

## Australian Refugee Policy: Myths and Realities

William Maley

On the weekend of 12-13 October 2002, a series of terrorist bomb blasts on the Indonesian island of Bali killed large numbers of Australians, many of them young holidaymakers who had crowded into a popular nightspot, the Sari Club. As victims of the blasts were repatriated to Australia in emergency airlifts, harrowing accounts of the trauma to which they had been exposed saturated the airwaves, and calls to radio stations were suffused with a very human sympathy for the victims and for the families trapped in an agonising uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones.

During the 2001 election campaign, government ministers and candidates had defended the handling of the 'Tampa Affair' and the 'Pacific Solution' by implying, among other things, that action was required on security grounds, that terrorists might be concealed amongst the desperate Afghans and Iraqis who made up the bulk of the 'boat people' population. Not a shred of evidence was ever produced to sustain the insinuation, and the fact that the 'boat people' were actually fleeing Saddam Hussein and the Taliban did nothing to slow down its proponents, who included Defence Minister Peter Reith and Parliamentary Secretary Peter Slipper. Yet the message of October 2002 is that borders are no real protection against terrorism: if terrorists want to hit Australians, Australians are easy enough to find.

If we are lucky, another message may also come from October 2002. The experiences of the young Australians caught up in the horror of the Bali bombings are strikingly similar to those which Afghan asylum seekers long endured. During the 1980s, Afghanistan experienced, on average, deaths on the scale of the Bali attacks every day for ten years straight. The dead were just as much cherished sons, daughters, parents, siblings and friends as were the dead of the Sari Club. Perhaps our own experience of terror will make us look less harshly on those who have long lived with similar sorrow. But if we are to do this, we will also need to recognise the basic flaws in our current approach to refugees and asylum seekers.

### The politics of the refugee issue

The refugee issue in Australia is driven by domestic politics, and the key factor shaping policy has been the influence of Pauline Hanson's One Nation and its supporters. A study of popular opinion at the time the Howard Government was elected pointed to the

underlying significance of race for the electorate, and presciently concluded that coalition elites were 'more subject to the electoral temptations of race than the ALP' (Jackman, 1998, p. 183). At the 1998 federal election, One Nation won 8.43% of the primary vote; it even managed to win 9895 votes in the nation's capital. Detailed study of voting behaviour in 1998 has since established that race and immigration were major factors mobilising One Nation voters (Gibson, McAllister and Swenson, 2002). Given Hanson's own failure to secure a House of Representatives seat, turmoil within the party organisation was only to be expected, and between 1998 and 2001 it effectively imploded. But this had a consequence that was not sufficiently appreciated at the time, namely a determined bid by the Coalition to lure back those who had defected to One Nation in 1998. At the 2001 election, One Nation supporters were the swinging voters, and compulsory, preferential voting made them a potent force.

How were these voters to be attracted? One possibility would have been an explicit preference deal between the Coalition and One Nation, with each committed to recommending to its supporters that 'second preferences' be directed to the other. But the risk of going down this path was too great. A preference deal would have split both the Liberal Party and the National Party, and earned the utter scorn of the quality press. Instead, the Government opted for policies and rhetoric which would appeal to the mindset of the One Nation constituency. The 'Tampa Affair' fell squarely into this category (Maley, 2002). So did the false claim, spread during the election campaign by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and then by the Prime Minister and other ministers, that refugees on the boat known as SIEV-4 had thrown children overboard (Weller, 2002).

The results were more than satisfactory from the Government's point of view. According to the Australian Election Study, fully a third of 1998 One Nation voters abandoned the party and returned to the Coalition, while barely a tenth opted for the ALP. This is not to say that refugees and asylum seekers were the predominant preoccupation of the electorate. Indeed, only 13% of voters regarded refugees and asylum seekers as the main issue, behind education (17%), taxation (16%) and health and Medicare (16%). However, the refugee issue was one on which the Coalition's approach was decisively

*Poor Fellow My Country* (1975) is a memory feat, but who can forget how Jeremy Delacey heals his mangled genitals with honey poultices after a Sydney Hospital decided that excision was the only way to save the hero's life?

