



INFORM-ACTION

Newsletter of the Social Action Office - Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes Queensland

The Common Good – an Illusion?

In this month of May *National Reconciliation Week* is celebrated. There is much to be celebrated with 27 May being the anniversary of the 1967 referendum in which 92% of Australians voted to include Aboriginal people in the census, and 3 June is the anniversary of the Mabo decision. As this week draws closer my heart sinks further as all indicators show us that life for Indigenous Australians gets worse by the day. The events of the last few days in Queensland with the jailing of an 11 year old boy highlight even more how bad things are. This child was apprehended for spray-painting his name on a road and footpath. He was consequently taken in a mesh cage in a police four-wheel-drive for a 500km journey and then jailed overnight ... the story goes on...

It is not too simplistic to say that if the values of the *Common Good* were lived out in this country things would be different. Instead, the *Common Good* is becoming more and more of an illusion in our society and in particular for Indigenous Australians.

The statistics regarding Indigenous Australians, as presented in the recent Senate Report on poverty and financial hardship *A hand up not a hand out: Renewing the fight against poverty* (March 2004), place *Indigenous Australians as the most disadvantaged and marginalised group in Australia. On all the standard indicators of poverty and disadvantage, Indigenous people emerge as the most socially and economically deprived* (p 301, 13.1).

Is it not the duty of all citizens (and an even more serious responsibility for those who publicly proclaim their fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus) to ensure that nobody is marginalised in such a way as Indigenous Australians are? Is it not a similar duty and a graver responsibility for government, at all levels, to redress this atrocious situation? Of course it is, but why do we continue to live in a state of delusion and self-interest, powerless to redress the undermining of the values of the *Common*

Good? A serious and very overdue stocktake is needed.

As mentioned previously the Social Action Office is taking *For the Common Good* as its 2004 Federal Election campaign theme. The vision of this campaign is this:

To influence the promotion and growth of the values that uphold the Common Good of All, so that all experience a fair go and share fairly in the resources of this country.



The goals flowing from this include:

- 1.0 to identify and promote the core values underlying the *Common Good* as they relate to specific policy issues relating to water management, poverty and homelessness and a culture of peace;
- 2.0 to provide educational materials and strategies for the members of religious congregations for whom SAO exists, SAO Partners and other groups whom SAO chooses to network with about these issues;
- 3.0 to organise the above groups in appropriate ways in order to effectively lobby **all** candidates in the lead-up to the 2004 Federal Election.

The UK Bishops in their 1996 document *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching* remind us that *no social trend, however negative, is beyond reversal*. May this type of hope and optimism sustain us during this election year of 2004.

Annette Arnold
Director

For the Common Good

For the Common Good is the theme of the SAO 2004 Federal Election Campaign. The following two articles give us information to reflect on current situations and issues that are related to the *Common Good*. The first is an extract from a **Pastoral Letter of Bishop Chris Saunders**, Chairman, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, on the Feast of St Joseph the Worker, 1 May 2004 (full text: http://www.acsjc.org.au/content/issues/the_human_costs_behind_the_official_unemployment_rate.html), and the second is **action taken against buying supermarket milk**.

The Human Costs Behind the Official Unemployment Rate

Behind the Official Statistics

One of the fundamental realities of recent economic change is that, despite a decade of high economic growth, Australia's performance in providing full-time jobs has been poor. Indeed, there have been periods of 'record growth' when full-time employment has declined. It has been the growth in part-time and casual employment, much of it insecure and poorly paid, which has bolstered the overall employment figures. In such a setting the 'official' rate of unemployment is far less meaningful than when full-time employment was a more typical pattern of work.

While 'official' unemployment has been falling, the concentration of 'work rich' and 'work poor' households has been intensifying. The true extent to which people

are excluded from employment is much higher than the official rate. When the numbers of official unemployed are added to those who are 'under-employed' and to discouraged jobseekers, the official rate of under 6% would more than double to around 13%. The fact that there are 1.3 million Australians who are unemployed or underemployed

presents a serious challenge to the value the Church places on the importance of work in the lives of individuals and families.

In his 1981 encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, Pope John Paul II presents work as being integral to the life and development of the human person, who is destined to share in the making of the world. To the extent that our society allows unemployment and underemployment to continue at these levels, we are denying a significant number of our citizens their rightful dignity as human beings and withholding the means to participate in the life of the community.

