

WA SOCIAL WORK NEWS

May 2004

■ PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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Thought for the Day

I have dedicated my life to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for, and to see realised. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

*Nelson Mandela (1918-)
Speech at his trial in Pretoria,
20 April 1964.*

Online Version

An online version of the
newsletter can be found at

<http://socprofsocwkr.highway1.com.au>

I am very proud to be able to say that the Society's inaugural social work conference, *Building our place: Relationships, partnerships, communities*, which was held at Wollaston College on 4 and 5 May 2004, was an outstanding success. It occurred in a beautiful setting, with high attendances over both days and had a diverse program that engendered an excellent evaluation.

This result is remarkable and attests to the commitment and enthusiasm of the Conference Coordinating Committee, under the stewardship of Karen Vincent and Cindy Gorton, who have organised the event on a completely voluntary basis. The time and effort required to put together such a comprehensive program cannot be underestimated – many hours by a small group including Tom Barrett, Pattie Benjamin, Erlene Chun, Mia Cotton, Mary Joyce, Jason Newman, Anne Pickard, Greg Swensen and Emma White, in addition to Karen and Cindy. I also want to acknowledge a special thanks to the volunteers and students for all they did to contribute to the success of the conference over the two days.

For me the Conference has highlighted the difficulty that the wider community of social workers in this State have in being able to fully understanding what precipitated the formation of the SPSW. The recent history of the breakdown of relations between the AASW's National Office and the West Australian Branch has been documented in earlier issues of *WA Social Work News*.

Suffice to say the State Conference, the AASW's WA Branch website and the WA newsletter were all lost during the previous strongly centralised regime of the AASW. What the SPSW has regained and continues to develop is a matter of satisfaction to me.

On a different note, one of the "red herrings" that is often used to debunk the role of a purely State based organisation (such as the SPSW) is "accreditation" of the schools of social work. This was traditionally provided by the AASW. Accreditation is merely assessment of university social work courses

for the purpose of entry to membership of the professional body, as required by employers for social work positions.

It is my view that a better outcome for accreditation will occur when the SPSW develops this role. This would include a more comprehensive process that included information from a broad range of sources, not just course materials and interviews with academics, but also from current students, recent graduates, experienced practitioners and employers.

I have recently had a fascinating and thought provoking dialogue with Jim Ife, the Haruhisa Handa Professor of Human Rights Education at Curtin University. His views have particular currency as he has the advantage of having been a Head of Department of both of WA's premier Schools of Social Work, plus being able to draw on his long standing commitment to and involvement in peace and human rights issues. I take the liberty to quote part of Jim's comments, which were made in relation to the Conference.

"I am not sure that the institution of social work has much of a future, and I am sure it doesn't unless people in both the professional association(s) and the universities come to terms with some harsh realities and stop trying to cling to a "professional identity" model that is well past its use-by date.

"The vast majority of social work graduates will never have a job called social worker or a job which requires AASW membership. Also the vast majority of them will have several qualifications - social work will be one of several, and it is the combination that will count in the workplace. In this environment, to think that people will do a social work course, call themselves a "social worker", make that their primary identity, join a professional association, and all the rest, is a nonsense.

Unless the professional association and the schools realise this and understand that they are operating in a bygone age, social

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LETTERS

Ms Sarah Hordern
Vice President
AASW Ltd

Dear Sarah

On behalf of the Board of the Society of Professional Social Workers, I thank you and members of the AASW for making time to visit with us on 1 April 2004. It was a pleasant and constructive occasion.

Further to our discussion that evening, here are some suggestions which have the potential to move us towards a cooperative rather than a competitive relationship.

The SPSW Board members present, and speaking for those who could not be present, emphasized their view that autonomy of function within Western Australia is our paramount concern. This cannot be guaranteed by the constitution of the AASW and the requirements of Australian company law.

I posit a number of possibilities for your consideration. These are:

1. *The AASW enters an agreement to affiliate with the SPSW necessitating prior constitutional change for the AASW.* There are then two possible ways to proceed -

- a) the AASW to simply affiliate with the SPSW, requiring the deletion of the WA Branch from the constitution, or
- b) the renaming of the SPSW.

Renaming is a simple matter and would allow for the AASW name to continue in Western Australia. The advantage of an affiliation is that it is the simplest short term measure that would allow for autonomy in WA on the one hand, and integration on the other. Decisions relating to fees and fee structures would require negotiation as would the relative responsibilities. This would not be too difficult a task.

