

April 2001

Helping people build better lives

A regular update on our research, analysis and public advocacy

Poverty isn't a crime: ignoring it is

The coexistence of strong economic growth with high (and possibly increasing) levels of poverty and inequality in Australia indicates to many that the distribution of income and wealth is unfair. Some people fear this widening divide between high and low income households is being reflected in increased community fragmentation or may result in community meltdown. Lack of community 'connectedness' perhaps affects those in poverty most severely but is recognised as a worsening manifestation of social inequity (Johnson & Taylor 2000).

National Coalition Against Poverty

Within this environment of widening inequality and unacceptable numbers of people— especially children—living in poverty, the Brotherhood of St Laurence has given its support to and is a founding member of the National Coalition Against Poverty (NCAP). The Coalition is an umbrella organisation created to promote community action throughout its member networks that will challenge this inequity and work towards the eradication of poverty in Australia.

At the beginning of March, the coalition had 46 members, comprising local governments, unions, welfare and community organisations, individuals and church-based agencies.

Federal Government obligations

NCAP believes that the right to an adequate standard of living is a basic human right.

Australia must honour this right given that we are a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Under these international covenants, the Federal Government in particular has the obligation to *respect, protect, fulfil* and *promote* the right to an adequate standard of living.

- Respect: The Federal Government must require all its agencies and agents to abstain from carrying out, sponsoring or tolerating any practice, policy or legal measure that violates the integrity of individuals or impinges on their freedom to access resources to satisfy their needs.
- Protect: The Federal Government must ensure that its agencies and agents prevent the violation of this right by other individuals or non-state actors.
 Where violations do occur, the state must guarantee access to legal remedies.
- Fulfil: The Federal Government must ensure public expenditures, regulation of the economy and the provision of redistributive measures enable all Australians to enjoy this right.
- Promote: The Federal Government must recognise
 that the right to an adequate standard of living is
 multi-faceted. The Federal Government must
 ensure its legislation, policies and delivery of
 services do not in any way erode this right. If
 legislation, policies and service delivery
 mechanisms exist that erode this right, it is
 obligatory for the Government to correct it
 immediately.

The way forward

NCAP acknowledges that people contribute to the community in a variety of valuable ways, only one of which is paid employment.

With a growing understanding that Australia may never again experience full employment, NCAP believes those without paid work should have access to adequate support and resources so that they are able to fully participate in society and pursue their aspirations. NCAP does not believe that all current social security payments are sufficient to ensure this access.

NCAP believes that people who are unemployed should not be punished for being without paid work nor for not meeting arbitrary 'mutual obligation' requirements. Many people without paid work are living in poverty and dealing with the constant exhausting pressures of mere survival.

The best way to tackle poverty is to address the structural causes of economic inequity.

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The right to an adequate standard of living includes the right to food, clothing, housing, health care and education.

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Current action

NCAP is now calling on the Federal Government to take an immediate step and increase all pensions and benefits to onequarter of average male weekly earnings.

NCAP is also calling on the Federal Government to establish a Royal Commission into poverty in Australia with the aim of developing measures to determine an adequate standard of living for all people and to make recommendations as to how poverty in Australia can be eradicated.

What can you do?

- Join NCAP and participate in a number of actions aimed at eradicating poverty.
- Endorse the petition (included with this issue) that calls for an increase in pensions and benefits and for an Inquiry into poverty in Australia.
- Circulate and promote the petition within your community and spheres of influence.
- Visit NCAP's website at http://go.to/ncap for more details of member organisations, actions you can take and to download the petition.

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Reference

Johnson, J & Taylor, J 2000, *Growing* apart: a new look at poverty in Australia, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

In this issue

An estimated two million Australians (11 per cent) live in a household in poverty. The Brotherhood of St Laurence has recently joined the National Coalition Against Poverty, an umbrella group of like-minded organisations working to raise awareness and promote community action. Sally Jope reminds us of all people's right to an adequate standard of living and asks for your support and involvement. A petition calling for an increase to the level of pensions and benefits and seeking the establishment of a Royal Commission into Poverty is included with this issue for your use.

The unemployment rate is on the rise: 6.9 per cent in February 2001. This is bad news in itself, but what *doesn't* the unemployment rate tell you? Fiona Macdonald draws on the

work of labour market observers to argue the case for developing a range of indicators which will give a more rounded picture of the state of the labour market. Meanwhile, the Social Policy Research Centre and the Brotherhood have joined forces to evaluate the Job Network. The findings of the first report, *Is the Job Network benefiting disadvantaged job seekers?*, are summarised by Helen MacDonald.

Previous articles in *Brotherhood Comment* have analysed underlying assumptions driving policy initiatives in the 'welfare reform' area. We do know that the Federal Government has been influenced by reforms taking place elsewhere. Peter Hardy, a social work student on placement at the Brotherhood, discusses the harmful impact welfare reform has had in Wisconsin. In the next issue, welfare reform in the United Kingdom will be considered.

Steve Ziguras offers some reflections on the inaugural conference of the Social Entrepreneurs Network. The Brotherhood's Library and Information Service has many resources available on social entrepreneurship, an approach to community development work which needs more discussion within the sector.

And finally, a couple of requests. Social Action and Research is undergoing its annual planning process where we determine key policy areas for the coming year. Steve Gianni asks for your thoughts and feedback on our proposals. Annual subscriptions to *Brotherhood Comment* are now due. We ask for your continued support to help cover our costs.



Helping people build better lives

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Brotherhood Comment is published three times a year by the Social Action and Research Division of the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence works for the well-being of Australians on low incomes to improve their economic, social and personal circumstances. It does this through direct aid and support, and by providing a wide range of services and activities for families, the unemployed and the aged.

The Brotherhood also researches the causes of poverty, undertakes community education and lobbies government for a better deal for people on low incomes.

