

WORLD NEEDS GOODWILL

JUST over a year ago *The Canberra Times* suggested in an editorial that Australian children of all ages should be encouraged to write to penfriends in three countries in an effort to establish lasting links in the name of peace. The idea, by no means new, was prompted by the belief that children, left to themselves, are rarely motivated by hatred or violence, and, indeed, must be taught bigotry by adults. The response has been surprising. The editorial was reprinted in the *Japan Times*; it was picked up by several journalists in other countries; a substantial number of Members of the House of Representatives passed it on to schools in their electorates; and recently the *Australian Stamp Explorer* published a short article about it and the ease with which such links can be established. With the help of diplomatic missions in Canberra, the result has been that several hundred children from Australia have established links with children in New Zealand, the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Austria, East and West Germany, the Soviet Union, Israel, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Venezuela. One young writer has asked for a pen-pal in Mongolia!

This recitation of the responses *The Canberra Times* has received is no way a self-awarded pat on the back. Indeed, given the number of children in Australia the number who have responded is a very small percentage. But that merely emphasises the point: peace efforts grow from small, individual actions.

At this special time of year when families are drawn together, when friends, including those neglected for most of the year, are remembered and acknowledged, it is worth pondering on the baffling and seemingly insoluble difficulties of achieving peace.

Certainly lasting peace will not come from an increasingly volatile arms race. It will not flow from intransigence in the Middle East, or in Northern Ireland or in Central America. It can only grow from a genuine desire not to kill or be killed, not to dominate or be dominated, not to threaten or be threatened. Peace grows from understanding which should not be confused with acceptance. There are too many offensive conditions in the world — poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy — for individuals to be complacent or indifferent. But the aim must surely be to change such conditions peacefully. The sacrifice of lives on the altar of martyrdom generally means that the innocent have paid to exchange one oppressive regime for another.

The affluent responsible

It is the affluent, both individuals and nations, that must bear the responsibility for peaceful change by indicating to their governments the immorality of the present burdens borne by the poor, the diseased and the starving and by easing those burdens through constructive aid programs. The recipient nations, too, have an obligation. Too many spend too much on arms, most of which are designed to keep their people subdued or to rattle at neighbours. Aid could well be linked to a matching reduction in arms spending.

This Christmas festival of Christmas can serve to remind all religions that most of them have contributed in one way or another to past and present armed conflict. This places on them a greater onus to now preach compromise and reconciliations, to acknowledge differences that must be accommodated rather than necessarily eliminated. For centuries Christians were taught to hate Jews; Jews and Arabs were and are taught to hate each other; Catholics and Protestants in Ireland were taught to fight and kill each other; for decades capitalists and communists have been taught to despise and destroy each other. Is it not time we paused in our ingrained hostility and looked for the threshold of common ground?

Our common concern for universal health, for minimum standards of living, for enough food, for the protection of the environment we all share — these, surely, are common goals, not to be achieved at others' expense. It is to this distant end that small steps must be taken. Linking children of the world with their eager, innocent interest in how other children live is one strand in bonds of friendship which are so desperately needed if the world is to survive the madness of blind nationalism and intolerant ideologies.

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War crimes by both sides

Received December 18

Sir, — While the Menzies report recommended the investigation of some 70 [foreign-born] Australians whose names were not released, it also cleared three. Mr Rover, Dr Megay and Mr Urbanchich — convicted of war crimes by the self-appointed judge Mr Mark Aarons in ABC radio's trial by the media.

Our legal system accords the accused the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, yet these individuals were declared guilty until proven innocent. Despite the strong condemnation of the ABC program's name-dropping in Federal Parliament on December 5 and the disquiet even within the Jewish community, Mr Aarons gave us more of the same on December 7, repeated on two consecutive days. This time he devoted a whole segment to Hungarian Nazi war criminals, naming 11, one of whom (like Dr Megay) I know to be dead.

Without disputing the merit of trials more than 40 years after the events, those ethnic communities who were the victims of war crimes committed by the victors should also be entitled to similar retributive action, if justice is to prevail. Or are war crimes unforgettable and unforgivable only if committed by the vanquished?

