

HUMANIST viewpoints

CELEBRATING WORLD HUMANIST DAY

Sunday June 21st was World Humanist Day and we celebrated in style. A Symposium of member presentations provided food for thought, followed by dinner at the reopened venue in the former Broadway Hotel. John August spoke on Secular History, Victor Bien dazzled us with an examination of Humanism and the modern Political Order, Erik Aslaksen presented a fresh look at Evolution & Intelligence, Fay Love reviewed the 'Sunday Philosophy Club' series of novels, and Peter Furness moved us with his amazing report on Humanist Aid in Uganda. More personal expressions came from David Duffy, Brian Edwards and our keynote speaker, Alex Greenwich MP, as well as a new Meetup member, Steve Hulme. A big thankyou to all contributors.



Event Coordinator, Murray Love (left) enjoying World Humanist Day 2015 with Independent MP for Sydney, and Keynote speaker, Alex Greenwich (centre) and President of the Humanist Society of NSW, Ian Bryce (right)

HuVAT 12th July John August on Secular History Activism Meeting Sunday 9th August AGM Sunday 13th September

TURN TO PAGES SIX AND SEVEN FOR A CALENDAR OF HUMANISM FOR JULY, AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2015

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MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS WELCOME FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE—WHY NOT START WRITING UP YOUR NEWS & IDEAS TODAY

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OUR CANBERRA CHAPLAIN RETIRES

On 7th November 2014, Charles Foley retired as Canberra Hospital Humanist Chaplain, an official ACT government-recognised volunteer position, after almost nineteen years in the job. Around 1995, Charles was asked by the then Head Chaplain at Canberra Hospital to represent the belief system of Humanism. The Humanist Society of NSW agreed to his being officially designated the Humanist Chaplain to serve the Humanist Community within the Canberra region.

Charles came to Australia having been certified by the Humanist Society of Friends, a legally incorporated religious organisation in California. Since 1939 it has been authorised to issue charters anywhere in the world and empowered to train and ordain its own "ministry" to serve as 'ministerial equivalents' to attend to the pastoral and ceremonial needs of Humanists and all others seeking the care and services of a Humanist Chaplain. The Society became part of the USA Humanist Society in 2003. Charles reports he took several issues into account in making his retiring decision:

"There are now very few people specifically identifying as Humanists or members of Humanist families entering the Canberra Hospital. It used to be that those who identified as 'unchurched', 'no religion' or 'atheist/rationalist/freethinker/agnostic etc.' were offered my Chaplaincy services. The last census seems to indicate that there were about 3 million people in Australia who so identified.

"However, for some time now, there has been in place in the Canberra Hospital a 'General Team' of many trained 'Pastoral Carer' volunteers who attend to the needs of those who fall into these generalized categories. The General Team members complement the volunteer lay teams that the Anglicans, Catholics, and Uniting Church Clergy maintain for Pastoral and Spiritual Care to members of their respective belief communities. All of these team volunteers go through a rigorous training and are screened. They are in the hospital on a daily or rostered basis rather than being in an 'on-call' Chaplain category. ACT Government authorised 'On Call Chaplains' from various other faiths and belief groups to compliment these teams, as did I as the Humanist Chaplain.

"Another reason for stepping down is that the new Pastoral and Spiritual Care system will involve trained Pastoral Carer volunteers permanently assigned to certain wards or hospital areas instead of the present 'roaming' system. The full time ACT governmental Paid Head Chaplain during my tenure was a Mennonite American and a wonderful, easy going overall supervisor, with whom I have enjoyed many successful interactions. However, he returned to America recently.

"Other reasons are my age (now over seventy-one years old) and my personal health including the need to reduce stress. To continue being a voluntary ACT authorized On-Call Chaplain entailed ever-increasing bureaucratic requirements including mandatory courses, monthly meetings, and close to an hour round trip travel to the Canberra Hospital from my home over the border in Queanbeyan NSW.

"I would like to say that I've had the true privilege of being invited, over the years, to spend many hours at the bedside of sick, dying and injured Humanists and other non-theists. I've been present at births and death, at physical and mental injuries, with sick children and the infirm elderly, with

patients, their friends and families and been a compassionate colleague to other hospital staff, often consulting on personal and ethical issues from a Humanist belief perspective.

"Among the other Chaplains, priests, ministers, monks and nuns, as well as the lay Pastoral Care team members, I've tried to exemplify Humanist principles and beliefs whilst respecting the democratic rights of others to exercise their precepts and rituals. I've made many personal friends across all divides of race, religion, politics, age, sexual orientations, genders, and have many incredible memories. My personal Humanistic beliefs have strengthened and I trust I've served the Atheist/Agnostic (as well as the wider) community well.

"Following retirement from the ACT government approved Chaplaincy position, I can still visit sick, injured or dying Humanists or members of their families on request of the patient, as the Humanist Society's (clergy equivalent) Emeritus Chaplain/Hospital Visitor, as needed, whenever I can. I am most appreciative of the ongoing support of the Humanist Society of NSW, its past and present officers and members. I leave, knowing that I have joined Humanist Chaplains in many different countries and scenarios, in armed forces in some countries, in prisons, in hospitals and in other settings where non-theist compassion is needed and sought, not just by members of the various Humanist communities but by humanistically inclined people of goodwill."

Lyndon Storey comments on becoming the new Canberra Hospital Humanist Chaplain: "It's a wonderful opportunity to succeed Charles Foley as Humanist Chaplain at Canberra Hospital. Thanks and congratulations are due to Charles for his long and excellent service in that position.

"I see Humanism as a living breathing philosophy of life, capable of inspiring and supporting people to live meaningful lives, and contribute positively to their community.

"While religious and other organisations have had a long time to develop institutional approaches to supporting community and expressing compassion organised humanism is still in the early stages of doing this. Acting as a Humanist Chaplain is an opportunity to further explore how to do this, and to encourage others to do so.