Planning SAR's agenda

It's that time of the year again, when we turn our minds to planning and strategic directions. The Social Action and Research (SAR) division of the Brotherhood has reflected on the first six months of this year's plan and made corresponding adjustments for the second half of this financial year. We are now seeking your input into our strategic plan for the financial year 2001–2002.

The SAR agenda is not only being published here in *Brotherhood Comment* and internally amongst Brotherhood services staff, but also for the first time publicly in *The Age* and *The Australian* newspapers.

Is this a proactive or reactive agenda?

Probably a bit of both. Some areas are work in progress, ethical business and employment for example, while poverty and income support are clearly a part of our core business. Housing, health, and education are acknowledged as key determinants of poverty while indigenous Australians and refugees figure prominently in most measures of disadvantage.

Each set of projects within an area has both reactive and proactive elements to it. The Brotherhood is acutely aware of the need for innovative policy, services and programs 'on the ground' for those most in need. Our advocacy and social action will always have an eye on the practical realities confronting Australians. However, it is also true to say that the Brotherhood is concerned with those difficult questions that go to

the heart of service systems and policy directions that perpetuate poverty.

The Brotherhood, through its delivery of community services and the work of SAR, is determined to make a strong and positive contribution towards an Australia free of poverty. If a new social order or at least a paradigm shift is required, SAR is prepared to support and or lead it.

Two Brotherhood initiatives that will make a contribution to this vision are a national public inquiry into poverty and a social marketing campaign aiming to achieve behavioural change in Australians' attitudes towards poverty. More details will follow in the August issue of *Brotherhood Comment*.

How will we achieve our goals?

- Integrated planning across the Brotherhood and in particular across the three elements of SAR, that is, Policy and Research; the Library and Information Service; and the Promotion and Communication Department.
- Developing and communicating findings or experiences from research and Brotherhood services in a consistent and strategic way to all Australians.
- Remaining focused on a new social order for Australia while not neglecting individuals in need.

We hope you will take this opportunity to help inform our strategic agenda. The work of the Brotherhood and SAR can only be strengthened by dialogue with the communities we serve.

Stephen Gianni

(03) 9483 1372 sgianni@bsl.org.au SAR has decided on 10 strategic areas of focus:

- 1. poverty—connecting the issues
- 2. globalisation and locational disadvantage
- ethical business
- 4. health
- 5. housing
- 6. indigenous poverty and reconciliation
- 7. refugees
- 8. income support
- employment, economic and social participation
- 10. education

For each area we've developed a brief rationale sheet that defines the scope and contemporary issues. A subsequent set of projects and activities has been developed with ideas for possible partners. Projects have been prioritised and allocated resources where available.

Your thoughts may relate to:

- the focus areas themselves, or those missing
- the possible projects and or activities
- potential partners
- the priority that should be given to any one project
- or any other comments.

The lists of proposed projects and activities, although by no means comprehensive, remains long—too long to publish here. Contact SAR's Publications Officer, Mas Generis, for all or part of the project list. It is also available on our website, www.bsl.org.au/sar/welcome.htm.

Mas Generis

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The state of the labour market

In recent months academics and politicians have drawn attention to the inadequacy of using the unemployment rate as the principal indicator to assess the health of the labour market.

The main criticisms of this reliance on the unemployment rate stem from its failure to capture various dimensions of the fundamental changes occurring in the labour market over the last two decades. For example, the unemployment rate tells us nothing about the problem of underemployment.

Underemployment and overwork

Full-time jobs growth stagnated in the 1990s and part-time jobs now make up more than one-infour of all jobs. While part-time employment is not in itself a problem, there are currently over 400,000 part-time workers who would prefer to

is a measure of inequality in employment and is based on earnings dispersion within industries averaged across the economy.

On all four of the HLM indicators the performance of the Australian labour market has been poor over the decade to 1999: full-time employment has stagnated, underemployment has increased, more of the full-time work force are working long hours and earnings inequality has increased (Watson 2000).

In addition to more comprehensive indicators such as the HLM, we need to be able to see what is

and those paid by labour hire firms represented 1 per cent of all employees (ABS 2000).

However there are other indicators which do not appear to point to an increase in job insecurity. Mark Wooden (1999) examines workers' perceptions of job insecurity from Morgan poll surveys conducted since 1975 in which people were asked whether their present job is safe or whether they believe there is a chance of becoming unemployed. He

Full-time jobs growth stagnated in the 1990s and part-time jobs now make up more than one-in-four of all jobs

work more hours. At the same time there appears to be an increase in overwork with many full-time workers wanting to work fewer hours and the proportion of full-time workers working 49 or more hours a week increasing in recent years (Watson 2000).

Improved labour market indicators

Two recent suggestions for broader approaches to the measurement of labour market performance (Denniss 2001 and Watson 2000) do incorporate underemployment and long hours of work. In addition Watson's Health of the Labour Market Index (HLM) includes two indicators of the overall state of the labour market: a full-time employment index and an industry earnings dispersion index.

The full-time employment index is constructed to capture the number of jobs available to the entire adult population, unlike the usual employment and unemployment rates which are measured as proportions of the labour force and which, therefore, can change when discouraged job seekers give up the search for work as well as when there are changes in the number of jobs available. The industry earnings dispersion index

happening in relation to a much larger range of factors which are important in determining the well-being of those in work or wanting work.

Some of these are job security and insecurity, long-term unemployment, movements in and out of employment, mobility out of low-paid jobs, and labour market outcomes for demographic groups and geographic regions.

