



THE WEST AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL WORKER

President's Report

When I contemplated nominating for Branch President, even though I have been on the Committee of Management for a number of years, I don't think I really comprehended all the responsibilities and privileges that went with the position. Responsibilities are numerous - hardly a day goes by that someone doesn't contact me as Branch President for assistance or information.

And of course, the "Liz calls" always marks the swinging into action of some significant AASW activity or response. Without Liz Retamal, the Branch's executive officer, the WA Branch would not be able to be as proactive and accurate in its services to members as it is. We are indeed lucky to have Liz!

But enough about responsibilities. What about the privileges? One of the best of the privileges is having the opportunity to write the bi-monthly President's Report for the newsletter. I have the opportunity, cart blanche, well almost cart blanche, to raise professional issues that impact on our clients, social work practice or the profession.

As I look around me, I am aware that there are a number of significant and very public issues that have come to my attention (and I'm sure yours) recently. One just has to follow the media to see issues surfacing that potentially have enormous impact on our clients and on ourselves as social work practitioners.

For example, daily in the news are trickles of information about the forthcoming GST and its implementation. Will this be taxed, will that be GST free? Yes to tampax, no to parts of chicken! The list goes on and on.

But what's happening to any debate about the equity of implementation? Where is the debate about the impact of the GST on our society's most vulnerable. Certainly overseas experience indicates that a GST type tax impacts more significantly on low income people, people who in the past had income below the tax threshold and thus paid no real tax as such.

We also know that low income people spend a greater proportion of their income on goods (and services) than other income brackets and thus will bear a greater tax burden, proportionally.

We also hear in the news about denominational employment agencies funded by the Federal government requiring as an essential selection criteria the need for applicants to subscribe to a particular religious ethos. There is no doubt that the values espoused by that ethos would be seen by many as a positive moral approach. The question must be asked, however, is it equitable to exclude as potential employees in the funded programs, people with different religious and ethnic backgrounds?

Retaining the right to employ individuals from a particular religious background to carry out the religious work of that religious group is appropriate and necessary. As social work professionals, though, we must question the appropriateness of this being an essential requirement for carrying out the secular work of the Federal government by its funded agencies.

The final issue that I wish to draw to your attention this month is the issue of mandatory sentencing as it relates to youth in our society. Again, as a profession, we would be clear about a desire to see the crime rate reduced. However, is there not an obligation to make sure that any unintended consequences of such legislation are addressed?

If there is evidence, and certainly there is increasing concern that the evidence exists, if there is this evidence to suggest that mandatory sentencing places young people at risk and this risk appears to be disproportionately impacting on Aboriginal youth in particular, is there not an urgent obligation to review and rethink these laws?

All of these issues and more speak very clearly to us as social work professionals. Regardless of where we work, it is essential that advocacy and social justice issues are of primary importance for us as a profession and as individual social workers. I would urge you to make your voice known to our political decision makers about these issues.

We can't, and shouldn't, wait for some one else to do it for us. We owe it to our clients and to ourselves!

An online version of this newsletter can be found at
<http://westausaasw.highway1.com.au/>

In closing, I would like to welcome Francis Lynch and Roxanne Garven to the Committee of Management. They have been seconded to fill vacancies on the Committee. We welcome them and look forward to their contribution to the Branch.

I also draw to your attention to the commencement of the first round of student placements for the year. I commend those of you who have offered to be a placement supervisor. Students are the future of our profession. By providing a placement, members are contributing to that future. And don't forget, being a social work placement supervisor also accrues CPE points!! (As does being on the COM!) If you're not offering a social work student placement for this semester, why not consider it for the next round?

BARBARA MEDDIN

HOWARD'S NEW PATERNALISM BY KANISHKA JAYASURIYA

John Howard's idea of a social coalition seems to be in the same ideological league as that of George Bush Jnr's slogan of compassionate conservatism. The spin placed on this erstwhile approach to social policy is that it represents a shift towards a more caring society. But rather than the emergence of a caring society, compassionate conservatism reflects the emergence of a new and harsh paternalism garbed in the language of reciprocity.