"I am looking forward to what I will be able to do at Canberra Hospital, and I'm also very interested in supporting discussion about how humanism can be a foundation for positive involvement in community. This may involve developing a more regular process to encourage people to provide humanist chaplaincy in various situations. It may involve something quite different, and/or a move from the concept of "chaplain" to developing an alternative humanist concept. Its not up to me to say how this will happen, only that I want to support this process as well while acting as a chaplain.

"It is not the case that only religions can provide moral support and companionship for people through chaplaincy and similar offices. Humanism can also provide a framework through which people can reach out to others in solidarity and sympathy. There has been a lot of emphasis on critiquing the role of religion in society. Its also important to explore how humanism can light the way to building a better society, and better relations between people."

THE EMOTIVE SUBJECT OF SUICIDE

Suicide is an emotive subject, and a deeply personal one for those who have lost someone they love through suicide. Losing a young child is the worst of all. When reports reveal that there were 22 suicides among children aged 10 to 17, in Queensland alone, last year, it shocks everyone.

An opinion piece, entitled 'Worthy self-murder? Choose life instead, surely' by journalist Brendan O'Neill (The Australian, November 2011), looks at this moral dilemma – Is it wrong to commit suicide? O'Neill is a columnist for the Australian, and editor for Spiked, and online site. He has been described as a "Marxist proletarian firebrand", by the Guardian, a "loony, lefty hack" by the British National Party, comments which we can expect from those two conservative organisations.

He takes a serious look at suicide, saying it was once a taboo subject by both the religious and secular camps, but which is now much discussed, but I had some trouble with some of his comments. For instance, he criticised suicide on the grounds of the "sanctity" of life. Sanctity refers to holiness, godliness. He also wrote that the perception of suicide as wicked, is "simple and true". Wicked is not used in the current vernacular of youth (i.e. "That band tonight was wicked"), it is used in the sense that it is evil, wrong, sinful.

That doesn't sound like it comes from a Marxist proletarian firebrand, it sounds like someone who is taking a sectarian, moral viewpoint. "Tiredness with life" is seen as 'elitist exhaustion' among intellectuals. Would not a 103 year-old person, entirely dependent upon nursing staff to attend to his every need, from feeding him to toileting, thereby losing any autonomy, be tired of life? The fact that even if there was a Peaceful Pill, they would be dependent upon somebody to administer it would make anyone not only tired of life, but furious that they still wake up each morning.

In Australia, there are high rates of suicide in the Aboriginal communities. Quoting the article again, WHO figures revealed the country with the highest suicide rate is Guyana, South America, with 44 deaths per 100,000 people.

In the Kimberley, Western Australia, the rate is 70 deaths per 100,000, so, on those figures, Australia is the highest .

Society is divided on the issue of suicide, and there are various groupings:

- pro-choice, pro-voluntary euthanasia
- undecided
- it is illegal, so therefore wrong
- pro-life - suicide is a sin, on sectarian grounds

Still others say, 'Suicide is selfish'; think of those who are left to cope with it. Fair enough. I personally knew three young people who committed suicide in horrible ways, in one year. Two were schizophrenics, a third clinically depressed. They were all tragic cases, whose treatments could not take away the pain of living.

O'Neill's seeming solution is that we all need cheering up. Give people something to live for. It will take more than a transitory chuckle to change someone's life.

Try cheering-up a person denied refugee status on a hunger strike, or driven out of their mind in one of Australia's refugee detention centres. Try cheering-up the depressed, victims of physical and sexual abuse, the traumatised, mentally-ill, destitute members of our society, whose human rights are increasingly being whittled away by an economy-driven government.

State-assisted suicide has been legalised in some countries in Europe, and in the United States, and there are growing numbers in Australia who would like to see it legalised.

Religious moral indignation is laughable in light of the Church's lack of moral backbone over sexual abuse of children in their institutions, some of whom were driven to suicide.

Barbara Cattunar

Consider Making a Donation or Bequest

This year, please consider making a donation of \$5, \$20, \$50 or whatever you can to protect and sustain the NSW Humanist Society. Your donation will sustain the diverse range of activities the Society undertakes. Please also remember us in your Will. All bequests contribute to the longevity of the Humanist Society of NSW and Humanism.

Book Room & Library

Some of us have switched to e-books, while many continue to appreciate physical books. Either way, if you have any surplus books in your collection then consider donating them to the Society's Library or for sale in the Book Room. Thanks also to all the Book Room helpers.

Member News

Vale: we regret to report the deaths of longtime members Kep Enderby and Barry Malligan. We also farewell founder member, Past President and generous benefactor Mollie Campbell, acknowledged elsewhere in this newsletter.

New members: welcome to Hooman Mirali, Noel Duhigg, Mark Walburn, Anne Alexander and Negar Talkavoly. These new members joined at our Activism Meeting and at our (joint with UNAA) International Women's Day event.

Member Renewals Due

All members renewals for 2015/16 are due July 1 2015. There is an insert in this newsletter re renewals.

Angela, Membership Secretary, abraxas@tpg.com.au

MAY 2015 ACTIVISM MEETING REPORT

On the 10th May, we had another Activism Meeting. Contributions included the following:

Vicki Potempa recalled that she had previously done prison visits on a voluntary basis. At a later stage, this activity was taken over by funded Christians and she was squeezed out.

Timothy Graham (University of Sydney Atheists, & Student Freethought Alliance) noted some students saw discussing atheism and argumentative as pointless. He sees worth in students staying 'in the movement' after graduation, and in better interaction in the meantime.

Ian Bryce, Humanists NSW President, outlined our position to the annual Australian Humanists meeting. He asserted that it was possible to develop absolute positions around morality and truth. He noted the talks he has been given around fundamental physics and the big questions, and was concerned that universities have "degrees of woo" around things like chiropractic and homeopathy.

John August (yours truly) noted the worth of "parasitic activism" - of disagreeing with our opponents - particularly if they have higher profile than us - on their turf rather than in public. Disagreeing with them in public might bring them greater public attention, while in disagreeing on their own turf, we both keep them honest and appeal to sympathetic people who are already aware of the group we are targeting.