That such a denial should occur in Australia following a decade of record growth is all the more unacceptable.

Human Costs of Unemployment and Underemployment

Between 1990 and 2003, Australia increased its production of goods and services by nearly 50%, while its population grew by 16%; yet only 9% more people had full-time jobs. When the situation is stated in these terms, many remain unmoved. However, the picture becomes clearer when we discover some of the human costs of the relative decline in full-time work and the resulting unemployment and underemployment.

Children in Poverty

The report of the recent Senate Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship revealed that poverty resulting from unemployment, particularly child poverty, remains a significant problem in Australia. Since the early 1990s, the proportion of children in jobless households, depending on what period we look at, has been falling only marginally, remaining constant, or actually increasing.

Working in Poverty

Not long ago, it could be said with some confidence that finding a job and receiving a wage was the surest way for a family to escape poverty and stay out of poverty. For many, this is no longer the case. Around one million Australians are in poverty despite living in households where one or more adults are in employment. The growth of casual employment to around 27% of the labour force (or 2.2 million people), and the insecure and low paid nature of many jobs, has contributed to 'working poverty'. The minimum wage is regarded as inadequate to the needs of a family, but irregular hours can result in people earning less than the minimum. The recent poverty inquiry showed that low-paid workers – particularly women and young workers – are most susceptible to poverty. As a nation we need to consider ways to improve the security of these jobs and the adequacy of their remuneration.

A national response to workers and families in need

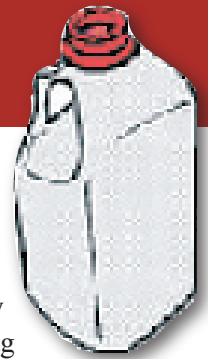
The recent Senate Poverty Inquiry recommended a national summit on poverty involving all levels of government and sectors of the community to develop a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy. Today, we repeat the earlier call, in 2003, from the heads of Christian churches and leaders of the Jewish and Islamic faiths for a national forum on poverty. They identified as an important focus the emergence of second and third generation unemployment in Australia and the needs of hundreds of thousands of children in families that have never known an adult in regular employment.

THE COMMON GOOD

The riches that economic-social developments constantly increase ought to be so distributed among individual persons and classes that the common advantage of all, which Leo XIII had praised, will be safeguarded; in other words, that the common good of all society will be kept inviolate.

The Fortieth Year #57

Buy the milk of human kindness and not the milk of human greed



The Social Justice Commission for the Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba is calling on all consumers of milk to *stand in solidarity* with dairy farmers suffering the impact of de-regulation.

“Often we can feel disempowered in the modern world of multinationals and large supermarket chains but as consumers we have the power of choice. If consumers of milk in the city decided to avoid supermarket branded milk and instead buy milk that gave a fairer price to dairy producers it would send a message to supermarket chains.”

These words are from Mark Copland, Executive Officer of the Social Justice Commission in Toowoomba. This call for solidarity follows protests by dairy producers who have been courageous protesting the effects of

the sale of supermarket branded milk... Catholic Social Teaching holds that the economy is made for people and not people for the economy, and under the current regime hard-working dairy producers simply cannot make a living if supermarket brands of milk continue to

grow in popularity. This is not just in the interests of the farmers – it is in everybody’s interest. Once the large supermarkets have a stranglehold of the market it would be logical to eventually see an increase in the price of supermarket-branded milk.

Consider standing with country farmers the next time you purchase milk from the corner store or a milk vendor.

THE COMMON GOOD

The common good embraces the sum total of all those conditions of social life which enable individuals, families and organizations to achieve complete and effective fulfilment.

Mother and Teacher #74



BOOK REVIEW



One No, Many Yeses: A Journey to the Heart of the Global Resistance Movement

By Paul Kingsnorth

Published in Great Britain by The Free Press 2003

The name of the book derives from the fact that worldwide there is a body of many millions of people opposing the power of corporate globalisation, as witnessed in the protests at Seattle and Genoa, and at the gatherings of the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre and recently at Mumbai. There is one loud “NO”. However, as is often pointed out derogatively by media commentators, these “No’s” are the surface expression of widely dispersed aspirations. Do the movements against globalisation need to “get their act together” and unite under a positive vision? Or would this run counter to the spirit of grassroots democracy that is at the heart of the protests – a respect for differences that allows many voices to blend in harmony rather than in unison? Paul Kingsnorth addresses this question.