Frances de Groen and Laurie Hergenhan have each spent many years on Herbert's work, and have now compiled a fine collection of his letters written between 1929 and 1979. Herbert was a copious and unrestrained writer of letters, and at least one recipient decided to discard a letter after reading, believing that fierce invective bestowed on one of Herbert's *bêtes noires* did neither man much justice. In 1970, the poet Robert FitzGerald consulted Tom Inglis Moore (one of Xavier's correspondents) about the editing of the letters of Hugh McCrae and they decided that some material written by their friend was best omitted. Contemporary scholarship tends to deplore reservations of this kind, and de Groen and Hergenhan, apparently without expurgating material, point out that their selective edition does present a warts and all portrait. Their notes also try to set some records a little straighter than they appeared in Xavier's letters: 'Because he played so fast and loose with the truth we have indicated at times where he distorts it but of course we have not been able to note every occasion.' Sometimes one suspects that Xavier worked hard at being a 'disturbing element', the title of the autobiography of his early years.

The letters are arranged in chronological order and with a commendable attempt to locate them by theme: 'Black Betrayal' and Failure (1929-34), Exiled in Capricornia Country (1935-38), Literary Lion in Love and War (1938-47), Writer, Chemist and Disturbing Element (1964-68) and *Poor Fellow Dreaming* (1970-79).

The editors also point out that aspects of Xavier's political and sociological position were liable to change and contradiction, and this is understandable given the inconsistency and ducking and weaving practised by political powers in any decade of history. In many ways, however, Xavier maintained steady and fundamental principles and beliefs. It is difficult to argue from these letters that he wavered from a complete belief in the possibilities of a great multi-cultural Australian nation even while he lamented what he felt was its rapid, wanton discarding of opportunities for a unique greatness. Always a republican and anti-imperialist, he would now be fulminating against what he would call the take-over by the United States of America of the cultural and political independence of his country.

Although, measured against most of us, Xavier was a little larger than life, he was very human and an extremely humane man. If he were not, the devotion shared by the unforgettable Sadie and Herbert would

be inexplicable. Women can love fools, rogues and hypocrites, but the Jewish-born Sadie was not a woman of this kind. Sadie was so strongly her own person that she was never threatened by Xavier's tendency, as the editors put it, to refuse 'to let others 'be', while demanding this priority as supremely his.' De Groen and Hergenhan are perhaps quite accurate when they suggest that part of Xavier's difficulty was that he was not sure that he was his own person, despite his egocentricity.

A letter to Hergenhan in 1970, written '40 years and 3 months' after first meeting Sadie, talks about their shared sense of humour: 'I often say that I guess the greatest achievement in marriage that one can claim is to be able to keep one's partner laughing to the end.' He decided that Sadie was 'very definitely not intellectual, for which the Lord be thankit' but that she was the nicest woman he had ever known. He acknowledged that she had an infallible and uncanny judgement about his writing although 'I've always been troubled about her inarticulateness about my work.'

Possibly Sadie loved her husband too much to let him know just how sharp her intellect was and how precise her criticisms could be. As the editors suggest, Xavier's letters and his novels show that he could be both fascinated and terrified by women.

Many of the letters deal with his literary work and his (often fiery) encounters with funding bodies, publishers, editors, critics and other writers. But there is also a great deal of warmth. In a letter to his brother Vance in 1941 he said the poet James Devaney was 'a lovely fellow', and that he and Sadie had met Shaw Neilson 'but could not get him to talk of anything but food.' This recalls another lyric poet, W B Yeats, who shocked a young diarist by indulging in three helpings of pudding at her mother's dining-table.

While there is much repetition about himself, his history and his writing, there is also the unswerving pursuit of basic principles and standards. There are also some contradictions. But if challenged, Xavier might have replied as Walt Whitman did in *Song of Myself*: 'Do I contradict myself?/ Very well then I contradict myself,/ (I am large, I contain multitudes). Xavier certainly did too; the multitudinous, often Dickensian characters in his novels are witness to that.

Xavier was aware that his letters would probably be published and he alleged to Hergenhan in 1970 that some people cajoled him for correspondence out of self-interest. He admitted to Hergenhan that 'I need a penfriend (God help me for coming to use that term!)[...] Of course there are scores of people who would like to be getting my letters, who *try* to get them. But, as I've said, there must be a deep motive for my writing.' His motive was mostly to get support or because, as he said,

commentators. Professor Anthony Hassall, an acknowledged authority on Stow's work, supplies the Forewords to both reprints, and full accounts of the books are given in his *Strange Country*, a 1986 study of Stow's prose and poetry. As Hassall reminds us in the Forewords, the elusive elements of these novels puzzled some readers who responded to the narratives but wanted sub-texts more easily pinned down. This would have defeated the intentions of the novels, since among other things, they were attempts to comprehend the mystic elements which bind together the physical reality of Australia and its inhabitants.

