (02) 9878 5250 Fax: (02) 9878 5058
A special interest meeting for social workers will be held on Sunday 16 November.

Self management, compliance and parent education issues.
Transplants, coping with change, sexuality and fertility,
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between CF teams.

Letters

Mr Mario D'Orazio
Producer, Today Tonight, Channel 7

Dear Mr D'Orazio

I refer to the story you screened on Monday, 6 August 1997 on Today Tonight about crime in the suburb of Maylands, in particular a couple's attempt to deal with some youths that were allegedly causing a nuisance outside their shop. It is useful to highlight issues of social concern on your program, but the way in which you did this causes our Association some concern.

The portrayal and reinforcement of stereotypes about youth in general, and Aboriginal youth in particular, does nothing to solve the problem. Portraying young people in such a negative light only adds to the already worrying prejudice about them and about Aboriginal young people, which further marginalises and alienates them.

While it may be said that viewers have the right to know what is happening in the community, your presentation of the issue does not put their behaviour in any meaningful context. Young people who have suffered considerable disadvantage are not currently stakeholders in the community as we know it, and hence their is little or no reason for them to conform to social norms. "When you've got nothing, you've got nothing to lose", is the comment often made.

For the young people in question having a claim to fame by appearing on your program, may also help entrench a self image as a public enemy and create for them unsatisfactory positive reinforcement.

The other point of concern, is the portrayal of the police as the only solution to social problems. The responsibility of the police is principally law enforcement. If the law has been broken, then it is the responsibility of the police to act in accordance with the appropriate legislation. From your story it seemed dubious that the behaviour of the young people was anything more than a form of socially unacceptable behaviour. This is something that the police are not in a position to deal effectively with apart from through some informal process.

A mediated response often produces far better outcomes than a punishment or law enforcement response. There are people in our community who are trained to do this, among them social workers, and other human service workers. Unfortunately there is a dearth of overall community services to assist people to resolve matters of conflict and persecution.

In short we need to invest in more appropriate ways of ensuring that issues of conflict are dealt with in a far more

constructive and mediated manner. Policing is not the only answer.

The media itself has a profound level of power and sensation-alised biased reporting often inflames socially sensitive situations. What you present does stick and does influence public opinion. It is important the media consider the implications of some of the stories it presents to the community, especially in relation to the portrayal of disadvantaged, disenfranchised and marginalised groups.

To constantly portray the negative side, is a bias and is often counterproductive and reinforces the unacceptable stereotypes which can lead quite easily to unhealthy scapegoating. The context needs to be portrayed and in a case such as this alternative approaches to the problem other than the police, explored.

Yours sincerely

Brian Wooller
8 August 1997

The Editor
The West Australian

Dear Sir

It was somewhat concerning to hear that Sir Ronald Wilson's period as Chairman of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission was not renewed by Government.

Sir Ronald Wilson is, without a doubt a truly great West Australian. Without his commitment, zeal, fair mindedness and balance between issues of morality and the law, many of the gains the Human Rights Commission has made in Australia, would not have been achieved.

Sir Ronald, no matter what decision politicians make based on their particular political imperatives, we salute you.

Yours sincerely

Brian Wooller
6 August 1997

Mr Brian Wooller
Branch President

Dear Mr Wooller

It was a great pleasure to officially open the Australian Associations of Social Workers (WA) Annual Conference yesterday. The very basis of a social worker's profession is a laudable desire to assist others in crisis. Sadly society in the 90s has many ills which lead to family trauma, breakdown and dysfunction. Without doubt our social dilemma would be much larger were it not for the wonderful work carried out by our communities social workers.

Marlena and I were please to notice the Association's 50th Anniversary quilt which was hanging behind the stage. The quilt is a great testament to the diversity of the social work profession, and describes the many facets of their service to society.

Thank you for the opportunity to open your important conference, and for the lovely gift of flowers to Marlena. Would you please extend our best wishes to your Association's members.

With warm regards.

Yours sincerely

Michael Jeffery, Governor
20 August 1997

His Excellency, Major General Michael Jeffery AC MC
Governor of Western Australia

Your Excellency

Thank you for your very kind words following your attendance to open the West Australian Branch Conference of the Australian Association of Social Workers.

It was very pleasing for us that you not only opened the Conference but remained for the Keynote Address given by Dr Elizabeth Constable.

You comment in your letter that social workers do have a difficult job of work to do is appreciated. It is times like the State Conference, where they are able to come together to share their ideas and to gather strength from one another to go back into the workplace and continue the important and difficult job that has to be done.

Thank you once again for agreeing to open our Conference.

Yours sincerely

Brian Wooller
25 August 1997

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