

Keeping warm by burning the floorboards ...

Ross Gittins, economics correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, wrote on 24th April about Australia: "We're wealthier, healthier, better housed and better educated, but it's coming at the expense of the environment... It's clear that our present mode of economic operation is unsustainable. We're keeping warm by burning the floorboards. We're living in a fool's paradise."

Bill Twigg, whose family has farmed in Bears Lagoon, Victoria, for almost one hundred years, has given much thought to the environment, and even asked God how He wanted him to farm the land. Here are some of his conclusions, from his booklet "Farming the Natural Way":

"After many years we were able to develop a system of farming in sympathy with the environment and nature. The biggest obstacle I had to overcome in developing this system and understanding my land was myself, my ingrained beliefs and attitudes. When we were farming traditionally, our farm became like a drug addict - the more inputs we added, the more the land demanded. We felt we were using most of the fertility in our soil to pay the cost of these inputs.

No reduction in yield

"We concluded that we could accept a smaller yield per acre with less expenses in the short term, knowing that the reduced demand on the soil fertility would prove much more profitable in the long term. But we were pleased to find that there was to be no reduction in yield. We sold most of our expensive machinery. Our aim is to be able to run our farm with just a motor bike and sheep dogs. Over the last twenty-five years we have found that we rarely need to use inputs such as fertilizers, drenches, supplementary

feeding and dips, and have been able to change to spring lambing, increase yields and therefore profitability.

"After high input farming, it takes approximately five years to return the soil health and turn it into a profitable enterprise. The secret is in the development of lucerne, a deep rooted perennial plant, as our major planted pasture species. Lucerne is similar in root growth to much of the original vegetation of our area. Our Australian landscape was once covered with predominantly perennial vegetation e.g. saltbush, kangaroo grass, wattles and trees. There was only one annual grass species in Australia before European settlement. Like lucerne, these perennial plants had the ability to recycle nutrients and moisture to the soil surface. Lucerne has also helped eliminate dryland salinity.

Planting trees

"Plants really are the greatest fertilizers. They add to the soil exactly what is needed - that is their function. We plant at least five thousand trees every year as an integral part of our farming system in order to improve the landscape and soften the environment. We plant indigenous trees in irregular clumps of five to ten acres. We include a large percentage of acacias, which put nitrogen back into the soil for eucalypts and other species to feed from. Acacias are short-lived, but when most are dead in ten to fifteen years, we will fire the area. Since establishing the trees in clumps we have noticed a considerable increase in bird activity. We believe we need all native species, plant, animal and insect, to create a balanced system. Lose one and it starts an ecological chain reaction.

"Huge multinational agri-businesses pocket billions of dollars every year from the sale of their chemical fertilizers and poisonous pesticides. In small country towns where the closure of small businesses and farms is a sad

fact of life, the only new businesses to open are prosperous looking chemical outlets.

"I used to feel very angry and try to convert people to my way of thinking, and then feel very disheartened and depressed when no changes were achieved. I don't do that any more - I find personal satisfaction in seeing the ways of nature and adapting them to our farming system, and am happy to share my ideas and experience with people who are interested."

In the constant need to bridge the gap between city and country Australia, Jim Beggs, past national President of the Waterside Workers Federation, says:

Contrary to media speculation that they are traditional enemies, the farmers and the wharfies have been meeting together officially and personally over the past thirty years. Delegations from the bush have visited most major ports around Australia, and wharfies have made visits to the bush. In 1991, members of the National Farmers Federation were official guests of the Waterside Workers Federation's National Conference in Sydney.

Last year a group of farmers from the wheat and wool area of Donald, Victoria, visited the Port of Melbourne as guests of the union executive. Myths were dispelled and friendships forged as an open and honest dialogue took place about the bulk loading of grains, containerised cargoes, chilled fruits, salinity, crop improvement, the environment and how to keep banks in the bush. Both groups agreed that, as we met face to face, we all had the same problems and challenges and much more in common than we realised. Early this year, I was guest speaker at the Donald branch of the Victorian Farmers Federation's Annual Meeting.

Shook his hand

The local newspaper, *The Buloke Times* carried a report of the visit, including these words: 'In his many years on the waterfront Jim Beggs has seen technology replace sheer brawn and hard, dangerous work, something that he sees as common ground for wharfies and farmers. In both industries numbers are dropping as modern machines and technology make their mark. At the end of the Patricks dispute, a farmer shook Jim's

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Different religions ... rivals or allies?