A half-century later, the stories may be understood with greater ease, even by adolescent readers. The themes have been embodied many times in prose, poetry and drama. Australian films have brought to life, through images and sound tracks, as much as by characters and narratives, the haunting and insistent experience of Australian life beyond the larger cities.

Both novels depict recurrent themes like the spiritual journey, inner exploration, and the paradoxes of the 'human condition' which, while acknowledging the physically earthly, is also relentlessly questioning. Stow's was among the twentieth-century fiction which dealt with attempts by non-Indigenous Australians to find a place for themselves in the continent. In *To the Islands*, Heriot attempts to reconcile his place and actions while in charge of the Christian mission with the idealism of his faith and the physical and spiritual reality of the Indigenous people he is meant to serve. To some readers, Heriot is an image of all those European settlers who were aware of their failure to meet their own hopes in the new country.

*Tourmaline*, it might be said, represents the physical and spiritual 'search for water' which lies at the heart of non-Indigenous occupation of the continent. Today, more than ever, this search has become imperative in the physical sense, and for many, our continued co-existence with the environment demands a response that lies beyond the material reality, call it what we will. As in several of Stow's novels, a key figure, the water diviner who names himself Michael Random, is a vulnerable and enigmatic figure who seems to offer a form of salvation to the people of *Tourmaline*, but who wants to lead because his need to lead is greater than the needs of those he tries to lead. After his death, his role as water diviner is taken by Kestrel, a tougher, more realistic figure.

*Tourmaline*, with some allusively-named characters, allows itself to be read as allegory, and as such, produces levels of resonance which can be enjoyed even if not fully understood. The narrator is a fairly active bystander figure who pulls the narrative together although not with exhaustive explication.

In both *To the Islands* and *Tourmaline*, as in all Stow's novels, there is a great deal of writerly tact and respect for the intuition of the reader that perhaps has something to do with the fact that he is also a poet. He is one of those writers whose prose fiction is most comfortably received by those readers who also like poetry.

In *To the Islands* and *Tourmaline*, women have an honourable but secondary place, something which will not surprise women readers. Perhaps the fact is that, in the harsh, conflictive environment of the novels, the most sensitive and responsive male characters embody many of those qualities traditionally held, rightly or wrongly, to be found more often in woman.

Stow was one of several Australian writers in recent decades influenced by Eastern mysticism, and among the commentators, Hassall and Helen Tiffin have examined the Taoist elements in *Tourmaline* which Stow helpfully indicated in the poem 'From The Testament to *Tourmaline*.' Where some readers believe Eastern spiritual teachings incongruous in the context of Australia, others believe that in comprehending this land and our place in it, we need all the help we can get.

Stow's novels too may be helpful to a new generation of readers who are looking at the Australian condition with fresh curiosity and increased urgency. Finding a contemporary political and social meaning in the world of *Tourmaline*, as well as appreciating its literary qualities, might be a challenge students enjoy.

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### A Disarmingly Disturbing Correspondent

De Groen, Frances and Hergenhan, Laurie (Eds.)  
*Xavier Herbert: letters*. UQP, St Lucia.  
ISBN 0 7022 3309 9 (pbk). pp.xviii + 490. \$45. 00

Everyone in the Australian literary scene over a certain age has a Xavier Herbert story to tell, and these letters will bring many of them vividly back to mind. Checking the year of his death (you couldn't forget he was born in Federation Year), I was surprised to find that Xavier died as long ago as 1984. He still stands very clearly in the visual imagination of those who had much to do with him. For all his idiosyncrasy, Xavier was an easy and courteous houseguest, bringing with him a large supply of the best pure honey which he considered a mainstay of human nutrition. Recalling all the events of the massive

preferred by the voters who counted, although analysis by Professor Ian McAllister suggests that the effects of the September 11 attack would on their own have been sufficient to cost the ALP the election, and outweighed the effects of the 'refugees' issue (McAllister, 2002).

### Do we help the neediest?

While some of those who switched to the Coalition were undoubtedly driven simply by a dislike of immigrants, particularly people from the Middle East, others may have been swayed by the ostensibly moral argument that boat arrivals were taking (or as Immigration Minister Ruddock once charmingly put it, 'stealing') places from those in greater need. This argument is a spurious one, as careful scrutiny of the Government's Offshore Resettlement Programme reveals. Fully 6,000 places of the 10,000 designated in 2002-03 for offshore beneficiaries are in fact set aside for 'Special Humanitarian' entrants who need not be refugees, but must have sponsors in Australia. These need not be immediate dependents of refugees, those entitled to what the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) calls 'derivative protection,' for the purpose of sponsorship is to find some local onto whom the costs of resettlement can be shifted. The Government does not pay the airfares for 'Special Humanitarian' entrants, which means that such visas are effectively available only to people who are well-off, or who have well-off sponsors (the very attribute for which boat people have been so relentlessly derided by the Immigration Minister).