I also noted that we have the videos of a good deal of past HuVAT talks on our website.

Kate Alway (Sydney Queer Atheists) outlined her activity in visits to temples, an atheist choir, Skepticamp and the Mardi Gras parade. Kate also talked about 'critical atheism' - we need both practice and theory, and we need to draw from 'critical theory' to understand injustice in our world, because some threads drawing from atheism lack compassion and sympathy in dealing with others.

David Shoebridge (NSW Greens MLC) spoke about the experience of the NSW Greens in bringing the Catholic Church to account over child rape. Their event in Newcastle brought in many more people than expected - showing a definite latent concern in the community. He wanted three changes to the legislation - a removal of the time limit, given that victims are so damaged that they take in the order of 20 years to bring forth their complaints; bring the sentences into the 21st Century, given they are currently so small and do not reflect the harm caused; and to remove the Ellis Defence, whereby the Catholic Church can use its trusts to evade financial responsibility for the harm it causes.

John August



Vale Mollie Campbell

Mollie Campbell passed away in Mudgee on 17 June 2015, aged 85 after a period of ill health which hospitalised her in December. This is only an initial record of her life. In a subsequent issue, we hope her partner Gordon will be able to provide a more personal and detailed obituary.

Mollie was president from 1997 – 2000 when she had to resign from ill health. She continued to help set up and run Australis 2000 with Affie Adagio when Australia hosted the IHEU international congress that year. Mollie was awarded the OHA (Outstanding Humanist Achiever) award in 2000. In earlier years she was Secretary 1985-95.

Mollie helped considerably to finance the purchase of Humanist House in Chippendale in 1969. The Society had a previous building in Darlinghurst before the move to Chippendale. In those years she hosted a few times on the south side the North Shore suburban group's meetings which was flourishing back then.

She was a successful business woman and used her wealth to help the Society a great deal with several large donations over the years. She went out of her way to be politically even handed such that for the Council of Australian Humanist Society's (CAHS) Convention in 1997 held at Rose Bay she invited PM John Howard to speak. In the event he could not make it but deputed Tony Abbott in his stead. I met Tony Abbott in person on that occasion.

Mollie lived for many years in Bellevue Hill and I remember often going there in the 1980s to code up the membership management database which is still in use to this day.

In 2002 she and Gordon moved out of Sydney to a country property in Mudgee in which they lived to the present.

References: Secular Who's Who which records her de-conversion from a Baptist upbringing, OHA list on CAHS website, my own diaries, old Viewpoints.

Victor Bien

NSW PRESIDENT'S QUARTERLY REPORT

HuVAT (Humanist Viewpoints Afternoon Talks) for the quarter included 'Liberating Naturalism' with philosopher Dr David Macarthur in April, and in June we examined the issue of 'State Aid' to religious schools, led by Brian Edwards.

The occasional meetings **Activism** and **World Humanist Day** (WHD), and the regular **New Humanist Meetups**, continue to get our message out to members and the public. I attended '**Atheist Spiritualities & Other Earthly Delights**' held on 22 March. We agreed that there is plenty of awe, wonder, compassion left, once science removes the false elements of spirituality. See a full article on Meetup later in this issue.

At the 800th anniversary of the **Magna Carta**, we discussed its legacy as part of WHD. Around 1200, Feudal England consisted of counties run by Barons, with a ruthless King John as dictator, extorting taxes and conducting imprisonment, murder and torture.

Meanwhile, the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1215 drafted an Agreement to set some rules and make peace between the Barons and the King. This promised *Protection of church rights, Protection of the barons from imprisonment except by law, Access to swift justice, and Limitations of taxes.*

Although quickly nullified by the Pope, it was revised and reissued frequently in a succession of wars, treaties and new Kings. Lately it is referred to on many human rights forums including by Mahatma Ghandi and Nelson Mandela.

Some clauses of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 can be traced to the Magna Carta, eg *Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person.* The Amsterdam Declaration of 2002 emphasizes that Humanism supports democracy and human rights. Thus the Magna Carta played a very early role in the protection of human rights.

The United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA) kindly offered three tickets to their Concert for **Peace** at the Opera House. Angela Drury, Brian Edwards and myself attended. It included a release of doves, a speech by Malcolm Turnbull, a choir of 300, and a performance of the major chorale *L'Homme Armé*.

Our property **Humanist House** is, between Humanist events, being hired by several like-minded organizations for their meetings. This spreads our message, and earns some revenue.

We have placed on display in Humanist House, many **original artworks** donated by prominent Humanist Dennis Morris. These depict striking landscapes and wildlife in Africa and Australia, in oils, water colours, and pastels. Please consider purchasing one – the proceeds will help promote Humanism.

I delivered **three lectures** to U3A Nepean on the topic of Fundamental Physics and the Big Questions of Philosophy. This includes much scientific support for Humanist standpoints, and was particularly well attended and well received. More are scheduled.

Open Forum continued to provide well-informed and controversial talks. Topics included Taoism, Iraq an historic overview, A Tale of Two Oceans, and Nuclear Risk. Two talks on Africa addressed health and political problems in the Congo and Sierra Leone, as well as reconciliation in Rwanda and Burundi.

A group of **French freethinkers** approached the Humanists to ask about secularism and humanism in Australia. The French *Laïcité* is a type of secularism, promoting separation of church and state, but it originated in *lay* church people (ie not ordained). see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laïcité>

In Australia by contrast, the secular movement consists mainly of atheists. Many French call themselves *laïques*, and France has much more effective absence of religion in government.

A major event in the quarter was the **Annual Conference of the Council of Australian Humanist Societies** (CAHS). NSW delegates Ian Bryce and John August travelled to Perth for the weekend of meetings and celebrations.

Attendees included several delegates for most States, many observers from the local HSWA, and friends and relatives. The program began with a welcome dinner on the Friday.

The AGM on Saturday 30 June was the official event for CAHS. This included the usual Past Minutes, Business Arising, Reports from office bearers etc.