Job insecurity

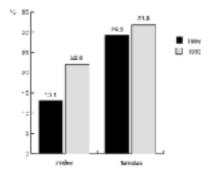
Finding valid indicators to answer some questions about the labour market is not an easy task. Take job security. One of the main measures labour market observers have relied on as an indicator of job insecurity is the growth in casual employment. Over the last 15 years casual jobs have increased dramatically from fewer than one-in-seven employees in 1984 to more than one-in-four employees in 1999. In fact casual employees accounted for almost half the growth in employed persons between 1984 and 1999. In addition to this increase in casual employees there have been increases in employees in fixed-term employment and in contracted employment (for example employees who are paid by labour hire firms). In 1998 fixed-term employees represented 5 per cent

finds little evidence of a long-term rise in perceived job insecurity. Wooden also considers trends in job mobility and job duration using data gathered for the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) labour mobility survey and again finds little evidence to suggest that mobility has risen or that tenure has become shorter between 1975 and 1998.

Other researchers have pointed to problems with using the growth in casual employment as an indicator of growing job insecurity. For example, casual employment covers some people who are not employed by someone else but are ownermanagers of their own businesses and it also includes many employees who have been in their jobs for a relatively long period of time. Murtough and Waite (2000) suggest that casual employment is not a good indicator of insecure or precarious employment and that employees

Casual employment as an indicator of insecurity

Proportion of all employees who are casual, 1989 & 1999



Some indicators of insecurity among casual employees

- 62% have earnings that vary monthly
- 10% have two or more jobs
- 97% have no paid leave
- 27% have been with their employer for more than 2 years

By comparison, of employees in ongoing full-time employment

- 12% have earnings that vary monthly
- 3% have two or more jobs
- all have paid leave
- 64% have been with their employer for more than 2 years

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2000, *Australian Social Trends 2000*, ABS, Canberra, Cat No. 4121.0 & Cat No. 4120.0.

should not be regarded as 'true' casuals unless they self-identify as casual employees and are in jobs which are occasional, irregular or short-term.

The debate about job insecurity or 'precarious' employment hinges on what is meant by these terms. The ABS definition of a casual employee—an employee who receives neither paid sick leave nor paid holiday leave—was designed to identify employees who have a casual employment contract as understood in the industrial relations system. In this context insecurity relates not simply to job tenure but to the lack of regulation or protection in employment. Like many other 'non-standard' workers casuals are mostly located outside the system of protections associated with 'standard' (full-time permanent employee status) employment.

Broadening the definitions

If we want to understand how changes in the labour market are affecting the well-being of workers we need to adopt a broad interpretation of employment insecurity or precariousness. One such interpretation is provided by Standing (1986 in de Ruyter & Burgess 2000) whose classification of labour insecurity includes seven dimensions:

- 1. Labour market: Probability of securing employment when out of work.
- Employment: Ability of employers to lay-off workers, extent of employment protection, notice requirements.
- 3. Task: Ability of employers to redefine jobs.
- Work: Presence and enforcement of occupational health and safety, regular working hours and sociable working hours.

- Income: Stability and predictability of earnings, presence of minimum wages, access to benefits when out of work.
- Skill reproduction: Ability to acquire and retain skills, access to training.
- Representation: Existence of independent trade unions, rights to organise and strike.

Casual and other non-standard employment have high levels of insecurity on a number of the dimensions contained within this broader conception of insecurity.

Consider, for example, income insecurity. One indicator of income insecurity is variable earnings. Almost two-thirds of casual employees have earnings which vary monthly. This has particular significance given that the highest concentrations of casuals are in the lowest-paid occupations and industries. When wages are low a downward variation in earnings may leave individuals and families without adequate incomes.

The three industry groups with the highest proportions of casual workers are the three groups with the lowest average hourly rates of pay. These are agriculture, forestry and fishing, retail trade, and accommodation, cafés and restaurants. The two occupation groups with the highest proportions of casual workers are also those with the lowest average hourly rates of pay, and:

- over 50 per cent of employees who are elementary clerical sales and service workers are in casual iobs; and
- 43 per cent of employees who are labourers and related workers are in casual jobs (ABS 2000).

The proportion of women employed in casual and other non-standard employment is much higher than the proportion of men, even in the younger age group 15 to 24 years when fewer women have child care responsibilities. The majority of casual employees in the retail trade and the accommodation, café and restaurant industries are women. Both of these industries have very low rates of trade union membership, a potential indicator of insecurity of representation.

Casual employment as an indicator

Casual employment is clearly associated with insecurity and labour market disadvantage. However, for some highly-skilled and highly-paid workers the rise in non-standard forms of employment may be a positive experience where new opportunities present themselves regularly.

At the same time employment insecurity is not restricted to casual employees and others in non-standard jobs. For example, past research undertaken by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (1997) demonstrated that some workers in permanent full-time jobs are experiencing high levels of insecurity resulting from unsociable hours, work intensification, broadening of job tasks and low pay.

The labour market is becoming more fragmented and the experiences of employees more divergent. The measures we use to assess the state of the labour market need to be able to take these factors into account. The

impacts of the changing labour market on different groups of people and in different regions need to be monitored using a range of indicators which, in combination, give us some idea of how the labour market is affecting employees' well-being.

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National education and employment forum

Bridging the gap: the role of education in overcoming the increasing distance between 'the haves and the have nots'

A national education and employment forum (NEEF) is to be held in Melbourne on Friday 4 May 2001. This forum is part of a network of state forums, culminating in the national forum in Brisbane in August 2001. NEEF has been established by the World Education Fellowship, a voluntary international association with advisory status to UNESCO.

The aims of the forum are to:

- identify the extent and main characteristics of educational disadvantage currently being experienced in Australia;
- develop a proposal for policy and action to table in Federal Parliament at the end of 2001, to achieve more effective education;
- pursue proposals by all available bodies responsible for education and training for employment, including the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs; and
- alert industry and commerce to the needs of the disadvantaged and seek assistance in overcoming the gap through education.