One of the themes that has been most successful for discussion in the work I do with Sixth Forms in Britain has been *Moving Out Of Your Comfort Zone* . A recent trip to India by my wife and myself challenged me to practise what I preach. There was the obvious physical unease associated with customs, food and poverty etc. But what was even more of a challenge was to see life from a perspective very different to my own.

Especially after 11 September we all need to question the assumptions and attitudes we so easily live with. So it was a good experience to spend three weeks at a visioning conference with 200 people of all major faiths from about 40 countries. Are different religions rivals or allies? In the light of the spiritual struggle going on in the world this is an increasingly important question. There are obvious differences between us in theological understanding as well as practice, and there always will be. But beyond this I ask myself whether there is a common experience of finding inner liberation that is at the heart of all the great religions. For instance, some Muslim friends tell me that though many in the West fear the word *Jihad*, first and foremost it means facing the evil in oneself. This is the *Greater Jihad*. Is this basically the same inner struggle that a Christian or a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Jew, or a spiritually motivated non-religious person would experience when confronted by the downdrag of human nature?

It must have been a temptation for Mahatma Gandhi to take the seeming short-cut of bitterness and violence to gain Indian independence from the British. But he was out for something greater - the spiritual growth in his own people as well as in the British. As recent Hindu-Muslim riots have shown, this is a continuing need. But it interests me that Gandhi, a Hindu had gained inspiration from Jesus submission on the cross. Then later Martin Luther King Jr, a Christian was influenced by how Gandhi had submitted to God's will. Truly spiritual people recognise and respond to the real thing in others, ie the surrendering

of the self for a greater good. A Muslim friend of mine in India is the founder and director of an Urdu-speaking girls' school in a slum area. He writes: As educators in the business of building and nurturing lives we must teach children to distinguish between a right cause and a wrong cause. The spiritual discipline required to battle feelings of hostility, rage, hatred, fear and terror will have to be inculcated and practised. Being a Christian I was grateful to be invited to do interactive sessions with students in this Muslim school and support my friend with his vision. A common calling of spiritually motivated people should surely be personality transformation. There has probably been no era in human history in which that is more urgently needed than today. To that end God may well require us to move out of our comfort zones.

- Howard Grace, a British teacher, currently visiting Australia

Two excerpts from the Action for Life newsletter:

From Cambodia ...

Over the past months the Khmer Youth Association had worked hard planning the second Angkor Youth Camp. From 30 March for six days, we were privileged to join over 150 youth from all provinces of Cambodia and from 19 countries in Siem Reap, site of the ancient temples of Angkor Wat.

We were encouraged by the determination of organisers and participants to work together to find solutions to current burning issues. Sessions focused on Youth and Decision Making, Youth and Human Rights, Youth and Sustainable Development, and Drug Abuse. AfL members shared their experience on these issues and spoke on the importance of change beginning with one's self. Our songs and skits were especially appreciated. And we learned to do the Cambodian rambon (dance), trying to be gracefull

[The AfL group also write of meeting public figures such as Sam Rainsy, President of the Opposition Party, Prince Sirivudh, half brother of the King, and Kassie Neou, founder of the Cambodian Institute of Human Rights.]

... and from Taiwan

Since the end of March we have been visiting high schools and universities in Tainan. This has become a priority of our stay in Taiwan, as the goal is to link the students with the MRA team and the existing programs here. In each session we challenge students to think about their lives and the problems facing their country. We visit the same school 3 or 4 times and this gives us a chance to get to know the participants really well. Also, we meet with the students on a one-to-one basis in an informal way, so that we get to know each other better. We had a few problems in the beginning as the students were not receptive because of the culture, some were shy too, but later we discovered that it takes extra effort to let them open up.

The principals and teachers of the respective schools were keen to know more about AFL and MRA-IC too. One of the highlights of our stay in Taipei was a symposium called "The mission and responsibility of global youth". We shared our experiences with AfL and listened to what the Taiwanese youth had to say. It was a very interesting interaction followed by a report in one of the local newspapers.