2. *The AASW incorporates in each state under the respective associations incorporation legislation.* We now have uniform company law in Australia. This would require the disbandment of the second branches in NSW and Queensland as it would not be possible for two incorporated AASW's to exist within one state jurisdiction. Each of the incorporated groups would affiliate with the company in the ACT. There may however be difficulties with two separate ACT entities, one an incorporated body, the other the company with whom each group would affiliate, thus requiring clear name differentiation of each.

3. *The AASW incorporates in each state and then federates.* This is likely to be a longer process but in many ways one which is more in keeping with social work principles. The company structure has never been totally comfortable for the branches, having been foisted upon them under ACT companies legislation in 1989

Regards fees, respective functions etc a possibility with either an affiliate body or a federated structure is that the national function is purchased. This would allow for each federated entity or affiliate to buy services as required, eg assessment of courses, national ethics structures, membership, levy for IFSW etc. This is a fairer way as each branch is likely to do some things differently, depending on the special needs of its particular members. A system of levies allows for autonomy of function and proper budgeting across each group without the entanglement of the 'one company controls all'.

Separate incorporation allows for proper legal accountability and stops the snatch and grab behaviour that has been prevalent in recent times.

If these alternatives are not acceptable to the AASW then we face the reality that two separate organisations will exist in a competitive relationship in relation to programs and membership. Even in this environment there are areas that we at SPSW would like to reach agreement on such as ethics, professional standards, social and public policy and entry standards.

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Website
<http://socprofsocwkr.s.highway1.com.au/>

Discussion group
<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/wasocialwork/>

Email
socwork@highway1.com.au

CPE EVENTS

To be announced Interactive Forum

Interactive forum with full SPSW Board for members and interested others. Wine and light refreshments will be served.

Tuesday 29 June

Current Issues in Aged Care

8.00 am - 12.30 pm at a residential care facility (to be announced)

Breakfast and seminar with the Federal Minister for the Aged, Hon. Julie Bishop MHR.

Thursday 22 July 2004

Youth & Popular Culture

Half day seminar at Curtin University Working with young people and social work education.

Wednesday 25 August 2004

AGM

5.30 for 6.00 pm at Niche Lotteries House, Hospital Ave, Nedlands
AGM followed by brief questions and answers, with a speaker to be announced. Prior to the AGM wine and light refreshments will be served. Afterwards there will be a simple buffet dinner.

September 2004


Pleasing Our Customer - Relevance to the Helping Professions

Date, time and venue to be announced. Discussions are being conducted with an internationally renowned West Australian expert and author, who will speak on the topic.


Other events

These include research, organisational culture and a number of other topics, such as the *Children & Community Services Bill 2003* (currently before State Parliament - second reading speech was in Legislative Council on 4 May 2004).

Input from members is welcomed.



social workers



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WHAT THE SPSW OFFERS YOU!

We offer professional indemnity insurance without the excess that is contained in the AASW's policy.

Prior to the advent of the SPSW any social worker who is subject to a claim must find \$6,000 to fund the initial part of the process.

Whilst AASW policy is to refund its members excess should the situation arise, past experience is that it has taken a long time to do so and the member must bear the cost until it pays up. The SPSW policy simply has no excess and the insurance company takes over all necessary arrangements from the start.

Because we have no fees to pay to a national body, the SPSW fees are significantly lower than those of the AASW. The SPSW ploughs back into WA all monies collected and earned to enable service provision and support required by its members.

Current activities

- CPE program

- Community service, such as public lectures
- Quarterly forums
- Annual conference
- Locum service
- Nurturing the membership and profession generally with excellent supports and discussion attached to CPE and other events.
- Interest groups such as research, aged care, mental health, youth and other special interests of our members
- Mentoring for recent graduates and others

Future directions

- Social action groups, eg if there is a short term emergency appropriate to that group it would be 'where the action is'.
- Developing working relationships with schools and a wide range of agencies to promote high quality practice.
- Responding expediently to local issues.
- Social work book club which would discuss issues of broad interest to social workers.

It would be my hope that we could agree to adopt practices and policies relevant to the profession without arguing about who owns what. Other professional groups are able to discuss and agree on such things, and social workers above all professions have the skills and expertise to do so par excellence.