There was discussion on broadening the scope Australian Humanist, and including more photos. Currently the online version is simply the pdf as printed. Should there perhaps be a different online version, without length limits, many links, and many photos?

Motions on Notice are an important means of setting CAHS policy for the coming year. We are pleased to report that all three Policy motions put by NSW (thankyou members!) were accepted (with minor amendments):

- To oppose funding of chaplains in schools, while excluding secular welfare workers.
- To express concern for social justice, in particular domestic violence, and support funding for women's refuges, and to communicate this to domestic violence campaigner Rosie Batty.
- To eliminate the privileged position of religion in charities.

Australian Humanist of the Year (our award to a public figure) went to past Labor MP Carmen Lawrence, and a Saturday dinner was held at which the award was presented. From Humanist ranks, Outstanding Humanist Achiever was awarded to Stephen Stuart, President and long-time pillar of HSVic.

A new CAHS executive was appointed, headed by Scott Sharrad of SA. His group has visions of a much more active Australian body (whereas most activities are currently organized by States). They intend that centralized membership, a larger financial base, and a higher profile, will ultimately increase public awareness and effectiveness of humanism in Australia.

On our social day we visited Fremantle, and discovered there is a matrix of tunnels beneath the historic Fremantle Jail – a return visit is anticipated!

Further Reports on the CAHS AGM will appear in the coming Australian Humanist.

Ian Bryce



CALENDAR FOR JUL-SEP 2015

	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
			1	2	3	4	5
J	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
U	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
L	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30	31		
	31					1	2
A	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
U	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
G	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
		1	2	3	4	5	6
S	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
E	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
P	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	28	29	30				

Open Forum meets each Wednesday
night at Humanist House 8.00pm

Sunday 12th July 2015 4-6pm , Humanist House - HuVAT:

'Secular History' - John August presents Strange Stories; State Aid & DOGS; World War I; Mannix, Catholics & the Menzies Era; Abortion, Whitlam and reforms; Recent times including Hawke, Keating, Hewson & Howard - and Voluntary Euthanasia in the NT.

Sunday 26th July 2015 3-6pm , Humanist House - Meetup:

'Humanistmas in July' - If you'd like to see the NSW Humanist Meetup prosper, then it's time to come along and bring and share some good food, bad drink and festive spirit. And share yourself and your dreams and ideas. The topic is 'community'.

Sunday 9th August 2015 3-5 pm , Humanist House - Activism:

Continuing the Activism Meetings we had in January and May. We'll try to get a range of speakers along - probably John Kaye from the Greens, but hopefully also people on separation of Church and State, Ethics Education and the impact of cults

Sunday 23rd August 2015 3-6pm , Humanist House - Meetup:

'Calling Generation X' - There will be opportunity for sharing views on the different 'generations' - boomers, millennials etc but will mainly be trying to focus on Gen-X i.e. those aged 35-55 who we need to draw in to revitalise the Humanist movement .

Sunday 13th September 2015 2-5 pm , Humanist House - AGM:

Official notice of the Annual General Meeting will be issued at the due time, so please wait for such confirmation.

Sunday 27th September 2015 3-6pm, Humanist House - Meetup:

'Existentialism is a Humanism' - This Meetup event will examine the philosophical movement known as Existentialism and whether it still offers insights into our lives in a godless world . There will be a guest speaker, Psychologist Maria Fuentes, and other informative presentations and opportunity for each attendee to express a personal response to this fascinating field.