Some deserving individuals do indeed enter Australia under the Special Humanitarian Program, but it is simply laughable for politicians to imply that this very substantial component of the offshore program necessarily helps those in greatest need. As the former Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs recently put it, the 'poor, unskilled, illiterate and non-English-speaking refugee with no links to Australia and stuck in a squalid camp may be in the greatest need of resettlement and have superior claims to "refugee status," but they are unlikely to be on our priority list' (Menadue, 2002).

While we are discussing those in greatest need, it is worth noting that applicants for places in the offshore program can be rejected if they are disabled. As long as this remains the case, virtuous talk about 'those in greatest need' should be recognised for what it is: empty politicians' blather. Refugees with physical disabilities are almost invariably among the neediest, yet the Offshore Resettlement Programme discriminates against them quite shamelessly. Those rejected have included

### Protecting the bureaucracy came ahead of protecting refugees

elderly refugees suffering from muscular degeneration, women rape-victims who are HIV+, and refugees with children suffering from Downs' Syndrome.

A particular distressing case came to light on 2 April 2001 when Shahraz Kiane, an Australian citizen who had earlier received a 'Protection Visa' as a genuine refugee, set fire to himself outside Parliament House in Canberra after becoming entangled in a bizarre jungle of bureaucratic frustrations following the rejection of his wife's application for a 'Split Family' visa because their 8-year-old child suffered from cerebral palsy. Mr Kiane died as a result of his injuries on 26 May 2001, and the handling of his family's case by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs was subsequently the subject of a scathing Ombudsman's Report.

Six days before Mr Kiane set himself on fire, the Department had received a letter from a psychologist at the Canberra-based counselling service, Companion House, which warned that his mental health had continued to deteriorate and his suicide risk to increase. On 19 July 2001, the Secretary of the Department brushed this aside in a response to the Ombudsman which read:

The department receives large numbers of representations on the health conditions of sponsors and proposers in apparent attempts to force decision-makers to act hastily and without full information. I am sure that you would agree that decisions should not be made under this sort of duress (Commonwealth Ombudsman, 2001).

One would almost have thought that it was the poor bureaucrats who were the victims of this bungle. The Secretary seemed not to realise that all he was revealing was the purblind mindset of some of the staff in his own agency.

### Is Indonesia a safe country?

This mindset is equally on display with the oft-repeated claim that those who seek protection in Australia are unworthy of sympathy because they could have done so elsewhere—notably in Indonesia. Perhaps we will hear less of this after the Bali bombing. But the entire line of argument requires much more careful exploration than it has typically received. First, Indonesia is not a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Nor is Malaysia. Nor is Pakistan. (When an Afghan asylum seeker reaches Australia, it is often the first country the asylum seeker has ever encountered which is a party to the Convention.) 'Protection' granted

in such countries is not a right under international law, but a privilege that can be swept away without notice if the political climate changes.

A recent and detailed study by Human Rights Watch has provided additional grounds for extreme scepticism about claims that countries such as Indonesia are safe. While Australian ministers and senior officials tend to be guided by escorts whenever they visit refugee settlements overseas, and as a result receive sanitised accounts of ground-level realities, Human Rights Watch's researchers presented a grassroots perspective on life as a refugee. As a result of its interviews 'with refugees who had already made their way to Australia, or who had been intercepted at sea by the Australian authorities and returned to Indonesia,' Human Rights Watch determined 'that many of the refugees had legitimate, protection-related reasons for leaving their countries of so-called first asylum.' These reasons included

serious risks of forcible return to countries where their lives and freedom were threatened (refoulement); continuing threats from their original persecutors operating across borders; inability to acquire legal status and the related risks of harassment, arrest and detention; as well as discriminatory restrictions on their access to the labor market, housing, health care and education, often making daily subsistence impossible (Human Rights Watch, 2002, p. 3).