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hand, saying as he did that he never thought he would shake the hand of a wharfie! Jim still has enough contacts on the waterfront to be able to offer to show around any farmers groups from Donald who care to make the trip to Melbourne. From the response of those who heard him, that will happen! As the increasing pollution of the atmosphere contributes to global warming, both farmers and townfolk, more than ever, need jointly to contribute to the solution.

The Editors would like to hear more stories of caring for the environment and initiatives to bridge the city/country divide.

- Jane Mills, Sydney



Marjorie Bates, who received a BEM for service in the Prime Minister's Department, recently had this letter published in The Canberra Times under the headline "PS needs rebirth of integrity" .

"In all the recent debate on the rights and wrongs and responsibilities of departmental advice to the Prime Minister in difficult situations like the children-overboard fiasco, it seems that honesty and truth are the main casualties. I recall my service of more than 20 years in the Prime Minister's Department in the 1960s and '70s. Initially I was just a stenographer, but I had a sense of privilege and felt proud to belong to a service where there was honesty and integrity in the objective advice given to the Prime Minister.

From early experiences, I realised that everyone, even junior officers, had a responsibility and a part to play in this service to the country; doing our work faithfully and with care could help create an atmosphere of trust and

peace, enabling senior officers to have freedom of heart so as to give their best thinking to the Prime Minister and the country. If a mistake had been made, it was most important not to cover it up but to admit it honestly and try to rectify it - not to blame someone else. In today's society, Shakespeare's words seem particularly relevant: 'O what a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive.' So my prayer is for a rebirth of honesty and truth in the Public Service and in society generally."

She received phone calls and letters of support, including one to *The Canberra Times* which said 'Good on you, Marj!'

John Bond, Secretary of the National Sorry Day Committee, writes: "Recently I attended a conference on Indigenous Governance which brought together much of Australia's indigenous leadership."

"Among the case studies presented was one by an Aboriginal man from Maningrida in Arnhemland, who spoke about environmental management in the Liverpool River area. It is a huge job, grappling with everything from mimosa to cane toads. When I talked

with him, he told me that an MRA visit to India with friend Ron Lawler had helped him get his life on the right track, and had led him to take on the work he is now doing."

Global Club aims to bring together young people from a wide range of cultures, where they have a chance to meet and understand each other better. Goretty Nguyen reports on their latest event:

When did you last bunny-hop with a giant balloon between your knees? Or dig your heels into the ground, grip tightly on a rope and respond with all your might to cries of "Pull, pull, pull"?

Had you felt as youthful as some forty Melbournians on a Saturday morning, you could have headed to Kooyong Park for *The Global Club's* first (annual) sports carnival. *The Global Club* committee and its regulars welcomed many new faces. Much laughter, huffing 'n' puffing and encouraging spirit was evident as four teams competed in volleyball, a tug-of-war, tunnel ball and variations of balloon races for a shiny and prized trophy. A wholesome lunch of French baguettes and summer fruits was shared by all.

A pioneer in "Track Two Diplomacy" **Book review by Jim Coulter**

It has been said that in the days of the Roman Empire it was the Greeks unremitting, unseen work running the administration that enabled the Romans to be free to enjoy their circuses. Archie Mackenzie was such a background worker. I was staying with him when he was at the UN not long after WW2. As the main assistant to a top statesman, he worked through the night polishing a major speech. It was delivered the next day to much applause by a delegate who, for his part, had spent the night on the town.

His postings as a diplomat saw Mackenzie serving in the Balkans, in South-East Asia and the Middle East. He was in at the founding of the United Nations and believes that its future hinges on the member states heeding Kofi Annan's call for a moral recommitment to the UN Charter. After quoting Winston Churchill's sharp observation: "The United Nations was set up not to get us to heaven but to save us from hell," the author

comments: If it did not exist it would have to be invented. And if we allowed it to collapse, we would find it a Herculean effort to rebuild it.

Mackenzie's dry Scots sense of humour illumines the book. The way he and his wife Ruth, a fellow Scot, care for the locals, wherever they are, shows the human face of diplomacy. When he was Ambassador to Tunisia they were saddened to hear that a poor family living next to the compound had their 12-year-old daughter killed by a car. Ruth wondered if they should take flowers, but their cook said: Why flowers? You cannot eat flowers. Why don't we make a big couscous and take that to them? As Mackenzie comments: In the years ahead we often thought back to this event as we grappled with the West's need to give much deeper consideration to the implications of the Rich-Poor gap in the world.