For more information or to register, contact: **Dr Gordon Young** State Coordinator of NEEF Victoria young@preston.hotkey.net.au

From welfare to nowhere: welfare reform in Wisconsin

Since the election of Republican Tommy Thompson as Governor in 1986, Wisconsin has been at the forefront of welfare reform in the United States. The reforms have proven to be a benchmark in the US, with their influence reaching to Washington and beyond.

'Workfare': the new approach

Governor Thompson argued that Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the nation's largest public assistance program, removed people's willingness to take responsibility for their lives and that of their children. His aim was to reduce the number of people on welfare and move them to what he called 'self sufficiency'.

This was achieved through the introduction of reforms such as 'Workfare', which are compulsory work schemes, and 'Learnfare', which made AFDC benefit levels conditional on the school attendance of school-aged children. These reforms made the receipt of welfare assistance conditional on behaviour and performance. The results have been dramatic; Wisconsin's welfare caseloads have plummeted.

Under Wisconsin's welfare reforms new applicants are told they need to put in 60 hours looking for work before they can receive their

requirement that each county reduce its AFDC caseloads by between 15 to 25 per cent over the subsequent 12 months.

Another significant contributor to the reduction in welfare payments and caseloads has been the result of sanctions or penalties, often imposed for minor violations like missing appointments or failing to respond to notices.

Measuring the outcomes

There is little evidence to suggest that those who participate in workfare programs have better long-term outcomes than other welfare recipients. Many who have left welfare for paid work have moved into poorly paid and often casual employment, offering no permanent escape from poverty. The sub-minimum wages paid to workfare participants have the potential to depress wages at the lower end of the labour market, making it difficult for those finding work to escape poverty.

ease the financial burden. Critics contend that caseload reduction is an inadequate measure of the success of any welfare reform and instead the focus should be whether the economic well-being of children and families has been enhanced. There is little evidence to suggest the Wisconsin reforms have made a noticeable dent in poverty.

The reforms appear to be based on the premise that somehow poverty and joblessness result from an individual's failure to act on opportunities. Such assumptions ignore the structural social and economic causes of poverty and joblessness. Therefore the Wisconsin reforms can be seen as attacking welfare, rather than the underlying causes of poverty.

There is little evidence to suggest that those who participate in workfare programs have better long-term outcomes than other welfare recipients.

first payment and perform 'work assignments' 30 to 35 hours each week to remain eligible for welfare assistance. This is part of what welfare experts call 'diversion', turning people off welfare before they get on, and it has been a centrepiece of Wisconsin's welfare reforms.

In the mid-1990s Wisconsin employed competitive bidding for the management of each county's welfare system. Welfare organisations could escape the competitive bidding process by ensuring they met performance criteria specified by the state. Chief among these was the

In addition, these programs have the potential to displace workers already employed. This is particularly true given that employers now have a large pool of subsidised workfare labour to call upon.

The focus on caseload decline as a measure of reform success appears misplaced. Many have voiced suspicion that smaller caseloads have been purchased at the cost of greater family distress. Some former welfare recipients have had to 'double up', moving in with family and friends to

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For a copy of Peter's report, please contact us.

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Legislating to protect Victorians from racial and religious vilification

Victoria enjoys a very good track record as a multicultural community and most would agree that racial hatred and religious intolerance should have no place in Victoria. From its long history of working with migrant and refugee groups, the **Ecumenical Migration Centre understands the** serious harmful effects on those subjected to vilification, intimidation, threats and violence based on religion and race. These acts severely restrict their quality of life, opportunities and freedom of movement-in short, their full participation in the Victorian community. The significant physical and psychological harm of racial hatred against individuals and groups is best understood as a result of the cumulative effect of repeated incidents, far outweighing any single incident.

From this point of view the Victorian Government's proposed Racial and Religious Tolerance legislation ought to be welcomed as a clear message that racial and religious hatred will not be tolerated and that the law will be used to protect the rights of all Victorians to live without fear of vilification in their public and private lives.

All communities, it must be remembered, struggle with the racism found within, as well as the racism directed between ethnic and religious groups. No group inciting racial and religious hatred should be exempt.

In Victoria, existing avenues for aggrieved individuals have long been considered inadequate. Complaints of racial vilification made to the Sydney-based Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) may be investigated and conciliated where appropriate. However, HREOC's determinations are not legally enforceable. Complainants applying to the Federal Court face a complex and costly process. Civil proceedings requiring legal action to be taken against those perpetrating threats or abuse are problematic for people who may be intimidated or afraid to participate in this course



photo: Stuart Fleming

of action. The financial costs may also be prohibitive to many.

The proposed legislation will add to the current powers of the Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria (EOCV) to receive, investigate and conciliate complaints of discrimination and sexual harassment. It is intended to provide people who are subjected to acts of vilification with a formal process by which they can seek a remedy. Victoria remains the only state without such provisions.

The impact and incidence of vilification

While opponents of the Racial and Religious
Tolerance bill cite freedom of speech as a central
right, the harmful effects of racial and religious
hatred are less often discussed. The facts are that
physical and verbal abuse, threats, intimidation and
violence are part of the daily experience of many
minorities. The Ecumenical Migration Centre sees
the debilitating and destructive effects on members
of small and emerging communities who report that
racist violence and religious vilification is often part
of their daily experience. Generally however, these

acts go unreported because victims feel intimidated, or unsure or untrusting of options available to them for recourse.

Over the last decade, a number of reports have consistently concluded that racist violence is an issue in Australia. For example, racist literature and attacks on property continue to be strategies used by anti-Semitic groups and white supremacists. Furthermore, racial vilification is a particular concern for indigenous people, especially in rural communities in Victoria. (See the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia, HREOC 1991; Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991; and *New* country, new stories: discrimination and disadvantage experienced by people in small and emerging communities, HREOC 1999.)