#### **Do we identify refugees in our midst?**

Ministers often defend their harsh treatment of people in detention by claiming that they have been 'found' not to be refugees. Yet the processes used to assess people's claims are often remarkably suspect. For example, the Immigration Department has taken to using 'linguistic analysis,' in which applicants' voices are assessed by alleged experts, to identify applicants' countries of origin. The companies whose services are used have been heavily criticised by professional linguists (see Daley, 2002), and the methodological shakiness of such 'analyses' was exposed in a recent Federal Court case, *SBAQ v. Minister for Immigration & Multicultural & Indigenous Affairs* [2002] FCA 985. There, Justice Mansfield noted that while one company engaged by the Department stated that 'The person speaking has obviously his language background in Afghanistan,' another reported that 'The dialect/language variant occurring in the text/tape may with considerable certainty be said to originate from Quetta, Pakistan.' His Honour went on to remark that 'The two opinions are almost

the equivalent of two experts looking at an object, and one describing it as black and the other as white,' and offered the disturbing but obvious conclusion that the circumstances of the case gave 'little basis for confidence in the institutions which engage linguists and present their views as expert and reliable.'

The Government also trumpets the availability of a 'merits appeal' to the 'independent' Refugee Review Tribunal, but in practice this is a poor substitute for proper testing of executive decisions by an independent judiciary (testing which the Government has sought to preclude through the mechanism of a 'privative clause' in the Migration Act 1958 which provides that decisions relating to applications for refugee protection visas 'must not be challenged, appealed against, reviewed, quashed or called in question in any court'). Tribunal members are appointed for short terms, on the recommendation of the Immigration Minister, and need not have any legal qualifications or experience. In one case (*C' v. Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs* [2000] FCA 1649), the Full Federal Court found that a Tribunal member had been 'unpardonably rude and offensive.'

More recently, the Federal Court took the unusual step of declaring invalid a Tribunal decision, in part because of 'selective and unfair use' of expert opinions which I myself had offered at a background seminar organised by UNHCR for Department and Tribunal staff on Afghanistan and Iraq, at which I was one of the invited speakers (see *SAAG v. Minister for Immigration & Multicultural & Indigenous Affairs* [2002] FCA 547). And a classic example of the weakness of the Tribunal as a means of ensuring accountability is the Badraie case, highlighted in an August 1991 ABC Four Corners television programme, where an applicant had to fight all the way to the Full Federal Court to ensure that his claims would be assessed in accordance with proper procedures (see *NI202/01A v. Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs* [2002] FCAFC 94).

On 8 August 2002, and this time following the proper procedures, the Refugee Review Tribunal recognised that Mr Badraie and his family were refugees. In the meantime, seven-year-old Shayan Badraie had been deeply traumatised by detention, and Mr Badraie himself had been scorned by the Immigration Minister, who stated on the ABC's 7.30 Report on 14 August 2001 that 'clearly this is a case in which the family are not refugees.' On this occasion, as in the Children Overboard episode, Mr Ruddock rushed in where angels fear to tread. Protecting the bureaucracy came ahead

#### **The 1901 Commonwealth Election and the Importance of Historical Reflections**

Marian Simms (Ed.) (2001)  
*1901: The Forgotten Election*  
St Lucia: University of Queensland Press  
in Association with the API Network  
and Curtin University of Technology.

The first parliamentary election ever held in the Commonwealth of Australia has been a neglected object of study – until now. Hence the subtitle of *1901: The Forgotten Election*, an edited collection whose contributors include political scientists, historians, economic historians and former politicians. The book is modelled on the approach used in studies of contemporary elections by a team that includes the editor and a number of the contributors to this volume and has in recent times been published in the same series. This book gives new meaning to the term 'post-election study', being published one hundred rather than one or two years after the event! Notwithstanding the obvious challenges posed by such a temporal gap and the unavailability of much of the kind of data that informs the modern equivalents, the book is remarkably successful in portraying the flavour and key elements of the election and in providing interesting and informative analyses of its processes and outcomes.

Following an introductory chapter, there are five sections, each with a number of chapters, plus five appendices containing an array of fascinating statistical material about the voting, the candidates and the results. The five sections are on 'electoral methods and voting administration', 'selected leaders' perspectives', 'parties, groups and campaigns', 'local case studies' and 'candidates and voting outcomes'. Strangely, and without explanation, the section on leaders, while including chapters on Alfred Deakin, George Reid, Charles Kingston and Andrew Fisher, does not contain a study of the Protectionist prime minister before and after the election, Edmund Barton.