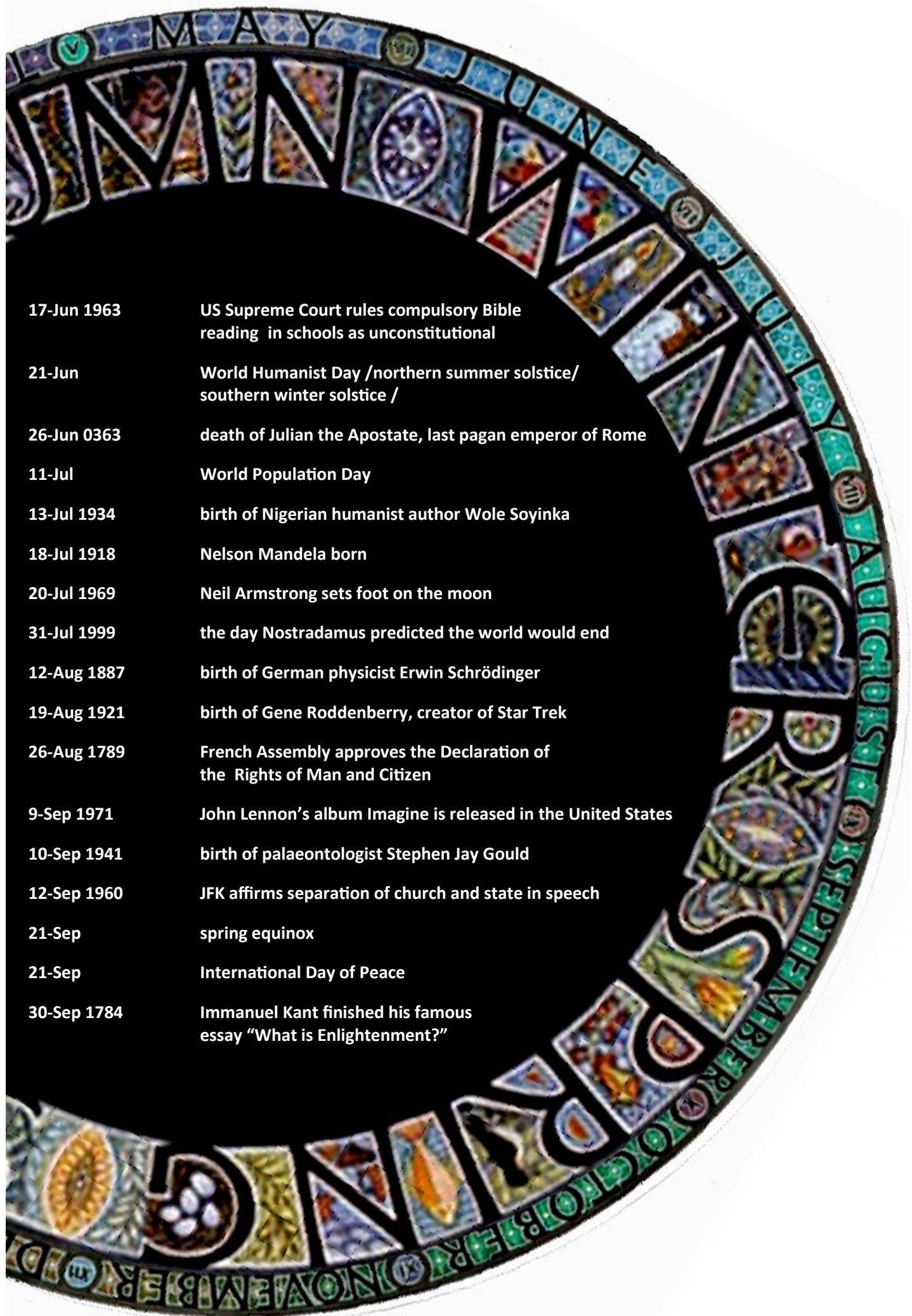


Humanist Aid

www.humanistaid.org.au

Humanist Aid is a registered charity established in late 2013 by a group of humanist friends in Sydney, Australia wanting to do something worthwhile with their time and energy which could help make a positive difference to the lives of others.

We are committed to supporting secular, non-religious charities which operate without any agenda other than to assist those in need. All donations received and funds raised are forwarded in full to our chosen charities as any expenses associated with running the organisation, which are kept to a minimum, are covered directly by our directors.



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|-------------|--|
| 17-Jun 1963 | US Supreme Court rules compulsory Bible reading in schools as unconstitutional |
| 21-Jun | World Humanist Day /northern summer solstice/
southern winter solstice / |
| 26-Jun 0363 | death of Julian the Apostate, last pagan emperor of Rome |
| 11-Jul | World Population Day |
| 13-Jul 1934 | birth of Nigerian humanist author Wole Soyinka |
| 18-Jul 1918 | Nelson Mandela born |
| 20-Jul 1969 | Neil Armstrong sets foot on the moon |
| 31-Jul 1999 | the day Nostradamus predicted the world would end |
| 12-Aug 1887 | birth of German physicist Erwin Schrödinger |
| 19-Aug 1921 | birth of Gene Roddenberry, creator of Star Trek |
| 26-Aug 1789 | French Assembly approves the Declaration of
the Rights of Man and Citizen |
| 9-Sep 1971 | John Lennon's album Imagine is released in the United States |
| 10-Sep 1941 | birth of palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould |
| 12-Sep 1960 | JFK affirms separation of church and state in speech |
| 21-Sep | spring equinox |
| 21-Sep | International Day of Peace |
| 30-Sep 1784 | Immanuel Kant finished his famous
essay "What is Enlightenment?" |

NSW HUMANISTS MEETUP - A HISTORY

You may be familiar with *Facebook*, surely the most popular social networking site on the Internet. But it's not the only social media in town, and there are some more specialised sites that are also booming on the web.

Meetup is one such website which focuses on establishing enduring active groups in different cities around the world - including a big presence here in Sydney. There is a charge made on the individual 'Organizer' of each group, but potential members join up instantly, and for free, online. New groups and new members are constantly coming forward. Members can join as many different groups as they like. Competition for attention between possible groups is intense. (Check it out at www.meetup.com).

There is now a *Meetup* group dedicated to the same goals as the NSW Humanist Society. The **NSW Humanists Meetup** (at <http://www.meetup.com/nswhumanists/>) was already five years old when I became its Organizer in late 2012. It had been set up in the early days of *Meetup* in Sydney in 2006, but its Calendar of Events largely consisted of things already happening around Sydney, which the previous Organizers believed would be of interest to those of a humanistic inclination. The Meetup title has undergone some name changes, but always including the word 'Humanists', and settled on its present name - by agreement with the NSW Society - shortly before I became the Organizer.

When I took over, I sought to enliven the group, take it forward, and give it a distinct identity. I negotiated full sponsorship with the Humanist Society of NSW, including a venue for regular events at Humanist House. This is a report to members on the efforts which have been made.

I established the fourth Sunday of the month as the regular time, as this balanced nicely with the Humanist Society's own active day on the second weekend of the month. I have called the events 'New Humanists Sunday Open House' as I am trying to get new and younger people involved in Humanism, and through the doors of our valuable asset, Humanist House.

I call the Meetup members 'New Humanists' and make my appeal to "those new to Humanism, seeking to renew Humanism, having new perspectives on Humanism, or making new friendships in a Humanist community" - a broad scope.

An ambition to revive Humanism in NSW is a demanding one. I'm also aware that 'new' is an adjective which has periodically attached to Humanism in many earlier decades. I was also working full-time up to February this year. Hence progress has been slow, with patience the watchword..

Still I have found the effort very valuable personally. The goal, and the difficulty, has been to get a persistent group of individuals so as to found a growing community.

Meetup is focused on 'groups'. But what is a group? The 'group' which *Meetup* provides, is all those who have signed up with a particular banner, subscribing to the online mailing list on what the Meetup group is up to. Some percentage of them will actually take an interest in what the group is doing. A smaller portion will sometimes attend events. A yet smaller group will attend frequently, and some of those may become active in the group's development.

Ideally they will bond socially, into a group of companions pursuing the banner themes - Humanism in our case.

Hopefully some go on to full membership in the Society itself.

Social media has its 'easy come' aspects, e.g. with fifty new people a month joining us online, but most are also 'easy go'. It's up to the Organizer to get participants meeting, and bonding - which is especially hard if they only come on an *ad hoc* and intermittent basis. Consistency seems important in overcoming this, so I have tried to build a thematic approach.