While the unity of our multicultural society is seriously threatened through the revival of old grievances, one aspect of the present accusations raises additional concern. Mr Aarons's emphasis of the anti-communist conviction of his quarry makes this very sentiment also suspect. Is this just an unfortunate coincidence, a welcome by-product or the reason for the whole exercise?

EVA MALONYAY
Lynham

[There was an omission from this letter as published on Monday.]

Times past

From The Canberra Times of 50 years ago.

December 24, 1936: The *Canberra Times* correspondent of *The Times* reported the arrival from abroad of volunteers, aircraft and munitions to help the government forces. The same paper's man in Gibraltar reported similar German assistance to the rebels.

Please write letters of less than 250 words. Short letters get preference. So we can publish as many views as possible, letters may be edited for space unless the author insists on publication in full or not at all. Every letter must carry the author's full address, for reference. A telephone number as well is desirable. Address the envelope: "Letters to Editor", The Canberra Times, GPO Box 218, Canberra City, 2601.

Need for reform of Social Security is 'paramount and urgent'

By CHARLES BLUNT, the Federal Opposition spokesman on Social Security

THREE and a half years of bad decisions and non-decisions by Labor have all but buried our ailing social-security system. This tragedy is making poverty permanent and more widespread and wasting millions of scarce taxpayers' dollars.

Reform can and will save this integral part of Australian society — our social-security system. There is a need to tackle the disincentives preventing welfare recipients moving from dependence to independence. Despite vast increases in spending the welfare dollar is achieving less. Fraud and overpayment, raging unchecked, have undermined the credibility of the system.

Social Security administration under Labor has been given to the left wing of the party, which is using it for social engineering. Despite claims to the contrary, this Government's social-security policy has no fairness and no equity. The aged have borne the brunt of overdue expenditure restraint while nothing was done, until most recently and even this is suspect, to stop the abuse of unemployment benefits and supporting parents benefits.

The result is community disenchantment leading to growing stigma for welfare recipients and resentment by those people who are meant to benefit from the existence of our social-security system.

The need for reform, the need for change is paramount and urgent.

First and foremost reform must focus on poverty traps — excessively high effective marginal tax rates arising from a combination of tax on non-pension income and benefit withdrawal due to this extra income. Pensioners and beneficiaries seeking to live their lives and break away from government dependency are blocked by this often insurmountable barrier.

In November, 1985, with great fanfare Labor introduced measures to ease poverty traps. In July,

1987, after a 20-month wait, the many people in dire need for immediate help will finally receive it.

The major problem of the social-security system are obstacles for individual effort and personal responsibility. Incentives to save, to work or earn more, to study or to become more qualified are stifled by the system. The system ensnares clients in a vicious cycle of dependency from one generation to another. Regrettably, it is easy to understand how children of current clients of the department are so disadvantaged, so restricted in their opportunities and horizons, they may become doomed to live outside the mainstream of Australia's society without any real hope of breaking through to achieve a more full-filling life.

It is financially irresponsible and immoral to allow our social-security system to foster dependence.

Not only must we consider the impact of Social Security on individuals but also its threat to the viability of the very economic system which finances its benefits. Under no circumstances can social-security policy be considered in isolation from the required, sensible and responsible management of the Australian economy.

The social-security system must not hinder economic growth either by the way the system affects individuals or in the costs it imposes on our economy in general. The Liberal and National Parties will provide suitable and effective economic policies that encourage the creation of new wealth and new permanent jobs and controls inflation. This will provide new opportunities to all Australians and particularly to those on low incomes.

Labor is throwing millions of taxpayers' dollars to the wind trying to combat the burgeoning poverty arising from its failing economic policies. The present La-

bor-administered system provides incentives for the wrong activities and pushes people into a welfare rut. Anomalies occur in the eligibility for the payment of Family Allowance, education assistance benefits and unemployment benefits. This encourages unemployment in preference to study or self-improvement.

Young people are encouraged to leave school and receive unemployment benefits — the strict means testing of education allowances, the new means test for family Allowance for 16 and 17 year olds, and the easily available unemployment benefits work together to create this effect.