Should none of the above appeal to the AASW, it is important to recognise that if we are competitors, we must be mindful of the laws in Australia that relate to anti-competitive behaviour and market share.

I hope this is useful. Nothing is impossible and I think if we bend our mind around this we could with our combined efforts overcome the set backs.

Most sincerely

Brian Wooller
President
8 April 2004

Dr Maria Harries
Branch Administrator
AASW (WA Branch)

Dear Maria

Further to the discussion between the AASW and the SPSW on 18 March 2004 I wish to request that the AASW assist us advertising and circulating the program for the SPSW Conference "Building our Place" to be held on 4th and 5th May 2004.

In correspondence with Jim Ife the SPSW has agreed to advertise the AASW sponsored International Conference in Adelaide later this year. The SPSW will do this at it's conference in May and through its newsletters and CPE events. (We would like some fliers please.)

It is important that we continue to cooperate and support events of an educational and professional development kind.

I look forward to your assistance in this matter

Brian Wooller
16 April 2004

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ARTICLE

A Development Nightmare

By Kenneth Rogoff

What if poor nations actually caught up with rich ones?

Indulge in a dream scenario for a moment: Suppose the world awoke tomorrow and, miraculously, every country suddenly enjoyed the same per capita income as the United States, or roughly \$40,000 per year. Global annual income would soar to \$300 trillion, or some 10 times what it is now. And while we're at it, suppose also that international education levels, infant mortality rates, and life expectancies all converged to the levels in rich countries. In short, what if foreign aid worked and economic development happened overnight instead of over centuries?

A heretical thought, perhaps. But I wonder sometimes what voters in rich nations must be thinking when they reward their politicians for cutting already pathetic foreign-aid budgets. Is it possible that, deep down, the world's wealthy fear what will happen if the developing countries really did catch up, and if the advantages their own children enjoy were shared by all? Would the dream become a nightmare?

Consider whether today's wealthy would materially suffer under such a scenario. As things now stand, 290 million U.S. citizens already cause almost one fourth of world carbon dioxide emissions. What if 1.3 billion Chinese and 1.1 billion Indians suddenly all had cars and began churning out automobile exhaust at prodigious U.S. rates? While the sun might not turn black and the ozone layer might not vaporize overnight, the environmental possibilities are frightening. And what of the price of oil, which is already notoriously sensitive to small imbalances in demand and supply?

Absent huge new discoveries or brilliant new inventions, oil could easily reach \$200 per barrel, as consumption and depletion rates accelerate. The mighty U.S. dollar would become a boutique currency and the euro experiment a sideshow. Investors would clamour for Chinese yuan and Indian rupees. The world's youth would grow up thinking that "Hollywood" must be a wordplay on "Bollywood," and McDonald's hamburgers would be viewed a minor ethnic cuisine.

And a country such as Canada would

suddenly have the economic heft of Luxembourg, with much of its population reduced to serving once poor, now rich, international tourists.

Let's face it. The rich countries would no longer feel rich. Humans are social creatures; once we clear the hurdle of basic subsistence, wealth becomes a relative state of being. Even an optimist such as myself must concede that a world of equality between rich and poor nations would be shockingly different—and that is even disregarding the impact on global power politics.

Still, such rapid economic development offers a clear upside for today's rich countries. Greater diversity and knowledge spillovers can breed much faster productivity growth, the ultimate source of wealth for everyone. Once properly educated, fed, and plugged in, inventive geniuses from South Asia and Africa might speed the development of clean and safe hydrogen power by two generations. And whereas commercial medical researchers might start spending more energy combating tropical diseases, now privileged citizens in temperate climates would still enjoy countless technological spin-offs. Indeed, such gains of rapid economic development could fully offset the losses to the rich.

By highlighting latent insecurities in rich countries, I certainly do not mean to endorse or stoke them. But these underlying fears must be addressed. If globalisation really works, then what is the endgame? What kind of political institutions are necessary to prepare—socially as well as psychologically—for success?

It is easy for everyone to endorse the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG), which aim to satisfy basic human needs by 2015. (Unfortunately, the specific objectives are so limited that MDG ought to stand for the Minimum Development Goals.) But how far are rich nations willing to take development? How much are we prepared to give?

Of course, no one has developed a magic formula for how to make countries grow, though economic researchers have identified a number of poisons. Corruption, overweening government intervention, and mountains of debt are contraindicated for countries attempting to develop (which is one reason most foreign aid should be recast as outright grants instead of loans).