Repetition of assaults (verbal or physical) impacts most on affected individuals and communities through the cumulative effects of prejudice, discrimination and power imbalances in society. The need to use all the mechanisms open to us to combat vilification becomes starkly clear when the focus is on the serious harm that racial and religious vilification inflicts on individuals and groups.

Will the legislation be effective?

A central issue is the extent to which legislation is effective in prohibiting, discouraging and prosecuting racial and religious vilification. The proposed broadly-based information



and education campaign is an essential and critical companion strategy if we are serious about social change in this regard. Criminal sanctions rightly remain a last resort amongst options which favour conciliation and civil proceedings and leave criminal proceedings for very serious offences.

An important aspect of the proposed bill would make employers accountable for ensuring their workplace is free of racial and religious vilification, harassment and violence. In this sense, the proposed bill complements current legislation outlawing gender and disability discrimination, assault and unsafe work practices. Taken together, this goes a long way to supporting a central plank of a mature multicultural society prepared to use the law to fight those who cause willful harm and incite hatred.

The proposed provision for an organisation or representative to take a case on behalf of an aggrieved individual is welcome and ought be extended to taking up the case of aggrieved groups. There also needs to be a role for the EOCV to initiate an investigation, say in cases of suspected illegal conduct.

The argument curbing the absolute and uncurtailed rights to freedom of speech in a democracy has already been won with laws about slander, libel and defamation. A clear focus on the harm and constraints imposed on individual freedom by acts of vilification will assist in making judgments in contentious areas like jokes and poetic or artistic licence.

The 'reasonable observer' test, already used effectively by the Equal Opportunity Commission, will assist in defining and separating trivia from rightful public deliberation. Particular attention must be paid to the possibility of Western dominant culture bias of 'reasonableness' in any 'observer' role. It will be necessary to bring to this 'reasonable observer' test the Victorian community's wealth of experience in managing diversity.

Will the legislation be supported?

The proposed bill is not guaranteed the full support of the Victorian community. Some

community leaders remain concerned that a legislative approach may draw unwanted attention to themselves as ethnic or religious minorities. Others may see it preferable to suffer in silence, finding dignity in turning the other cheek, believing racism will always be with us. Concern is voiced about the dangers of criminal proceedings giving undue prominence to those with an interest in promoting racial hatred, possibly even conferring martyr status upon them.

The title of the bill, Racial and Religious
Tolerance, also draws some criticism as
'tolerance' implies the existence of some core
group which 'tolerates' all others. The aim of the
legislation is respect for, and not merely
tolerance of, racial and religious diversity in our
community.

A legislative approach can never replace the need for social change through community education and information campaigns. It is important now that the Victorian Government provides details of its proposed community education strategy—after all, it is in the Government's interest to have broad-based community support for this important initiative.

The consultation process just concluded will no doubt identify practical ways to strengthen the draft bill to avoid unintended outcomes. This initiative marks an important step in recognising and preventing the harm accrued from racial and religious vilification in Victoria and in dealing with the perpetrators through a well-rounded set of options including conciliation, civil proceedings and criminal proceedings. It deserves the broad in principle support of the Victorian community.

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Women and poverty forum

24 April 2001

VCOSS and the Council of Single Mothers and their Children (CSMC), with the YWCA as a major sponsor, are cohosting a one-day working forum focusing on women and poverty on Tuesday 24 April at the YWCA in Melbourne.

Speakers confirmed to date include:

- Joan Kirner, ex-Premier of Victoria (opening)
- Sherryl Garbutt, Victorian Minister for Womens' Affairs (closing)
- Elspeth McInnes, Co-Executive
 Director, National Council of Single
 Mothers and their Children

Keynote speakers will address:

- government policies targeting single mothers
- Poverty, women and the law, and
- The casualisation of women's work and issues for young women in poverty

Working groups over the afternoon will develop specific and practical recommendations to government for change. You are invited to submit recommendations to a draft platform being prepared in advance of the forum date.

Registration:

Women with health care cards or on low incomes: no fee Community sector: \$33 Government and corporate sector: \$66

Kate Colvin

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Evaluating the Job Network

The first results from a study of the impact of competition on community-based employment agencies and job seekers has been released. The joint study, conducted by the Social Policy Research Centre of the University of New South Wales in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence and JOB Futures, a national network of community-based employment service agencies, shows mixed results for participants in the Job Network.

The Job Network was established in May 1998 and represented a 'radical experiment' in employment service delivery to job seekers which effectively replaced public provision with agencies competing in a quasi-marketplace for contracts. Assessing the impact on agencies and job seekers of this shift in the framework of services is the subject of the study being undertaken. The study is based on analysis of indepth interviews and consultation with Board members, managers and staff from 10 agencies in New South Wales and Victoria during the first contract period of the Job Network, as well as focus group discussions with more than 100 job seekers. The report discusses four main topics, including:

- assessment and referral operations at Centrelink;
- access to assistance for job seekers;
- agency practices; and
- · employer practices.

Assessment and referral

Access to the Job Network is determined by Centrelink, which establishes eligibility for income support and assesses job seeker levels of entitlement to employment assistance. This is done using a classification tool known as the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI).

Overall, agency staff and job seekers believed that the JSCI often did not provide an accurate assessment of job seeker difficulties, nor did it adequately measure the extent and nature of labour market disadvantage. Staff consulted for the study suggested the need for more detailed face-to-face interviews with job seekers to obtain

a more accurate understanding of their needs and to overcome some of the issues of job seeker 'under-disclosure' of difficulties. Insufficient staffing levels at Centrelink often precluded this more detailed assessment taking place.