Not surprisingly, given that the election was held under the existing laws of the former colonies, the book emphasises the differences between the states in the way the election was conducted, in the way the parties operated and, especially, in the electoral methods and voting provisions. Most states but not all had first-past-the-post voting, some in combination with multi-member electorates (and some with one electorate for the whole state); in some cases voters were to put crosses beside the names of their preferred candidates, in others they were required to strike out the names of the candidates for whom they did not wish to vote; Aborigines and women were able to vote in some states but excluded in

others.

The book contains many other intriguing insights into the election and the politics of the era. For example, as is emphasised in more than one contribution, the boundaries between political parties were much less clear than in contemporary politics. The overlaps and common ground occurred not only between the Protectionists and the Free Traders but also between both of these parties and the emerging Labour Party (generally spelt with a 'u' at the time). The project especially deserves credit for including some statistical analysis of the results in which, despite formidable difficulties, census data are matched with electoral data to produce an aggregate-level multivariate analysis. This produces interesting and in some cases surprising revelations, including that Catholic voters were linked to Protectionist support rather than Labour support, despite the widespread assumptions of modern times of an enduring connection between Labor and the Catholic vote and that farmers, as they do now, favoured Protectionism rather than Free Trade. Despite the limited suffrage, we also have the first evidence of the longstanding relative disinclination of women to support the Labor Party, a connection which may finally have been broken at the most recent federal election, one hundred years on.

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#### **Allusive but Timely**

Randolph Stow (2002)  
*To the Islands* (1958) ISBN 0 7022 3310 2 (pbk).  
pp.xii + 186. \$19.95  
*Tourmaline* (1963) ISBN 0 7022 3311 0 (pbk). pp. xi  
+ 210 \$19.95  
University of Queensland Press.

These timely and reasonably-priced reprints of early Stow novels will be welcomed by teachers and students looking for fiction which deals with enduring preoccupations of the Australian consciousness and perennial themes of our literature. Preceded by *A Haunted Land* (1956) and *The Bystander* (1957), *To the Islands* and *Tourmaline* are arguably Stow's most popular work, although *Visitants* (1979) contains for me, the most memorable incidents and descriptions.

Stow is not one of our neglected writers. He has been critiqued and, on the whole, well supported by scholars and critics since the 1950s, and his writing continues to receive attention from contemporary

## The Active Lonely Friend

This is the text of the speech given by Dale Hess to launch this book.

Rigney, Victoria (2002) *Peace Comes Walking*. Glass House Books, Paperback, 290pp. Price: \$25 ISBN 1876819960.

*Peace Comes Walking* is a biography of Donald Groom, the first full-time Yearly Meeting Secretary of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia. It is written by Victoria Rigney, a Friend from Tasmania Regional Meeting. Donald Groom's arrival in Sydney (with Erica and Brian) in April 1970 coincided with the arrival of Queen Elizabeth, Prince Phillip, Prince Charles and Princess Anne. The Royal Family received a huge fanfare; the Groom family received a much smaller fanfare, but nevertheless there was great excitement among Friends. Appointing a YM Secretary, the first paid-position among Friends in Australia, was a big step.

The expectations surrounding the appointment were high. Donald came to Australia with a lifetime's experience devoted to Quaker Service. He had served in Spain and France with Quaker Service giving aid to the victims of the Spanish Civil War. It was here that he saw the ravishes of war first hand. He then spent the next 21 years in India where he saw the effects of grinding poverty first hand. He had a vision for rural development which he implemented at the Settlement at Rasulia. During his time in India he got to know many prominent Indians, e.g. Gandhi, Bhave, Narayan, Nehru, Prasad, Desai, Tagore, etc. Of these Mohandas Gandhi and his successor, Vinoba Bhave, influenced him very deeply. He was drawn to the spirituality and political objectives of these men. He supported the 'Quit India' campaign for independence, and participated in the *Bhoodan* movement (walking from village to village asking landowners for gifts of land for the poor), the *Shanti Sena* (Gandhi's Peace Army, who would interpose themselves between parties in conflict), and *Sarvodaya* (Gandhi's program for the welfare of all). The *Bhoodan* movement was instituted by Bhave and the programs of *Shanti Sena* and *Sarvodaya* were continued by Bhave and Narayan. Donald committed himself to Gandhi's and Bhave's idea that the transformation of India, improving the lives of all, lay with the villages. His walking from village to village asking for land grants for the poor gave rise to the book's title.

Donald was a complex person. Throughout his life he continued to search to deepen his spirituality. He was by nature shy and conservative in demeanour; a man who sometimes suffered depression and loneliness. But he was also warm, particularly on a one-to-one basis, and courageous. He was a man who offered others hope and vision, a man radically committed to nonviolence and peace.