Though critics are correct to argue that foreign aid stymies growth by breeding corruption and stifling private enterprise, the empirical evidence suggests that aid can be productive when it supports good policies. Does trade help countries grow? Again, my read of the evidence says yes: If Europe and Japan gave up their outrageous farm protection and if the United States stopped competing with India for the title of anti-dumping champion of the world, poor countries would gain far more than if their aid inflows suddenly doubled. And, by the way, if poor countries gave up their own trade protectionism, their citizens would benefit by even more.

Even so, rich countries could easily afford to triple their aid budgets without running the remotest risk of the “nightmare” scenario coming true. They could channel money into health in Africa, into education, and into infrastructure and other necessities with little danger of any rapid catch-up. (Though why the World Bank still lends to China, with more than \$350 billion in hard currency reserves and a space program to boot, is difficult to explain.) Gallons of aid money, such as what Northern Italy has poured into Southern Italy for almost 60 years, help assuage development’s growing pains, but progress rarely occurs quickly.

Growth economics suggests that poor regions have a hard time closing the income gap on rich countries at a rate greater than 2 percent per year, even under the best of circumstances. Catch-up—when it happens at all—takes generations.

Rich countries need not be ambivalent or stingy. Certainly, if sudden and rapid economic development were possible and actually materialized, many citizens in wealthy nations would feel jarred, even threatened. And some day, world income distribution will be radically different than it is today, but not anytime soon. Nightmare scenarios and fear of success need never stand in the way of sensible—and generous—development policies.

Kenneth Rogoff is professor of economics and director of the Center for International Development at Harvard University. From 2001 to 2003, he served as chief economist and director of research at the International Monetary Fund. Originally published in January/February 2004 issue of Foreign Policy <http://www.foreignpolicy.com>

Dear colleague

Australia is my home country, October 2004 approaches and it is my special pleasure to invite you to register for the 17th World Congress of the IFSW which is being held in conjunction with the 31st Bi-annual Congress of the IASSW and the 29th National Congress of the AASW.

The theme *Global Social Work 2004: Reclaiming Civil Society* is especially important at this point in world history. Many of the themes of the last century will continue into this century and that is not surprising. We have been trying to address issues of poverty, ill health, access to education and the impact of war and disaster since social work began.

Themes of the latter part of the 20th century such as globalisation, the impact of refugees from armed conflict or famine and internally displaced persons, the effects of global communication, increased population mobility and environmental degradation will continue to provide a major challenge to the international community and social workers as a profession.

The impact of globalisation, heightened conflict and rapid change all contribute to a world struggling to find lasting solutions to poverty, illiteracy, pandemics, violence and xenophobia.

Set against a backdrop of finite or shrinking resources, practitioners and educators in every region of the world are confronted with increasing demands upon their knowledge and skills. Social work has always operated in the most difficult realms and under very strained circumstances.

We will continue to operate in diverse settings and our practice will need to reflect that context. However our connection with our colleagues at an international level will remain vital, not only in the sharing of practice wisdom but also as a critical vehicle for the attainment of a civil society.

The relationship between social work practice and education has been marked by a strength, which recognises and values diversity and remains unified in its commitment to social justice.



Global Social Work 2004
Reclaiming Civil Society
2-5 October 2004
Adelaide

<http://www.icms.com.au/ifsw>

The Adelaide 2004 Congress provides us with the opportunity and challenge to strengthen the unity between practice and education, reconsider the role of social work in a global context, develop new partnerships and strategies to address both familiar and new problems and to position the profession to influence emerging social issues whilst maintaining our core values.

I encourage you to register now to join us all in Adelaide in October 2004. Your contribution to this vital congress is central to our goal - exchange, dialogue, diversity and plans for reclaiming a civil society.

I look forward, together with all my colleagues, national and international, to seeing you in Adelaide in October.

Imelda Dodds
President, International Federation of Social Workers

work will soon be a thing of the past. And we kid ourselves if we think people actually like social workers, respect them or will fight to keep them - they don't and won't."

The views that Jim articulates should be debated seriously and widely, which the SPSW intends to do in the coming months.