While Centrelink is also responsible for informing eligible job seekers of the requirement to register with one or more Job Network agencies, job seekers considered the information they received from Centrelink to be very limited. Some agencies have run information sessions for job seekers about the Job Network, explaining such things as the overall system and the JSCI, in order to help them access the most appropriate level of assistance.

Access to assistance

In addition to the availability of information and accurate assessment by Centrelink, the study found low rates of participation in the Job Network by young people in particular and difficulties experienced by some people in obtaining the most appropriate types of assistance to meet their needs.

The lack of young people in our caseload always astounds me.

Many agency staff and managers reported low rates of youth participation in their programs, particularly intensive assistance, which provides higher levels of assistance for longer periods. Staff reported that it was particularly difficult to get young people who were not receiving income support to attend interviews because there was no incentive for them to do so. In spite of their best efforts to find work, many young people were often thwarted in their job search by lack of access to active assistance from Centrelink and by Job Network agencies because of the operation of the JSCI. Job search has become very costly for job seekers who may have to lodge resumés at several sites or travel long distances to agencies.

Once in the Job Network, some job seekers were unable to access the most appropriate types and levels of assistance to meet their needs, and very often this was the more disadvantaged job seekers

with higher support needs. Staff and managers argued that there was a need for specialist assistance not currently widely available such as:

- support for people with disabilities (especially psychiatric illness);
- interpreters, or staff with languages other than English;
- culturally sensitive services for indigenous and overseas-born job seekers; and
- assistance for people with multiple barriers to employment.

Some job seekers and service staff regarded two years of assistance as inadequate, especially for those with higher support needs.

Agency practices

Further reports from this study will examine in more detail examples of good practice in the Job Network. The initial findings show that, while not necessarily contributing directly to improved outcomes, job seekers value and recognise simple respect and friendly treatment by agency staff and spoke highly of those who treated them in this way.

Helpful practices by agencies for job seekers included keeping in touch with the progress of job applications, taking time to explain in detail the processes of the Job Network, providing easily accessible facilities, and support preparing resumés and job applications. Agencies that provided access to useful training or supported job seekers financially to take up training opportunities were regarded very positively by job seekers.

Employer practices

Agency staff and managers consulted noted the shift in focus towards servicing employers rather than job seekers, especially in their job matching activities. For some agencies, this has represented a considerable realignment of their service delivery priorities.

Job seekers reported being discouraged from directly canvassing employers for jobs, by employers themselves and some agencies, and have been redirected to Job Network agencies to apply for vacancies. This was particularly frustrating for job seekers who felt that this practice reduces their chances of getting a job. They also disliked the practice of not listing the name and location of prospective employers in an advertised vacancy until the time of interview.

Issues for further research

The study found that the introduction of competition has caused some conflict for community-based agencies who have had to adapt to a market-driven, outcome-based funding environment that is somewhat removed from one of cooperation and information sharing. At the same time, some agencies have adapted by becoming more innovative and efficient in their use of resources.

Some of these issues are being explored in greater detail in the second phase of the research currently being undertaken with job seekers and agency representatives.

The report, *Is the Job Network benefiting disadvantaged job seekers? Preliminary evidence from a study of non-profit employment services*, is available from the Social Policy Research Centre website (www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/dp/index.htm) and the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

Helen MacDonald

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Recent submissions

The Brotherhood puts forward its views when it believes that it can make a considered contribution to a better understanding of the needs of low-income Australians based on its research or policy analysis or its experience in providing services.

Significant submissions or statements released over 1999–2001 include:

Comments on the discussion paper, Targeting dental services: people with special needs (Victorian Department of Human Services)

A new tax system (Family Assistance) bills (Senate Legislation Committee on Community Affairs)

Issues specific to older workers seeking employment (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations)

Changes in Victorian schools and implications for lower-income families (People Together inquiry into Public Education)

Inquiry into the Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (More Jobs, Better Pay) Bill (Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Legislation Committee)

A safety net that helps build fulfilling lives (Reference Group on Welfare Reform)

A safety net that allows sole parent families to build fulfilling lives (Reference Group on Welfare Reform)

Interim report of the Reference Group: Brotherhood of St Laurence response (Reference Group on Welfare Reform)

Parliamentary Inquiry into Substance Abuse (Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs)

Public education—the next generation (Contribution to review of public education in Victoria)

High care residential aged care facilities in Victoria (Ministerial Advisory Committee on Nursing Home Regulation).

Submission to the Ministerial Review of Preschool Services in Victoria.

All these submissions are available for the cost of copying and mailing, usually \$9. Please contact the Brotherhood Library and Information Service on (03) 9483 1388, e-mail: library@bsl.org.au. Or visit our website at www.bsl.org.au/sar/spepre.htm.

Social Entrepreneurs Conference

some reflections

The first Australian social entrepreneurship conference took place in Sydney on February 15 and 16. Participants came from a wide variety of backgrounds, the largest group from community-based services with some from business and the public service. There was a tangible sense of enthusiasm and energy among the audience, and many spoke about the value they placed on being able to meet others doing similar work.

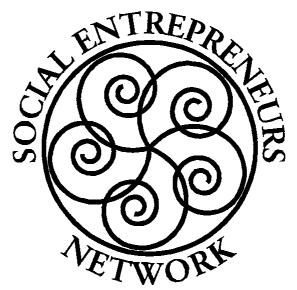
What is social entrepreneurship?

Social entrepreneurship was not formally defined during the conference, and although some participants wanted more clarity, most seemed happy with a broad understanding of the term. For those who weren't there, a working definition might be something like 'bringing community agencies, government, businesses and local communities together to develop innovative solutions to social problems'. The overall mood of the audience was probably captured in one participant's statement: 'We aren't interested in terminology or definitions, we just want to get things done'. There were six key strands which I thought kept emerging during discussions, and I've attempted to highlight these below.