My report is itself focused on those events customised for the 'new' Humanists coming at us from *Meetup*. Of course the NSW Humanists Meetup also publicises the Society's own events such as HuVAT (Humanist Viewpoints Afternoon Talks), End of Year Party, and special events like those on World Humanist Day or International Women's Day. But what appeals to the 'old' Humanists, if you'll pardon the term, won't always work for other generations.

The support of my wife Fay has been key in running the Meetup events. We kicked off with 'New Humanists Homecoming - 21st Century Style' on Sunday October 21st 2012, 2.00-6.00 p.m. I felt the four hour format went by quickly enough for those participating, but we later reduced it to three hours, to fit the incredibly busy lives Sydneysiders have these days. Shorter, more frequent events might be desirable, and weeknights may work better, but Fay and I live at the base of the Blue Mountains, so a monthly Sunday afternoon has been more sustainable, given the travel time.

During the first twelve months we had a talk from Steve Maxwell on the history of Rationalism in Australia, and a film and talk on Feminism and Humanism from our sisters in the Feminists Meetup. Other meetings focused on the topic of Humanism itself, and sharing personal hopes for the Meetup. A core group formed, but fell apart somewhat in 2013 when Fay and I went overseas for a couple of months. A new core developed, and it has been gratifying that others have kept things going when we travelled in 2014, and again this year.

Each winter we have a purely social event nicknamed 'Humanistmas in July' where we share food we have each brought. The August events have emphasised activism and particularly tried to assist non-religious refugees, but it isn't easy. I fear that non-religious refugees suffer extra strains from lack of a special community of their own in Australia. Religious refugees have weekly even daily contact from their co-religionist fellows. A sharing community is something Humanists aim for, but we need to work harder to achieve this at a level to produce individual benefits. In November 2013 we looked at Humanitarianism and charity.

On Friday October 11, 2013, in an effort at cross-promotion, I gave a presentation to the **Sydney Atheists Meetup** called '21st Century Humanism'. I didn't convince many to take up Humanism at the time, but the process was a valuable renewal for me. Researching the presentation got me involved further in cultivating my own sense of what Humanism can be, and mean.

I have also got bolder in outreach, and recruited Assistant Organizers who have been a big help in keeping it going - Pete, Dave, Christian and John.

Atheist scholar, David Killingly has contributed well-crafted presentations on the difficult topics 'Consciousness' and 'Critical Thinking' for our September 2013 and 2014 events.

In 2014 a new phase began with distinct topics, exploring in depth what Humanism can mean for a new generation. The events include elements I characterise as FYI, DIY and BYO. This includes talks, but also slideshows and videos (FYI—*For Your Information*). Then each participant has a turn to share their thoughts and concerns (DIY—*Do it Yourself*), bringing their own 'Humanity' to the occasion (BYO—*Bring Your Own*).

But how to get them to bond into a fellowship? An atomic chain reaction needs a 'critical mass' to get started and something similar operates here. The bonding and developing needs sufficient attendees to throw up commonalities and repeated attendance to accumulate the insights of examining life from different angles. I can't yet say that such a 'critical mass' has occurred, but hope remains.

I find I am competing with groups with related themes, such as Feminists, Atheists, Skeptiks - even Epicureans. The Humanist movement has traditionally had a broad territory but today it's issue-based movements with fluid populations. Broad-based, long-term organisations are significantly less popular in the age of social media, and consumerism. Look how political parties and trade unions have steeply declining membership.

It's a difficult time to be marketing the Humanist movement, which is in effect, what I'm trying to do. One way is to try to build a distinct and consistent Humanism 'brand' for the **NSW Humanists Meetup** - and the Humanist Society itself. This is one standard against which I assess the value of the presentations we offer to our *Meetup* 'customers'.

I will next give some idea of the presentations we have had.

In my absence, events have been ably managed by my Assistant Organizers. In March 2014 Christian Moir hosted a session on 'Parenting Freethinkers' examining how Humanism helps us to raise well-adjusted children, free of dogma and baseless anxieties. Then in April last year, Pete Miller convened an opportunity to raise what we each consider 'The Big Stuff' - the dominating Issues, Institutions, Ideologies, Idiocies and Opportunities of our time. Both were productive discussions that left room to return to these topics again.

And in May 2015, Dave Nelson presented 'Privacy & Identity in a Soul-less World' examining how corporations are increasingly collecting data which helps them subtly manipulate our behaviour and our very sense of who we are.

I personally presented several topics in 2014-15. We opened in February 2014 with 'The Pursuit of HAPPINESS - and its Discontents'. You might notice that I try to give the presentations what I hope are catchy titles, to attract the kind of 'thinking man' or 'thinking woman' we are seeking. My point was that the value of happiness is in the pursuit. The event was well-attended and enjoyed by those who came, but still not the firestarter topic I hoped for.

For May 2014, I wanted a topic as large and appealing as happiness, and came up with 'Freedom - Positive & Negative'. I minimised my presentation to an outline of pointers for wider discussion and maximised the time for participants to express their response to the essentials of the topic. The simple technique of getting everyone in a circle, and drawing out the thoughts each in turn, produces many wonderful moments. The output deserves to be recorded, but that would inhibit the contributors. I certainly found I was cumulatively transformed by these experiences, deeply

impressed by everyone's capacity for gems of insight, and took in more than I can remember, and I hope transformative learning will stay with each of those who come along.

In June 2014, to honour World Humanist Day, I presented Humanism around the world—the IHEU, The Freedom of Thought Report, Roy Brown's work at the UN Human Rights Council, what's happening in India and Brazil and some of the curious alternative 'Humanist' movements out there. All this plus Ian Bryce presented on his visits to Nepal and Tibet. This international presence contributes greatly to the Humanist 'brand' and we need to be appreciative and aware of it.