The primary responsibility for welfare lies with the individual and the family. The wellbeing of the individual is not a function of government alone. Our reformist social-security policy will promote and foster personal contribution by supporting both individuals and families to minimise trauma resulting from changed employment or family circumstances. We will encourage self provision in conjunction with government programs and will ensure that individuals accept their responsibility and obligations.

The Liberal and National Parties are determined to implement a program of reform to tackle the real problems created by current administrative practices. We will provide a coherent basis for the Social Security payment system.

Simultaneously the coalition will establish new and enforce existing sanctions to deal with those people who are prepared to steal from the system and to undermine its integrity. This action is regrettable but necessary if community respect for Social Security is to be restored and maintained.

Our main policy objectives are:

- 1 — To make the social-security system simple and easy to understand.

- 2 — To improve administration and to modernise methods of services and control of benefit payment.

- 3 — To better target resources and to concentrate help where it is most needed. To support and encourage the family structure as the traditional and basic unit of our society.

- 4 — To improve incentives to work, save, earn more and study.

- 5 — To give more recognition to the needs of people with disabilities.

- 6 — To ensure services are delivered efficiently and economically.

- 7 — To take those steps necessary to place Social Security on a secure financial basis for the future.

Consideration of the unemployment benefit system provides ample evidence of the need for changes as we have proposed. Today's unemployment benefit system originated in 1945 and the scheme has remained essentially unchanged since then. Its original intention was to provide assistance for short-term unemployment. It copied well in the '50s and '60s but in the '70s massive shifts in the world's economic balance created a new type of unemployment on a large and seemingly permanent scale. The 1945 approach not only cannot cope with the present problem but does not even address the fundamental problems of unemployment in the first place.

There is a need to address the cause of poverty and the associated human problems. The psychological and physical effects of long-term unemployment are well known. They include low self-esteem, dependency, drug abuse, violent delinquency and other anti-social behaviour.

These problems arise from isolation or exclusion from the mainstream of our community.

The Liberal and National Parties work for unemployment



Mr Blunt

benefits scheme will address these problems.

Welfare alone is not enough. We must bring people back into our community, give them a sense of purpose, some discipline to their lives and an incentive to become independent.

We will aim to give the unemployed and other clients of the Department of Social Security the same balance of obligations and entitlements affecting the Australian community in general.

In reforming the social-security system we will introduce a simpler, more equitable and more efficient system of income support programs, and they will be effectively integrated with the income tax system.

Our system of income support will recognise three elements:

- 1 — The basic level of support.
- 2 — Supplements to meet particular needs or circumstances.
- 3 — Incentives for people to provide for themselves through self-reliance, to achieve independence and individual freedom.

The important part of our welfare reform will be based on support for the family and young Australians.

We are committed to supporting

Australian families and to assist them in the raising and educating of children for it is upon them that the future of our nation depends. We are also committed to expanding the opportunities available to young Australians.

All young Australians should be either at school, in training or working, or a combination of the three.

To achieve this we will reform social-security income support criteria. A possible reform is making unemployment benefits unavailable for those under 18. However they will continue to be eligible for Family Allowance and our income-support programs will provide a positive incentive for continued study, training and self-improvement.

In ensuring that the conditions of benefit payment provide incentive and also balance obligations and entitlements we are determined that the mess Labor has created with supporting-parents benefits will be overcome. We will move to ensure effective maintenance collection, to ensure that parents and not taxpayers are primarily responsible for their children. We will also review the operations of the Family Law Act.

Letters to the Editor

Unfestive Civic

Received December 17

Sir, — Ho! Ho! Ho! It must be the joke of Christmas.

Come on, NCDC, what are the chances for '88?

Do you think you have had enough time?

Please don't try to blame the department this time.

Wasn't it last year we were told that Christmas decorations for Civic had been purchased, but it was too late to put them up for Christmas '85.

Surely NCDC didn't mean Christmas '87? As I don't see any, surely they must have meant one Christmas. Presumably if they were purchased they are rotting in boxes somewhere!

M. BYRON
Braddon
and four others.

Community health

Received December 19

Sir, — I note with some astonishment the letter of Dr P. Rowland, chairperson, Community Health Services Board (Letters, December 18).