In the meantime I wish to make the following observation. Unless the AASW can work out how to become a federation, it cannot change very much and will remain unable to accommodate the vastly varying needs of social workers in different parts of Australia. Until this change occurs there can be no guarantee that the financial abuses that occurred at the National level over the past five or so years will not re occur in the future.

I would like you all to know that the present Board of the SPSW has worked voluntarily for the past year, without paid assistance. Many of the current members of the Board of the SPSW were long serving, experience and dedicated members of the former AASW (WA Branch) Committee of Management.

The SPSW is only as strong as its members and it urgently needs members. The critical mass required to maintain and grow the SPSW must be reached by the end of June 2004. Without a broad membership the SPSW will not be able to operate and there will be no conference, no newsletter, no fraternity nor any of the other advantages of our new organisation.

Unless the SPSW gets widespread membership support in the near future it can not continue in either its present form or in a different guise.

As Professor Jim ife has succinctly stated, social work is at the crossroads. It is my view that without the SPSW the social work profession in this State will have an uncertain and directionless future. I urge you all to consider the very significant benefits of joining our growing young and vital professional body. The future of the profession is in your hands.

BRIAN WOOLLER
PRESIDENT

WHAT'S HAPPENING

May 2004

Best Practice for Government Contact Centres, 24-25 May, Canberra. See www.iqpc.com.au

June 2004

Stop Violence Against Women: Protect, Respect, Achieve! Amnesty International Conference, 4-6 June, Fremantle. Call Anne Fitzsimmons, Conference & Events Coordinator 02 9217 7698 or see www.amnesty.org.au

October 2004

Global Social Work 2004: Reclaiming Civil Society Joint Conference - 17th World Congress of International Federation of Social Workers, 31st Bi-annual Congress of International Association of Schools of Social Work & 29th National Congress of Australian Association of Social Workers, 2-5 October, Adelaide. Call ICMS 03 9682 0244 or see www.icms.com.au/ifsw

July 2005

18th Asia-Pacific Social Work Conference: Social Work Theories & Practice with Cultural Variations. Call Korean Association of Social Workers, 082 2786 0190 or see www.kasw.or.kr/eng/kasw.htm

July 2007

5th International Conference on Social Work in Health & Mental Health. Call University of Hong Kong, email: cecichan@hku.hk

BOOK REVIEW

Peel, M. *The lowest rung: Voices of Australian poverty*. Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2003 (\$37.95)

Mark Peel's book was launched at the SPSW's inaugural social work conference in May 2004. It is the remarkable result of research over a three year period in the mid 1990s with nearly 300 individuals who lived and/or worked in a suburb characterised as being the most disadvantaged in each the three major cities on Australia's eastern seaboard. These individuals included activists, social workers and a broad cross

WHAT'S NEW

The Lowest Rung

Mark Peel. Cambridge University Press, \$37.95.

Portraits from interviews with hundreds of people living in three disadvantaged areas in Inala (QLD), Mount Druitt (NSW) & Broadmeadows (VIC). Presents the growing inequality, entrenched unemployment & diminishing opportunities for young people in these communities as a consequence of social & economic changes in Australia.

The Elusive Orgasm

Dr Vivienne Cass. Brightfire Press, \$35 - www.brightfire.com.au.

A practical resource to help with clients who experience orgasm difficulties or wish to learn more about female sexuality.

section of people who lived in the suburbs of Broadmeadows on the north west fringe of Melbourne, Inala a suburb of Brisbane and Mount Druitt a Housing Commission suburb located in Sydney's west.

There is a strong sense garnered through these stories that as our society has become increasingly dominated by the ethos of economic rationalism and its precepts of managerialism, with its meaningless preoccupation with accountability, efficiency and provable outcomes. This has clearly failed a growing number of people, who one may wonder if it were cynically assumed by government would benefit the 'trickle down' effect from 'economic progress'. This failure is seen to have resulted in a growing number of families who have been harmed through the loss of secure employment coupled with an increasingly harsh and punitive welfare system which is disinterested in them "it is a system in which the first impulse is to uncover the ineligible, rather than support the eligible. And it is still a system designed largely by and for people who don't need welfare assistance rather than those who do." (p. 181)

There are a number of themes in this book, each of which lays clearly and inescapably before the reader that we must look again at the way policy has failed to deliver what our society should do, the security and means for individuals to live productive and safe lives. One of the issues that especially stood out for me was the profound effect

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Mr Brian Wooller
President
Society of Professional Social Workers

Dear Brian

Thank you for your letter received today in which you request that the AASW advertise the program for the SPSW Conference. We had been looking forward to receiving this request as foreshadowed by you at our joint meeting on 18 March 2004. Although we had not received this request by the time of the meeting of the Coordinating Committee on Monday 19 April 2004 we did hope to receive it and so decided on our response in the event that it did arrive in the near future.