If you look at the policies that Bush Jnr has implemented in Texas it becomes clear that compassionate conservatism is about redrawing a range of social policies from welfare to education in a harsher and a seemingly more benevolent paternalistic mode. The emblematic policies of this new benevolent paternalism can be found in the emphasis on the educational testing of 'basics', linking welfare to punitive sets of reciprocal obligations, and strong emphasis on a retributive penal system. There is nothing original about Howard social policy ideas: they are imitations of recent American policies whether it be in the work-for-the-dole scheme, Abbot's strident moralising on the lack of a work culture, Kemp's constant emphasis on literacy testing or even Howard's drug policy.

Indeed, in the United States, for example, in settings such as George Bush Jnr's Texas, this new paternalism in social policy has gone hand in hand with a high rate of penal

incarceration. In fact, one of the important elements of these kinds of paternalistic social policies is the blurring of the boundary between penal and social policy. In some instances, as with the work-for-the-dole scheme there is little to distinguish these programs from community service orders. With the much touted programs, such zero tolerance, social problems and policies are effectively criminalised and often the targets of these programs are minority groups such as Aboriginal people.

Of course there are direct political and electoral benefits of the new paternalism. Clearly much of the recent social policy experiments of the Howard Government are intended to reduce and roll back welfare programs. Much of it is squarely aimed at deterring welfare recipients and thereby cutting the number of people on the welfare rolls. Which brings us to the real issue: What exactly are these notions of compassionate conservatism and social coalition about?

This new paternalism of John Howard represents a distinctive neo-conservative response to social policy. It reflects the fact that the neo-conservatives are turning to social policy as the next phase of their political agenda. A constant refrain of these policies often phrased in hectoring moralistic style is the denunciation of the culture of welfare dependency. Witness John Anderson's recent tirade against Aboriginal welfare.

What is deeply disturbing about this is that there is a constant emphasis on the personal failure of welfare recipients rather than giving any consideration to the systemic social and political factors such as technological change and effects of globalisation that lead people to claim welfare benefits. In this respect some of Howard's social policy thinking bears an uncanny resemblance to the harsh Christian ethos that underpinned the poor law regime of the 19th century. It is of course curious that the strident moral tone adopted by the Howard government is not

directed toward private schools, health insurance funds or even the free to air television stations, all of which have been fattened by large quantities of government pork.

More significantly, the recent neo-conservative shift in social policy signals a desire to redefine the grounds of membership of the political community. It aims to radically reshape notions of social policy and citizenship in the mould of the new paternalism of obligations, duties and responsi-



INTRODUCTION TO COGNITIVE THERAPY

Next course for mental health professionals begins May 2000.

For information about registration phone now
08 9389 5155

bilities—the defining features of the new paternalism. It seeks to redefine access to benefits in terms of fulfilling certain specific obligations rather than as rights citizens possess by virtue of membership in the political community. It is a deeply disturbing and illiberal understanding of social policy that infringes the basic right to equal treatment by all citizens. It is an issue for anyone concerned with the health of our liberal democracy.

This emphasis on social issues does mark some thing of a change from the issues of economic reform that dominated neo-conservatives through the last decade. Increasingly, neo-conservatives are becoming anxious about problems of social order. A good barometer of this concern is the work of Fukuyama. The attraction of Fukuyama for conservatives is explained by the fact that he puts his ideas in biteable bits that can be easily digested by conservative politicians and commentators alike. Fukuyama first gained prominence after he triumphantly announced the 'end of history'. But Fukuyama has since become increasingly worried. In a later book he expounded the virtues of social trust, and in a recently published book called the Great Disruption he has become more anxious about social order.

Fukuyama now exhibits a familiar range of conservative paranoia: multiculturalism, the breakdown of law and order, and family decline. In short, the clear message he wishes to transmit is that too much freedom and liberalism may disrupt the operation of the economy.

And this gets to the heart of the new paternalism which aims to conjoin illiberal social practices with a liberal market.

For people on the right such as Fukuyama, social capital is understood in terms of cultural resources, community, and above all in terms of reinforcing social norms which

have supposedly withered as a result of alleged social engineering. For Howard social policy means getting back to the good old days where migrants, women and Aboriginal people understood their proper place in the scheme of things.