It is above all a gripping account of a man committed to try and find God's leading, not only personally but in his professional life as a diplomat. Not all smooth sailing, as evidenced by having 100 pounds docked from his pay for being non-alcoholic. He consoles himself with Thoreau's observation: If

a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.

On the final page Mackenzie aptly sums up what his book covers using Plato's words: Our discussions have been about no ordinary matter, but on the right way to conduct our lives.

Faith in Diplomacy by Archie Mackenzie. Available from Grosvenor Books, PO Box 53, Burwood, Vic 3125. RRP \$40.

Special price for *Newsbriefs* readers: \$30 post-free.

(ISBN 1-85239-030-1 should be quoted when requesting libraries to order in the book).

June National Gathering ...

A three-and-a-half day gathering for those who feel responsible for *MRA-Initiatives of Change* will take place at *Armagh*, Melbourne, Friday 7 June till lunchtime Monday 10 June.

For further details, please contact the MRA address in your State.

Reflecting on "Initiatives of Change"...

In "Initiatives of Change" we have a new name which is also a new phrase and a new concept. It is a phrase which we are getting used to. I for one am still not quite comfortable using it. During the search for a new name I proposed three and voted for a fourth. But the process we followed together produced this one.

Its newness and unfamiliarity gives us the chance to do some thinking about it. We have a major new concept to work with. The phrase has two main words. The first is "Initiatives". It can sound a little administrative - like an outline waiting to be coloured in. But it hints at enterprise, at introducing a fresh element into a situation. And it has a certain tradition in MRA when we think of the way Frank Buchman, as the one who set the ball rolling, was mostly described as the "initiator" of Moral Re-Armament. It is the plain inscription on his grave.

The second main word is "Change" - a word with as many meanings and colours of meaning as the word "love" - and even more able to provoke ambivalent or contradictory feelings. Is change a threat or a hope? Do we fear it or long for it? As one of the central concepts of MRA for as long as most of us can remember, we need to think about what we mean by it. It is a rewarding word to reflect on.

In between these two is the preposition "of" - indicating that the first part of the name comes out of the second part. The "initiatives" come out of the "change" and are part of the process of change. So "change" is really the primary

principle and "initiatives" are secondary - but still essential. I am reminded of the "first and great" commandment of Jesus, and the "second which is like it". One comes first but both are equally needed.

"Initiative" is in the realm of decision and action. "Change" is close to the core of life itself.

Many of us will have been through a period of pain or suffering or weakness, and then found it was the key to a new, expanded life. That to me is the doorway to understanding the phenomenon of change. While initiatives are something that we decide and "initiate", change is often something that comes to us unsought, unwished for and unexpected - our decision then is whether to accept it. This is where we are helped by our moral sense and our moral principles, if they are basic enough. It is something that is stretching, uncomfortable, even painful - just like life's other great processes such as growing or learning.

Change is one of the central characteristics of the Creation. Earlier this year I thought of it as "the movement without which there is no growth, no life, no hope, no future, no ascent to a higher life".

Even good people have to go on changing or they cease to be good! If it is really God we are reaching out to, we can expect to go on being shown new things, and at times saying goodbye to old ones.

Tennyson had a great vision when he wrote: "The old order changeth, yielding place to new, and God fulfils

himself in many ways lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

People reach the age of professional retirement relatively early today - but I think the continuing youthfulness of many MRA people comes from the fact that there is no retirement from change!

I have a picture in my mind of "Initiatives of Change" in a kind of cross formation - the initiatives are (naturally) the horizontal dimension, our relationships and outreach to the people and the world around us, but this is borne on the vertical dimension which change represents. This life force is rooted in our quiet times or in those moments where we are praying to the highest we know, but are also discovering our deepest feelings and our deepest - sometimes lowest - natures, and then that span from the depth to the height is bridged by (1) our humility and honesty but also, I believe, by (2) God's grace, the gift of power when all our own power has been exhausted. This is the dimension of change, the vertical dimension. I believe it represents spiritual growth that goes on long after the body, and then the mind, have reached their limits and started to decline.

"Initiatives of change" in fact is very close to another concept that came to us from German in the 1970s and describes the core of the MRA approach - "the dynamic out of silence".

- **Peter Thwaites**