I do not know where Dr Rowland gets his weird and inaccurate figures. He states that a general practitioner Medicare consultation (whatever that is) costs \$13.10. In fact the scheduled fee is \$16.40 and the Medicare benefit is \$13.95. His analysis of the cost of a CMP consultation is probably equally accurate. But let us assume for a moment that \$33.00 is the cost of every consultation at "an inner city health centre". This figure could be the amount that the taxpayer pays because in addition to paying the salaries of practitioners, there is a bevy of administrative personnel no GP in his right mind would employ. In that event, the practitioners would be cost effective but for the excess personnel foisted on them. On the other hand, the figure of \$33 which Dr Rowland states it would cost

Murrumbidgee Corridor

Received December 19

Sir, — You have reported (CT, December 16) new procedures issued by the NCDC and Department of Territories to prevent pollution of the Murrumbidgee by runoff from land development.

We welcome this step, which this council's initiative had a good deal to do with. We took up the question of runoff into the Murrumbidgee with the NCDC over a year ago, leading eventually to a tour of affected areas in the Tuggerang Valley by the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the ACT.

We are still concerned about the Murrumbidgee Corridor. The original policy plan was released in 1983 for public comment. Since then no more has been heard, though we understand that such a document is being used as an NCDC internal working paper. A draft Conservation Plan, open to public comment, was promised for July, 1986; it now seems that this will only be released in final form in conjunction with a management plan, in up to a year's time.

The narrowness of the corridor has been criticised since 1983, when suburbs were still planned for the western side of the river. That is no longer the case, and it has been announced that the NCDC is reviewing the Metropolitan Plan. Meanwhile, large-scale

development is taking place toward the Lanyon Bowl, and no public statement has been made about the definition of the corridor or what steps will be taken to protect it.

JOHN ROWLAND,
President,
Conservation Council of the South-East Region and Canberra (Inc)

Out-of-date drugs

Received December 22

Sir, — The letter written by Mr J. Peck, the deputy manager of the ACT Health Authority, which appeared in *The Canberra Times* of December 20, implies that the City Health Centre doctor who had his drugs unlawfully taken from his surgery by a non-professional officer of the Health Authority, could be administering dangerous out-of-date drugs to his patients.

Firstly, to allay any fears which patients may have got from reading Mr Peck's letter, it should be emphasised that doctors do not use out-of-date drugs — the doctor in question puts them aside for disposal, and in this case at least half of the drugs which were taken had been in a plastic bag in a locked cabinet and were old drugs.

Nevertheless, apart from perhaps one antibiotic, there is no evidence that the use of out-of-date drugs if given inadvertently are inherently dangerous — they only lose their potency by falling below the accepted percentage efficacy level — a fact which doctors in those countries who use donated out-of-date drugs are fully aware of, and make allowance, for by titrating the dose accordingly.

The article referred to, and which appeared in *The Canberra Times* on December 15, described the events correctly, something which could not be said about the

whitewashed Health Authority-released version, which was obviously deliberately phrased to mislead.

This incident is again nothing more than part of a witchhunt for which no win has yet been found, and appears to be just another example of Mr Peck's weird offensive against City Health Centre doctors.

HUGH PRATT,
City Health Centre

Concern for children

Received December 19

Sir, — It is pleasing to note that *The Canberra Times* is concerned with the plight of the world's children and has thus given widespread coverage, bringing those concerns to our notice and educating us on

the "silent emergency" (Editorial, December 13). On behalf of those young survivors of death, and of disablement from the six big preventable diseases, you are to be thanked.

Just as you have taken action, I urge the "just me's" and the "special me's" (companies, institutions and of course the politicians) of Canberra to do likewise. Remember that a sachet of salts for Oral Rehydration Therapy cost just 10c; the cost of immunizing a child is a mere \$5. UNICEF needs the 10c pieces and the \$5 in any multiples. The Government must be reminded that a multiple of 2 x the current UNICEF grant of \$2.5 million, such as was the case in 1983, would be acceptable!

Do we care enough?

(Mrs) LEONIE FERBER
Gowrie