First, participants talked about social entrepreneurship involving motivations of both profit-making and of wanting to improve society. Businesses were seen as social entrepreneurs only if they incorporated a broader social purpose in their activities. The spectrum of social entrepreneurship included at one end community agencies that entered business arrangements specifically for a social goal (such as getting jobs for unemployed people), and at the other, businesses with a profit imperative, but where social values were reflected in some way (for example providing some positions for long-term unemployed people).

Cliff Colquhoun was one of the 'model social entrepreneurs' who made a brief presentation at the beginning of the conference. He has been involved in setting up community-based business

enterprises in rural New Zealand. He suggested that social entrepreneurship operated at the junction of pure social purpose ventures and pure profit making; they generally attempted to earn money from market-based activities, and sometimes they would make a profit, and other times might not break even. He thought that government support was sometimes needed for ventures which were not entirely self-sufficient, but which provided useful social services.



A second theme was economic development. Many speakers and participants had embraced social entrepreneurship in an attempt to generate local economic activity and employment in the face of prolonged disadvantage. Some from rural areas in both Australia and New Zealand had attempted to develop new industries and employment opportunities to replace those which had disappeared with falling commodity prices, reduction of government services, and the closing of local or regional offices of large national or multinational companies.

A third impression was the frequent reference to the failure of the welfare state. Many people referred to existing services and policies as 'old, tired, passive, failed' and even as 'parasitic'. While there was a well-developed sense of what was or is wrong with our current system, few people highlighted the achievements. There was also a tendency for simplistic stereotyping of 'welfare' as paternalistic, one-to-one casework, dealing with symptoms and not with causes. Much of this seemed uninformed by any knowledge of the diversity of views, approaches and achievements of community agencies and welfare services, especially the long history of both community development and social advocacy.

The role of government

At the same time, there appeared to be an implicit assumption among some participants that all government funding was unhealthy, dependencyforming and to be avoided if at all possible. Maybe because of this, some worried that social entrepreneurship heralded an era of diminished government responsibility and involvement. Federal Minister for Employment, Tony Abbott, related a story in which he criticised a youth worker for seeking funding from government rather than raising it himself by organising a carwash. On the other hand, Mark Bagshaw from IBM felt that many corporate executives were coming to the conclusion that insufficient attention had been paid to the role of government in promoting just and cohesive societies over the last few years, and he called for greater government spending on social programs.

A fourth issue discussed by managers was difficulty in changing the culture of existing welfare organisations and many expressed a sense of isolation in attempting to do this. An interesting example of a large non-church based

Brotherhood Comment Comment



welfare organisation embracing social entrepreneurship gave an insight into some of these tensions. This agency's board had decided to change the direction of the organisation from service delivery to a more communitybased or community development model, but was meeting substantial resistance from staff. There was some sense of irony (among the audience at least) that an organisation which was promoting the (apparently newly recognised) importance of bottomup and grass-roots approaches was at the same time imposing enormous organisational change in what appeared to be a determined top-down manner.

The fifth issue was the tension between community-based activities and individual entrepreneurs. Peter Kenyon placed social entrepreneurship within the tradition of cooperatives and community development which has long been part of Australian public life. He also expressed some concern that much of the new paradigm was about doing things for communities, rather than with them. Despite frequent references to community, participants also talked about the need for freedom from restraints, bureaucracy, and restrictive performance monitoring, and the importance of individual creativity. These sometimes seemed inconsistent with community development approaches which are after all about being directed by communities, and helping community members take action,

rather than an entrepreneur organising things for them.

Lastly, it would have been useful to have a little more critical analysis or self-reflection about the pros and cons of social entrepreneurship, and its relationship to the larger policy field. This may have been expecting something from the conference which it was not set up to do, and perhaps future meetings or conferences could include a more critical approach.

Despite these reservations, the strongest aspect of the conference for me was an enormous sense of optimism in the ability of people to come together to find solutions to the problems of disadvantage, inequality and exclusion. It was this renewed sense of hope and the willingness to act on it which struck me as a central contribution of both the conference and the movement. One outcome of the conference was the establishment of a Social Entrepreneurs Network to provide mutual learning opportunities and support. For information about the network, contact Vern Hughes on (03) 9326 8245 or e-mail: hothamuc@sub.net.au.

Stephen Ziguras

(03) 9483 1316 sziguras@bsl.org.au

Want to know more?

The following resources are held in the Brotherhood Library.

Beck, U 2000, *What is globalization?*, Polity Press, Malden, US.

Brickell, P 2000, *People before structures:* engaging communities effectively in regeneration, Demos, London.

Brinckerhoff, P 2000, *Social* entrepreneurship: the art of mission-based venture development, Wiley, New York.

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Thurow, L 1999, *Creating wealth: the new rules for individuals, companies and countries in a knowledge-based economy*, Nicholas Brealey, London.

The Brotherhood's Library and Information Service website has details of other internet sites with materials on social entrepreneurship.

Contact:

Patricia Newell

(03) 9483 1388 library@bsl.org.au http://www.bsl.org.au/library/ socialentrepreneurship.htm

Work in Drogress

Ethical Business Project

The Brotherhood's recent acquisition of Mod-Style, a Melbourne-based optical frame import/wholesale business, has created a new opportunity for the Brotherhood to contribute to the increasing dialogue on ethical business practices and frameworks of corporate, social and environmental responsibility.

The Ethical Business Project (EBP) is primarily concerned with mapping the supply chain

of Mod-Style, and documenting labour and environmental conditions among suppliers and sub-contractors in the People's Republic of China (currently 90 per cent of the world's optical frames are made in China and the majority of Mod-Style frames are imported from China). While recognising the complexity and difficulty of documenting and monitoring labour standards in

China, the EBP aims to encourage improvements to the manufacturing conditions and management practices of suppliers, so that local labour laws and relevant international treaties such as the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work are upheld.