In October 2014 the New Humanists Sunday Open House event was styled 'Illuminating the Enlightenment'. We watched both of the *Heroes of the Enlightenment* DVDs which the NSW Humanists Society now owns, and discussed how the values and traditions which the Enlightenment movement focused and fostered are the grounds of modern Humanism. This is another approach to the branding of Humanism - giving it an image the people we reach out to can identify with.

For November 2014, having done the Enlightenment, and also 'Liberty' and 'Pursuit of Happiness' it was time to tackle 'Life'.

I advertised 'The Meaning of LIFE', a risky topic, open to both pretentiousness and banality. But there is no shortage of quotes and quips about the topic on the web, so I let the pictures do the talking, with a cascade of graphics featuring different approaches to existence—the serious, the humorous, the deep, the shallow, the dark and the light of LIFE itself. The most significant part of the meeting was getting each participant to open up on their innermost values. It was not a big attendance, but it showed the potential of value-based topics in growing the Humanism brand.

I opened January 2015 with the topic 'Cultivating our Humanity' and found the response rewarding. The simple but powerful word 'Humanity' contains all our vulnerabilities and all our aspirations and is key, I think, to developing the Humanism brand. I remain convinced there is potential in the *Meetup* system for cultivating a new generation of Humanists.

February's topic 'Multiculturalism, Humanism & Islamism' was a necessary response to the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, and the sudden rise of ISIS. Humanists need to talk about their theories and feelings on all this, as both Islamists, and their extreme opponents, are challenging our key values of modernity and cosmopolitanism. It was a tough discussion.

I observed that many new recruits to **NSW Humanists Meetup** included 'Spirituality' as one of their interests. Yet I know many other Humanists hold such words in suspicion. I crafted the topic-line 'Atheist Spiritualities & Other Earthly Delights', for March 2015 - hoping to bring different stances into dialogue. But the more 'spiritual' members didn't come. Those 'down-to-earth' people who did come, enjoyed looking at ways to find value in this awkward concept.

This history ends here, but the doing and the reviewing has been rewarding for me, enough to keep going in the effort of philosophising, marketing, evangelising, outreaching, worrying and working - trying to get new people interested in the Humanism movement.

Thanks to all who have been supportive.

Murray Love, Meetup Organizer



NORDIC COUNTRIES LIGHT THE WAY

According to Andrew Scott, Australia could learn from the nations of Nordic Europe. His new book, *Northern Lights: The Positive Policy Example of Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway*, maintains economic prosperity can be combined with social equality, and environmental responsibility.

Andrew is an Associate Professor in Politics and Policy at Deakin University. *Northern Lights* is his fifth book.

The income distribution in these countries is much more equal than in Australia, Britain, New Zealand and Canada - and nearly twice as equal as the United States. There is genuine work-life balance, and decent working hours, which lead to improving wellbeing, and lowering poverty.

Finland has achieved stunning success in schools. Denmark invests in comprehensive skills training as part of providing security, - as well as flexibility, in people's employment lives. Norway's taxation approach ensures that natural resources are used sustainably for the entire nation's long-term wealth.

Denmark, where people live within their means, has been voted the happiest country in the world, for many reasons.

Australian sociologist, Hugh Mackay, has said that the well-being of a society should come before the economy. The sense of belonging in one's COMMUNITY, not as part of a nationalistic TEAM AUSTRALIA, is a better way of securing a more stable homogeneous nation.

Compared internationally, the Nordic countries often come out on top as combining a high standard of living with equality, and an extensive public sector. The Nordic welfare model is built on social and welfare policies firmly based on the basic principle of universal rights, i.e. everybody has the individual right to assistance from the public sector if they are unable to look after themselves.

These rights, by the way, are the same for all, regardless of factors such as income and assets. The social security net has schemes linked to different events and life situations. These include health insurance, unemployment insurance, social security, and pensions for both early and later retirement.

A central policy goal is to avoid the existence of a 'working poor' - unlike the USA where employment figures are exaggerated through people who accept poorly paid jobs. Education is designed to ensure as many people as possible gain qualifications that enable them to find a good job.

An extensive childcare system has a direct welfare effect for families and helps to socialise children. It also helps to ensure gender equality in terms of opportunities to participate in the labour market..¹

How do Scandinavian countries achieve their economic/social successes through their socialist/capitalist economy? - They have very high taxes with very generous social welfare services provided by the state, the famous 'cradle-to-grave' welfare state. Yet they are vibrantly capitalist with low levels of interference in markets by the government, low levels of regulation, low levels of nationalization of industry and capital, and almost no protectionism.

The Scandinavian countries, especially Sweden, manage to maintain high levels of taxes and expenditures while also sustaining high levels of national wealth and production - and a standard of living among the world's best.

From the early 1970s, Norway has imposed substantial taxation on international oil companies which came to drill in Norway's North Sea oilfields. It also created Statoil, a national, publicly owned oil company which took a 50 per cent ownership share of all new oilfields.

The proceeds from Norway's taxation and regulation of resource wealth contribute to affordable free university education - something Gough Whitlam introduced. and which today is seen as unaffordable by both Labor and the LNP.

Norway successfully continues its policies, and has become one of the world's most wealthy and socially equal nations. The Scandinavian model of socialism, with its lack of class conflict, is a model for the rest of the world.

In Denmark, it is difficult for anyone to become rich, but then, no one is left to live in poverty, either. The standard of living is high. Social policy in areas like free health care, inexpensive prescription drugs, child care, education, and protecting the unemployed, are part of a 'solidarity system' that makes sure that almost no one falls into economic despair.

Danes may pay very high taxes, but they enjoy a quality of life that Australians would envy. The minimum wage in Denmark is about twice that of the United States and those who are unemployable, or unable to care for themselves, have a basic income guarantee of about \$100 per day. That is three times the around \$30 per day of unemployment benefits that people are expected to live on here in Australia.

In Australia, university students graduate with an average debt of \$25,000, while virtually all higher education in Denmark is free. That includes not just college but graduate schools as well, including medical school.