Victoria Rigney writes well and openly about the tensions in Donald's life – tensions with Friends Service and individual Friends about his ideas and methods of developing Quaker Service, which varied from colonial tradition, and his advocating a pacifist position during World War II; tensions with the missionaries and Mid-India Quakers about his blending Hinduism and Quakerism; tensions with Indian cultural practices; and tensions within his family regarding the education of his children, his activism and spiritual development resulting in his separation and aloofness from his family; tensions about the needs of his family; problems of balancing the help and support we can offer others and the needs of our family.

Although Victoria doesn't concentrate on Erica's life, she comes across in the book as a warm, outgoing, resourceful person with great inner strength. She is the source of stability for the family, which enabled Donald to work towards his vision.

At the time that Donald and Erica came to Australia, two major social issues embroiled Australia, the Vietnam war and the struggle for Aboriginal Land Rights. Donald made significant contributions in both areas. Particularly well remembered was his support for draft resisters and conscientious objectors.

On his way home from the War Resisters Triennial Conference in England in 1972 he stopped in India. He was on his way to visit his friend, J.P. Narayan, again when his plane crashed. Donald's death was a great shock to Friends in Australia (and elsewhere), partly because of its unexpectedness and news from a far off land; partly because of our expectations for him. He hadn't had time to reach his full potential. And we were just getting to know him.

The Donald Groom Fellowship was established as an initiative to carry on his work. Victoria summarises the work of the Fellowship at the end of the book. I commend this book to *Social Alternatives* readers. The proceeds from sales of the book go to supporting the Donald Groom Fellowship.

DALE HESS

of protecting refugees.

### A new torture? Temporary protection

In preparation for the 1998 election, Pauline Hanson released a policy document on immigration which argued that refugees should be given only 'temporary protection.' On 20 August 1998, the Commonwealth Minister for Health and Community Services, Dr Michael Wooldridge, launched a blistering attack on Hanson's arguments. Noting the 'spurious claim' that Australia 'should only be a temporary haven for refugees before they are sent back again when things get better,' he responded by labelling the claim 'deeply flawed and dangerous.' He went on to observe that 'creating insecurity and uncertainty as these views undoubtedly do is one of the most dangerous ways to add to the harm that torturers do,' and concluded that 'we must not and will not turn our backs on those who come here for refuge. To do so would be to betray our moral obligation as a community and to betray that great Australian tradition of helping out those in need' (Wooldridge, 1998).

Indifferent to whether it would add to the harm that torturers do, the Howard Government ignored this sage advice in late 1999 and introduced a regime pursuant to which 'undocumented arrivals' found to be genuine refugees can receive only 'Temporary Protection Visas' (TPVs). Hanson must have felt like opening the champagne.

But the injection into refugees' lives of a pervasive sense of insecurity was only the beginning of the barbarities associated with TPVs. In October 2001, when the vessel known as SIEV-X sank en route from Indonesia to Australia, the 353 who died included three little girls, Imman, Fatima and Zahraa Alzalimi, whose father Ahmed was a recognised refugee, living in Australia with a TPV. A condition attached to his TPV had denied him the right to sponsor his wife or young children to join him, and in effect thrust them into the hands of people smugglers. Mr Alzalimi's wife, Sondos Ismail, was one of the 44 survivors of the SIEV-X sinking, but another condition attached to Mr Alzalimi's TPV denied him the right to re-enter Australia if he left for any reason.

Peter Mares recorded that the Immigration Minister 'was unmoved by calls to grant him an exception in these exceptional circumstances' (Mares, 2002, p. 202). This prompted the highly-respected Neville Roach, Chairman of Fujitsu Australia, to resign as Chair of the government's Council for a Multicultural Australia. What Mares did not record was that the restrictive visa condition imposed by the Immigration Department was a flagrant violation of the 1951 Convention Relating to

the Status of Refugees. Article 28 of the Convention provides that

The Contracting States shall issue to refugees lawfully staying in their territory travel documents for the purpose of travel outside their territory, unless compelling reasons of national security or public order otherwise require, and the provisions of the Schedule to this Convention shall apply with respect to such documents.

And paragraph 13.1 of the Schedule provides that 'Each Contracting State undertakes that the holder of a travel document issued by it in accordance with Article 28 of this Convention shall be readmitted to its territory at any time during the period of its validity.' This obligation was not one imposed on Australia: it was voluntarily accepted by the Menzies Government when it ratified the Refugees Convention in 1954. But meeting one's obligations seems to matter little to the Howard Government when there are Hansonites to appease. Indeed, as former Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser recently observed, 'It now seems that this government has put Pauline Hanson's policies into effect. (Fraser, 2002).