The new paternalists seek to understand problems like unemployment, single mothers, and even indigenous disad-

Continued on page 4

CPE EVENTS

Share the Care

Carers 2000 Conference

29-31 March 2000

Brisbane

Contact: Conference Solutions, PO Box 238, Deakin West, ACT 2600

Ph: 02 6285 3000, Fax: 02 6285 3001

Suicide Prevention – Everybody's Business

7th National Conference Suicide Prevention Australia

1-3 April 2000

Melbourne Convention Centre

Contact: The Conference Secretariat, Suicide Prevention Australia, PO Box K998, Haymarket NSW 2000

Ph: (02) 9211 1788, Fax: (02) 9211 0392

Website: <http://AusEinet.flinders.edu.au>

Adoption in the New Millennium "Linking Past, Present and Future"

Western Australian Adoption Conference 2000

19-21 May

Advanced Manufacturing Technologies Centre, Perth

Contact: Adoptions International

Ph: 9328 2555, Fax: 9328 2544

Email: aiwa@multiline.com.au

Creativity and Development: Services for the Future

Mental Health Services 10th Annual Conference

29-31 August 2000

Adelaide Convention Centre

Contact: PO Box 192, Balmainm NSW 2041

Ph: (02) 9926 6057, Fax: (02) 9926 7078

Email: enquiries@themhs.org

Canadian Association of Social Workers World Conference

29 July – 2 August 2000

Promoting Equitable Societies in the Global Economy:
Social Work in the 21st Century

Montreal, Canada
Contact: CASW, Ph: (1) 613 729 6668, Fax: (1) 613 729 9608, Email: casw@casw acts.ca

**National Respite Conference – Respite:
Choosing with Confidence**

11-13 October 2000
Sheraton Perth Hotel
Contact: Ph: (08) 9332 2900, Fax: (08) 9332 2911
Email: promaco@promaco.com.au

**CALLING ALL NEW GRADUATES
AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERS!**

The New Graduates and Associate Members Subcommittee is having a gathering on the 13th March 2000 at City West Lotteries House, 2 Delhi Street, West Perth between 6.30 and 8.00 pm. Light refreshments will be provided.

Anyone interested in attending please contact
Dave Jones

9498 5138 (H), 9480 5500 (W)
9439 5177 (Fax)
email: ruahkwin@upnaway.com

Continued from page 3

vantage, in terms of deficit of social capital rather than as the outcome of systemic disadvantage. For the paternalists, social problems are the result of individuals deviating from natural norms and social practices embedded in the community.

There is no attempt here to examine whether these social practices contribute to individual autonomy and freedom. In fact, these social practices are judged by the yardstick of social order and social cohesion rather than individual liberty. Again, we see that this new paternalism in social policy is fundamentally illiberal.

However, this is not to say that we can somehow return to the traditional post war welfare state. This welfare state was an artefact of the post war economic order, which has irrevocably

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

SEEKING A WORKSHOP PRESENTER

We have received a request to run a workshop focussing on skills needed for **working with blended families and children**.

Workshop content could include issues surrounding sexuality in blended families, creative ways of working with children, relationships between step-parents and children, and sibling rivalry.

If you are interested in running a workshop around this general theme, please send a brief expression of interest covering:

- the topics you propose covering;
- course length (half or full day);
- expectations about number of course participants;
- dates of availability; and
- your proposed fee.

Expressions of interest should be addressed to Anne Pickard, Vice President (Education), AASW (WA) PO 198, West Perth 6872 and received by 17th April 2000.

Further information may be obtained by contacting Anne Pickard on 9464 7062 or Liz Retamal on 9443 2934 during business hours.

cably changed. Moreover, there are strong grounds to construct a welfare system that takes seriously individual needs and aspirations—something the post war welfare state failed to achieve. But this means a social policy built around the values of democratic autonomy and choice not the harsh paternalism of John Howard. This is a real challenge for the new social democracy of the 21st century.

*Kanishka Jayasuriya is a Senior Research Fellow at the Asia Research Centre Murdoch University. This article was originally published in **The Canberra Times**, 7 February 2000.*

The Overview edition of *The West Australian Social Worker* is published bi monthly by the WA Branch of the Australian Association of Social Workers (ACN 008 576 010). Services, products, opinions and enclosures are not considered as necessarily endorsed by the AASW nor represent its policy. Contributions are accepted on the understanding they may be subject to editorial revision.