Australian economists have been advocating higher taxation for a long time. Former Treasury Secretary Ken Henry has made clear the need to now increase taxation in Australia, and Sydney academic Dr Shaun Wilson reports that, when asked to choose between reducing taxes or spending more on social services, 60 per cent of voters prefer spending, compared with 37 per cent who prefer tax cuts.²

If the rest of Western Europe, or countries badly hit by the global economic crisis, like Greece and Spain are in no hurry to adopt the Nordic model, how, then, would Australia respond to the ideal of a cradle to grave' economy?

I suspect that in spite of all the impressive evidence that the socialist/capitalist Nordic economy works and will continue to work, it would be extremely difficult to convince hard-core, virulently anti-socialist, pro-capitalist, pro-consumerist voters and politicians in Australia. Rather than increased welfare spending, will be more cuts, with predictable results.

Unlike Denmark, homelessness and poverty are a fact of life here, and despite all the choreographed flag-waving, We-Love-Australia-Day exhibitionism, Australia has a long way to go before it will be voted the happiest country.

Barbara Cattunar

1 <http://www.norden.org/en/fakta-om-norden-1/social-policy-and-welfare>

2 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rep-bernieanders/what-can-we>

END WASTE AND GET REAL GROWTH

Dick Smith is right to say the world can't afford the sort of growth that wastes resources, and needs increasing population. But let's look at our definitions of 'growth'.

Most of our 'growth' is waste. An example is my ten year old microwave oven. It wouldn't work. Everyone told me it'd be cheaper to trash it and buy another. I got someone to mend it. It cost me his coming-out fee and six-minutes' work. Now it works wonderfully. Yet he doesn't get much work, and will soon be out of a job! Which of the two alternatives was better for the economy? Buying a new one gives income to the importers and foreign countries that make them- using energy and materials. Trashing it cost the Council for collecting it, and putting it in landfill, which is getting scarce. Getting someone to mend my microwave was income for the mender.

I live in my own house, which I refuse to sell, and don't want to go to a retirement village or nursing home. If I did go, it would make money for lots of people, who look after old people, from the operators and the care workers to the people who look after the financing of it all. If I sold the house, I would make some money, the estate agent, the wrecker, the builder of the new McMansion, his subcontractors, their workers, and makers of house-parts would all make money. The buyer of the McMansion would take out a mortgage and the bank would make money. The McMansion would need more maintenance, cleaning, central heating and air-conditioning than my present house requires. Selling my house would 'boost' the economy.

But there are plenty of things needing to be done, without such waste! All infrastructure needs vast improvement – repairs and innovation, in water supply conservation, sewage, transport and energy supplies. Sewerage systems can be restructured and rebuilt to stop the current appalling waste of our most renewable fertilizer, and enabling salvage of heavy metals and re-use of grey water at source.

There's the invention, manufacture and maintenance of more types of transport that don't waste, pollute, and endanger. Housing and community environments are needed that are decent for everyone. Our present spate of development is building wastefully designed houses that pile up future problems.

There are many aspects of rural Australia which need improving. How can the land be fertilized without pollution and run-off problems? What food sources can be easily grown that least deplete soils? What are the best ways to conserve marine and forest resources, and make it possible for wildlife to survive? Landcare needs many workers; you can't just plant trees and leave them. Can we develop plants that withstand climate changes, poor soils and droughts? Preserve Australian unique flora and fauna?

Pest and weed eradication needs manpower more than chemicals. Can we find uses for pests and weeds, since they abound and are hardy, and that need manpower rather than chemicals to control? For example, get rid of (not just cull) feral camels, using aboriginal desert know-how and skills, and making use of all bits of the camel. How can we develop cheap means of taking camel products from the places of killing to a centre for distribution?

The greatest conservation challenge is to reverse deserts and speed the biological processes that can crumble rocks into soils. Can we prevent fires and develop less flammable forests and understoreys? Is a less destructive defence than fire possible against wildfires?

Australian manufacture of products that are more innovative, renovatable, reliable, updatable, durable, beautiful, recyclable and less wasteful has the extra advantage of reducing the increasing freight costs from overseas. Manufacturing techniques will conserve resources. There will be innovation in artistic and other cultural products of each country that are distinctive and contribute to variety and beauty in life in the world. Fashions will be beautiful, useful, durable and comfortable, and designed to suit different needs, because they will be geared to the changing population.

Research in many fields will be increased, rather than cut. For example, technology will be from renewable non-polluting energy sources, and innovative intermediate technology will be exported as well as for domestic use, using solar, wind, and well-geared human-power (exercise).

Retailing at present is a source of waste. Most things in shops will be in waste-bins within two years. Fresh foods are wasted that are not sold the first few days. Retailers prefer to sell large appliances because the profits are greater, and hence have no call to sell innovative low technology. As freight costs and petrol costs grow, retail can change to allow more local shopping. Local councils can sponsor local 'Australia' shops that advertise locally-made goods. And people ought to respond by buying them. 'Conservation Shops' can stock and repair only conservation products. Salvage shops and centres can find uses and salvage for everything at present thrown daily out of shops, homes and building sites, and annually as hard rubbish.

If housekeeping is sustainable and saves waste, that will be more essential for our economy than markets that produce waste. Sustainable households will need more workers.

Services will include lifelong education to produce resilient, enterprising and idealistic adults; Childcare that is leisurely, for less herding and more freedom; Services include decent care for children, the disabled, sick, handicapped and elderly. This will need three times the labour force than we allocate at present, and opportunities to develop services further. Entertainment programs can be produced that are as fine as possible, giving visions for the future.

Work-share can reduce the load on the increasingly overworked work force, while the unemployed will be employed for the dole. Services to the public will be improved everywhere, as a priority. 'Invention sabbaticals' and holidays for workers will help to develop ideas and innovations. Conditions of work can be rationalized.

Once it was thought we should only need to work 20 hours a week. Why not? Today we have people working 48 hours plus, and others hardly working or not at all. Skills and retraining can be organized better.

Valerie Yule

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