Accompanying our original offer to co-sponsor this conference was the explicit commitment of the Coordinating Committee of the AASW to continue the work of the previous Committee of Management who worked so hard on the development of ongoing professional education and networking opportunities for social workers.

Given this commitment, we have unanimously agreed that the least we can do is to advertise your conference and furthermore, as a signal of our support for opportunities such as this, we will do this at no cost to your Society. We are in the process of finalising the next newsletter and will certainly include the information about the conference in it. May we take this opportunity to congratulate the planning committee on an excellent program which has been developed.

Thank you for the advice that you agreed with Professor Jim Ife to advertise the IASSW/IFSW Conference that is to be held in Adelaide in October of this year. As you requested, enclosed is some material on the conference. The website is very impressive - <http://www.icms.com.au/ifsw/> and you will notice that online registrations have commenced,

Can I also take this opportunity to advise you that a very sound offer has been presented by the ACT government to the AASW to pursue the matter of registration. The National Office of the AASW and all AASW State Branches are preparing the required documentation and it is to be ready for presentation in June 2004.

Given our shared interest in this matter and the fact that members of your commit-

tee have had a long standing interest and commitment to registration, I wonder if you or a member of your society would be interested in assisting in the preparation of the required documentation.

If you are interested and would like to work with us on this, please do contact me as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Maria Harries
Branch Administrator
AASW (WA Branch)
22 April 2004

Dr Maria Harries
Administrator,
AASW (WA Branch)

Dear Maria

Thank you for agreeing to assist in publicizing the SPSW Conference next week.

Would it be possible for an email note to be sent to your members, at least those that you have email addresses for? The conference as you know was late in starting and the final program was not available prior to my writing to you.

I agree that the planning committee has put together an excellent conference and it is important that we continue to profile the profession in a positive way as well as offering learning and educational opportunities for people in our business.

Thank you again.

Brian Wooller
President
28 April 2004

Book review: Cont'd from page 6

that male unemployment has had in these communities. The book attests to the considerable resilience of the women in each of the three suburbs, as indicated in the following lengthy quote.

"What everyone wanted to emphasis was the terrible toll that unemployment was taking on men who could never have expected to become so 'useless.' They recognised a profound sense of loss and the unravelling of expectations. Something was being taken away from men that could not easily be replaced. Women had other duties and other ways of contributing. They saw

themselves as more flexible, more able to adapt to the mix of paid and unpaid work and to the part-time and casual jobs that were available." (p. 122)

The loss of male identity which is coupled to loss of employment because of the massive restructuring of the economy that has occurred over the 1990s is persuasively argued by Peel as a priority issue as the future of many families, including those who have already become disadvantaged, will be exceedingly bleak until this is solved. We should realise that this is not an easy matter, as this is indeed a problem inextricably linked to the globalisation of the world economy. At a society level this will also involve providing the appropriate supports to support change in how males understand their place. *"The most difficult issue, it seemed to me, was how hard it was for men to think about other ways of being men, to find other tasks around which they could build a sense of capacity and purpose. As women largely managed the family's business, men were often inexperienced in the world outside of work."* (p. 130)

This book should be widely read by social workers, for it contains the seeds for regenerating basic social structures and highlights possibilities for economic change, so that we may have a fairer and more caring society. This is a work that should be read in conjunction other materials, a number of which are discussed in the following edited version of a recent article by Dr Carmen Lawrence, that also support the case for rethinking the kind of society we want to have.

Inequality: Are we losing our identity? **by Carmen Lawrence**

I think most Australians still hold the view that ours is an egalitarian society. Indeed, some would argue that egalitarianism is the value that defines us. While there are signs that more and more Australians are uneasy about widening of income and wealth gaps, many still appear to accept the boast made by our leaders that ours is a nation of equals where the ethic of a 'fair go' governs our private and public relations. But is this really so?