### Virtuous talk about 'those in greatest need' should be recognised for what it is: empty politicians' blather

### In conclusion

The preceding paragraphs only touch on some of the key flaws of present policy. The long-term psychological damage associated with the policy of detention without trial for undocumented arrivals deserves a study of its own (see Silove, Steele, and Watters, 2000). So does the corruption of Australia's promotion of 'good governance' in the South Pacific as a result of the 'Pacific Solution' (see Oxfam, 2002; Fry, 2002).

From the above discussion, it is clear that Australia's refugee policy is a shambles, sustained at best by half-truths, and stained by a cruelty towards victims of persecution that no reference to 'popular support' can justify in a decent country. And it is by returning to basic decency that we can begin to see a path out of our present situation. Since early 2002, the Australian Government has been keen to assert that Afghanistan is now safe for the return of Afghan refugees in our midst, and if Saddam Hussein were overthrown by the US, it would only be a matter of time before a similar argument were to be mounted in respect of Iraqis. Yet in appraising such claims, it is necessary to show some trace of humanity. Before long, it will also be 'safe' in a narrow sense for Australians to return to Kuta Beach in Bali, but only the crassest boor would propose that the young Australian victims of the bombing

be forced to do so. There is a lesson here for those who are not so hardened—or politically opportunistic—that the agony of the persecuted passeth their understanding.

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### Who's Who

"If not us, who?"

GORBACHEV

"I want to be there when everyone suddenly finds out what it has all been for."

MANNING CLARK QUOTING IVAN KARAMAZOV

For fifty dollars or so, the Directory incorporates the elite from A to Z, the men of note and token women too, but what would be best read is left unsaid. Instead of the solemn curricula vitae replete with titles, honours and decorations why not show how the makers and shakers the fakers and takers reached their lofty stations?

Allow the work and skill but also include self-promotion, lies and compromise, betrayals, the smiler's knife, the machinations and manipulations, and all that money buys - No principle replaces Number One when fame and fortune are there to be won.

GEOFFREY QUINLAN  
KINGSTON, A.C.T.

undermining them'. The likes of Abbott and Anderson should take heed of her warnings. Those harkening back to some utopian 'good old days' of the 1950s forget the lack of communication and the emotional repression. The 'happy' nuclear family back then often had a dark side of violence, inequality and oppression.

The home I created for my children in the 1980s and 1990s, and the families their friends grew up in were markedly different from those of my childhood. Our families certainly were not always happy (that is unrealistic) but there was much more communication and honesty – it was safe for my children to express their thoughts and feelings. While I couldn't wait to leave home at the age of 16, it was such a wrenching for both my children and myself when the time came. That certainly wasn't for a lack of independence. I had managed to create what I had missed out on: a real home, a safe haven. And it became much more so after my divorce. My children have never once asked me why I left their father. They have no need to as our lives became better in many ways. And their father, for so long an absent dad during the marriage, was much more present when they spent time with him.

However it was not all plain sailing. We had less money. We were not helped by the adversarial stances the lawyers chose in the divorce process. In hindsight, I could have made better decisions and choices and thereby had a smoother divorce. Regardless, I continued to be the full-time caregiver. My children got high grades at school, never needed therapy, both go to university and do not use drugs. They are far more balanced and emotionally healthy than I was at their age. And they are not exceptions. Many of their friends, though children of divorce, are high achievers and interesting and creative people.

Divorce is here to stay. Families can already be broken with or without divorce. This brokenness – the various forms of violence that grow within families and the lack of safety and love – is where the damage to children is done. Pamela Kinnear (2002) suggests that rather than insisting parents stay together for the sake of the children, 'it would be more useful to encourage parents to attempt to resolve conflict in constructive ways for the sake of the children, preferably within the marriage but, if that is not possible, outside of it'.

Divorce need not be damaging. But this war on divorce is. Its crusaders are stigmatising if not hurting groups of people rather than helping children and families. We need to be wary of research that is blatantly pro-marriage and dismisses or ignores healthy relationships within a variety of living arrangements. We also need to ignore the wailing of politicians and journalists who, fuelled by such research, want us to return to a romanticised version of nuclear family life in the fifties

that simply never existed. Divorce could have been the best thing that could have happened to some of the women and their children trapped behind those white picket fence.

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