Born in 1972, he studied history at Oxford University and was formerly deputy-editor of the Ecologist magazine. In this book (350 pages approx), he takes us with him on

his journeys exploring resistance movements in Mexico, Genoa, South Africa, California, Papua and Porto Alegre (Brazil). He then asks the key questions “What do we stand for?”, “What do we do?”, and outlines some suggestions for possible future directions. An appendix, Action Stations, lists the websites of many of the movements mentioned in the book.

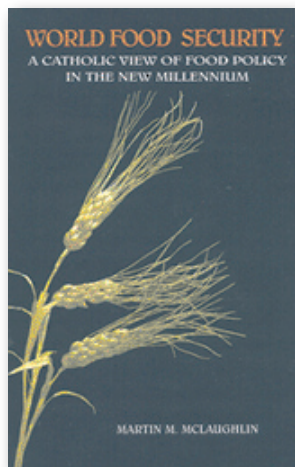
The back-cover advertisement for the book describes it as “A manifesto, a travel book: an introduction to the new politics of resistance, which shows there’s much more to the anti-globalisation movement than trashing Starbucks”. This statement indicates the style and flavour of the book. You will find in it a wealth of information about social issues confronting our brothers and sisters in the human family. You are invited to use this wealth of information as a stepping stone to finding your own path.

Janice Howard osu

Don't forget the International Year of Rice

The Centre of Concern produced in 2002 a very good book: *World Food Security - A Catholic View of Food Policy in the New Millennium*.

It has become increasingly clear over the past quarter century that almost all aspects of the global food system



are dominated by a combination of corporate agribusiness, wealthy people in both industrialised and developing countries, and the financial institutions and national governments that guide and support them. The thesis of this book is that the primary responsibility for improving the failing global food system rests with these persons and institutions. They control the system, reap most of its benefits, and make and enforce the rules

for its operation. Much of this power is exercised without accountability. Such exercise – indeed, the existence of such power – is basically undemocratic and unethical. It must be challenged and changed.

Visit the Centre of Concern site to order the book: <http://www.coc.org/focus/?ID=903>

Date Claimer

Saturday June 5
World Environment Day



The SAO Water Circle will launch its 2004 Federal Election Campaign on WATER ISSUES on this day. Please keep your eye out for the time and place of this event.

SAO stands in solidarity with the people of the Murray-Darling Basin and the issues around the Basin. It is concerned generally about the management of water, especially cross-border management, privatisation issues and the serious issues around the commodification of water.

FOR YOUR CALENDAR



2004 - International Year of Rice

<http://www.fao.org/rice2004/>

2004 is also the International Year to Commemorate the Struggle against Slavery and Its Abolition

MAY

- 10 Nelson Mandela's Inaugural Address as President of South Africa 1994
- 16 1.30pm at Justice Place, Woolloongabba: *Dialogue on the lived practice of Islam, from women's perspective*
- 18 Volunteers Day
- 20 East Timor becomes fully independent 2002
- 21 Murder of Australian Josephite Sister Irene McCormack in Peru 1991
- 22 International Day for Biological Diversity
- 23 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins
- 25 *Bringing Them Home* Report released 1997
- 25 Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories fighting for freedom, independence and human rights begins
- 26 National Sorry Day
- 27 Referendum allows Federal Government to grant citizenship rights to Aboriginal people 1967
- 27 National Reconciliation Week begins
- 28 Amnesty International founded 1962
- 29 International Day of UN Peacekeepers
- 30 2.00pm at Multi-Faith Centre, Griffith University Brisbane, Nathan Campus: *Dialogue with Professor Toh Swee-Hin*

JUNE

- 3 High Court Decision in Mabo Case 1992
- 4 International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression
- 4 Tiananman Square Massacre 1989
- 5 World Environment Day
- 5 12.00noon at Southbank, Brisbane: *Believing Women Picnic*
- 10 Myall Creek Massacre 1838
- 12 Aboriginal flag first flown, Adelaide 1971
- 12 World Day Against Child Labour
- 17 World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought
- 19 Equal pay for women in Australia 1969
- 20 UN World Refugee Day
- 26 International Day in Support of Victims of Torture
- 30 Introduction of unemployment benefits in Australia 1945