Through the prisms of their respective academic disciplines (economics, history and sociology), and with different levels of abstraction, Argy, Peel and Pusey all question this comfortable assertion. Argy's arguments are firmly based in aggregate, mostly

Inaugural Social Work Conference

Tuesday 4 May & Wednesday 5 May 2004

Building Our Place: Relationships, Partnerships, Communities

Text of speech by Hon Sheila McHale MLA, Minister for Community Development on the opening of the Inaugural Social Work Conference, Tuesday 4 May 2004

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and with whom we are travelling on the road to reconciliation.

I am delighted to be here this morning at the inaugural conference of the Society of Professional Social Workers. Social workers can play an important role in delivering services and coordinating responses to the community development sector.

As a varied group involved in providing a wide range of services to clients, it is important that they have a society that helps to serve their needs.

The Society of Professional Social Workers has recently been established to focus upon the needs and practice of Western Australian social workers and their clients. It can also be a leader in delivering quality service to individual clients and communities by supporting ethical and accountable practice.

As a WA based Society, it will showcase best practice models in WA and make professional development more accessible to its members.

This conference is an example of that. I have looked at some of the topics on the program over the next two days and I am impressed by the variety of issues and the calibre of the speakers.

The title of the conference - *Building our place - Relationships, partnerships, communities* - captures some of the core priorities of the profession.

These are also the priorities of the Department for Community Development, one of the largest employers of social workers in WA.

A successful move from the traditional welfare model to building strong individuals,

families and communities will be based upon our ability to partner with communities and other allied professionals.

One of the DCD's key objectives is to work with communities and partner with them in identifying and solving their own problems.

As you all know from your own experiences, however, this way of thinking takes time, and the outcomes are not always visible or immediately identifiable. Yet when partnering is successful it can be so powerful.

One example is the HYPE Program in South Hedland called Mingle Mob. Almost 12 months ago the area had been described as "a war zone" by the local Member of Parliament. People were frightened to shop because of the behaviour of some young people in the area.

However, the Department has contributed to a program that has resulted in a dramatic drop in crime in the area. Extensive discussion with community leaders, local service providers and members of the community, resulted in the employment of a number of indigenous workers who are working directly with their young people.

Academically, John Kretzman and John McKight back up this on the ground effort and wrote in 1993 "*significant community development takes place only when local communities and people are committed to investing themselves and their resources to the effort.*"

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national data, Pusey's in repeated interviews with a panel of 400 middle-income Australians, and Peel's account, in many ways the most engaging, on 'conversations' with a cross section of Australia's poorest citizens from the large public housing estates of Inala in Brisbane, Mount Druitt in Sydney and Broadmeadows in Melbourne. The authors might disagree about the extent of the problem but all three conclude that inequality amongst Australians is increasing and that egalitarianism itself may be under

threat as a defining social objective. And they all think that it matters.

All begin with the assumption that there is nothing inevitable about the way the economy operates and recognise that it involves choices which reflect values. All three writers illustrate—at different levels of analysis—some of the fallout from an increasingly aggressive and doctrinaire application of what Argy calls 'hard' liberalism. Argy defines 'hard' liberalism as an ideological form of economic liberalism which stresses the virtues of individualism. 'Hard' liberalism holds that forced redistribution is morally unjust and that governments have neither the competence nor integrity to intervene effectively in economic affairs (pp. 168–69). He lists its characteristic policy prescriptions as individual bargaining in the workplace, attacks on trade unions, pursuit of outsourcing and privatisation, opposition to public debt increases over the business cycle, low taxes and low government spending as ends in themselves, and opposition to most form of social regulation, including in the workplace.

All three authors agree that one pressure producing widening inequality is the momentum of so-called 'economic reform' and the policy shifts which have increasingly seen equity traded off for efficiency. These same policy prescriptions have seen the market place given pre-eminence over other devices at the disposal of government to make decisions about the allocation of resources.

The Drawing Board, September 2003, <http://www.econ.usyd.edu.au/drawingboard>

Fred Argy *Where to from here? Australian egalitarianism under threat*. Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2003 (224 pp). ISBN 1865088528 (paperback) RRP \$24.95

Mark Peel *The lowest rung: Voices of Australian poverty*. Cambridge University Press, 2003 (224 pp). ISBN 0521830621 (paperback) RRP \$37.95

Michael Pusey *The experience of middle Australia: The dark side of economic reform*. Cambridge University Press, 2003 (262 pp). ISBN 0521658446 (paperback) RRP \$36.95