It is intended that the EBP will contribute to a broader organisational understanding of international labour and environmental issues and of the roles that transnational enterprises play in global human rights matters.

The specific objectives of the Ethical Business Project are:

- implementation of a responsibility framework including codes of conduct and monitoring of performance;
- documentation of all research and evaluation; and
- collaboration with others to promote ethical business in Australia.

Serena Lillywhite has been appointed as the Project Manager Ethical Business, and has already visited Hong Kong and made



contact with optical frame traders and relevant NGOs including the Asia Monitor Resource Centre, Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee and Labour Rights in China.

In March, Serena and Stephen Chisnall (Mod-Style's General Manager) visited the major Mod-Style suppliers: seven factories in Guandong Province, southern China. The purpose of this visit was to build relationships with the suppliers to support ongoing dialogue with them and to undertake an initial evaluation of the conditions under which the Mod-Style frames are manufactured.

The EBP will provide the Brotherhood as a whole with learnings and processes which can be used to establish a framework of social, corporate, and environmental responsibility for all the organisation's activities. The Project will be completed in June 2002. At that time research findings and recommendations will be presented to the BSL Board. A report will be prepared to ensure all findings are documented.

Serena Lillywhite

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New publications

Policy in arrears

This report, written by Marnie Lyons, reviews the Office of Housing's rent arrears policies. It compares their Rental Arrears Policy and Procedures to the minimum standards regulating billing, collection and withdrawal of service required by the State Government of privatised utility companies. Findings revealing some inconsistencies are addressed by a number of detailed recommendations aiming to improve the provision of public housing.

For more information, or to purchase this report, contact:

Mas Generis

(03) 9483 1386 publications@bsl.org.au

Poverty information sheets

We have developed a new series of free information sheets. They provide facts, figures and suggestions for the future and are designed for students and all others interested in reducing poverty in Australia. The information sheets are written using clear and concise language and provide information on the following topics:

- Poverty in Australia
- Income support and poverty
- The poverty line update
- Poverty and unemployment

To obtain copies, contact:

Patricia Newell

Library and Information Service (03) 9483 1388 library@bsl.org.au



New information on poverty, housing and unemployment

The following are among the latest significant acquisitions received by the Brotherhood library

- Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) 2000, Australians living on the edge: survey of the community services sector 2000, ACOSS, Sydney.
- —— 2000, Does Work for the Dole lead to work for wages?, ACOSS Info 223, ACOSS, Sydney, Nov.
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- Zappala, G 2000, *Understanding the new economy: the economic and social dimensions*, The Smith Family, Camperdown, NSW.

Information services for the public

The Brotherhood of St Laurence library offers a specialist focus on the issues of poverty, unemployment, aged care, social policy and welfare, taxation and housing. It can also provide, for the cost of copying and mailing, up-to-date information sheets on poverty and unemployment as well as information on the Brotherhood, its services and its publications.

The library is open to students, community groups and members of the public from 9am to 5pm, Tuesday to Thursday. Books can be borrowed by the public through the inter-library loan system (enquire at your regular library).

To find out whether we can help you with the information you require, ring the Library on (03) 9483 1387 or (03) 9483 1388, or e-mail library@bsl.org.au. Further information can be found at www.bsl.org.au.

A regular update on our research, analysis and public advocacy

Indigenous peoples and the World Conference Against Racism

In September 2001 the United Nations is convening the Third World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) in Durban, South Africa. Over recent months a number of preparatory government and non-government meetings have been convened throughout various regions of the world.

From 20-22 February the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission convened an Indigenous Peoples and Racism Conference in Sydney. This Conference was officially recognised by the UN as the Regional Meeting of Indigenous Peoples of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Hawaii and the United States. This is the only Regional Meeting that has been devoted to the particular situation and experiences of indigenous peoples.

The Sydney Conference had the precise aim of exploring racism issues as they related specifically to indigenous peoples, and to draw out recommendations to be submitted to the next WCAR Preparatory Committee Session, to be held in Geneva 21 May to 1 June 2001, where a **Declaration Against Racism and Platform for** Action will be drafted in preparation for WCAR.

The Indigenous Peoples and Racism Conference included presentations by many highly respected indigenous people from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Hawaii and the United States, Their

experiences, backgrounds and focus varied greatly: some were academics, others bureaucrats, some shared their experiences of working in the corporate sector and still others had devoted their working lives to community-based struggles. Yet there were concerns shared by all and a report and submission has been drawn together with recommendations for WCAR.

This Conference represented a significant opportunity for indigenous peoples of the Pacific Rim to contribute to the UN Declaration Against Racism and to influence the UN Platform for Action combating racism and racial discrimination against indigenous peoples. As Dr Bill Jonas of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission stated in his opening address:

The challenge of this conference is to ensure that an indigenous perspective on racism is clearly articulated, through the formulation of specific recommendations which are actionoriented and which identify practical measures to be implemented at the national, regional and international levels to eradicate racism.

A representative of the UN High Commission for Human Rights, Julian Burger, was in attendance, to become informed about the concerns and issues raised and to hand deliver the report and recommendations arising from the Conference to Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Indigenous Peoples and Racism Conference workshops addressed WCAR's five themes:

- 1. Causes—examining the sources, causes, forms and contemporary manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance;
- 2. Victims—identifying are the victims of racism;
- 3. Prevention—considering measures for prevention, education and protection against racism in all its forms;
- 4. Remedies—considering processes for effective remedies, recourse, compensation and redress, and other measures for victims of racism; and
- 5. Strategies—to achieve full and effective equality.

More details can be found on the Indigenous Peoples and Racism Conference website: http:// www.racismconference.com/2001/ report.html.

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