

SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN

THE UNITED Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has reminded the world once again that the infants of the Third World are dying in tens of thousands each day — and not from hunger or rare diseases but from easily prevented or cured diseases such as diarrhoea, measles, whooping cough, polio and tuberculosis. Some 14.5 million children under five years of age are dying each year in what UNICEF calls the "unpublished silent emergency". In a recent special report, *The State of the World's Children 1978*, UNICEF calls for "a change in global morality".

It is shameful that the rich nations, with their very low infant mortality rates, ignore the appalling epidemic in the developing world. The superpowers and their allies are spending vast amounts on the development of horrific weapons while for very little cost they could ensure the health of millions of young children, allowing them to grow into fit adults instead of to die of preventable diseases. UNICEF estimates that for less than the cost of one aircraft-carrier 3.5 million children could be saved each year by immunisation against common disease. The world has the capacity to save the children of the Third World; it needs the morality to do it.

The politicians and the public of the richer nations can be persuaded to be generous towards the Third World. This was shown this year when the rock-music industry raised millions of dollars for the starving of Ethiopia through its "Live Aid" concerts. Sympathy was generated by film of dying children and adults shown on television almost nightly. When the famine eased so did the concern of well-off people for those in the Third World who remain in incontinence or simple treatment away from death. While famine comes and goes, disease is ever present, the risks accentuated by the lack of many things that people in the West take for granted, such as clean running water, sewerage and basic medicines.

Advances of 40 years

Many people have no doubt become complacent about standards of health in the Third World because of the dramatic improvements of recent decades. Mortality rates have fallen, population growth has slowed, many more towns and cities have safe drinking water and food production has increased sharply. According to UNICEF, there has probably been more real progress in the welfare of children over the past 40 years than in the previous 2000 years. The raw statistics make the fact that far too many children are still dying of curable disease and that the world economic slump of the 1980s is hitting the peoples of the under-developed world much harder than those of the developed. The poor have little "fat" to survive adversity, and average earnings have fallen by 10 to 15 per cent since 1980 in Africa and Latin America. For most nations of the Third World, 1986 has been the seventh consecutive year of negative economic growth, a situation that has seen a cut in some government services, including health services, to the poor, declining incomes, increased malnutrition and rising infant mortality in a number of nations.

The wealthier nations should get behind UNICEF with more money, equipment and manpower so that it can effectively tackle the diseases that are killing the poor children of the world. The progress of recent years must not be allowed to halt because the world economy is sick. The rich nations are suffering, but they can still afford the money required to fight disease in the poorer nations; the economic slump has not slowed the arms race. Moreover, the suffering of the children is not all: if they survive they are likely to be sickly adults, perhaps blind and brain-damaged, unable to contribute fully to their country's development and their families' welfare.

The plight of the children should stir the conscience of all well-off people preparing for the gift-giving and feasting of Christmas. The executive director of UNICEF, Mr James Grant, put it aptly when he said the time had come for the international community to say that it is "intolerable for a quarter of a million of its young children to die every week, and for millions to be malnourished, brain-damaged and disabled by infection and malnutrition which the world has already demonstrated its capacity to prevent on a significant scale and at a manageable cost". As he said, it is an obscenity to let this continue day after day, year after year.

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Racist Nazi witch hunt

Received December 11

Sir, — The current Nazi witch hunt (CT, December 6) is unjustified, unnecessary and vengeful, will encourage trial by media, ignores the war crimes committed by the victors, including mass murder by bombing, is incompatible with elementary notions of civil liberty, and relies on suspect Soviet evidence.

But it is also objectionable because it has encouraged racism. The witch hunt together with a recent unbalanced ABC radio program by Mark Aarons has led to anti-semitism, reflected in the phone calls and letters received by the ABC. The witch hunt has also incited racial hatred against Eastern European communities in Australia such as Ukrainians and Lithuanians, and against Croats. The Mark Aarons program left many Eastern Europeans with the feeling that they were the subject of a mindless vengeful vendetta, and many of their leaders objected to the witch hunt, the ABC program, and the refusal of the ABC

to allow them to reply to covert racist attacks on them.

If the Australian Government is intent on spending taxpayers' money on a hunt for alleged war criminals 40 years after the end of the war, it should give priority to hunting down those responsible for the deaths of thousands of Australian soldiers in Japanese camps. More than 30 per cent of Australians in Japanese captivity died, while almost no Australians died in German camps.

JOHN BENNETT,
President,
Australian Civil Liberties Union
Carlton, Victoria

Pokies part of club life

Received December 11

Sir, — We wish to express our full support for the current Licensed Clubs Association campaign for the introduction of new poker machines. Following the Edmunds report we believe there has been a reasonable expectation for this to have occurred some time ago.

For whatever reasons members play poker machines — whether for gambling against the odds, or for entertainment or for the knowledge that it is ultimately a contribution to a club they support — it is clear that the machines form a dramatic part of our club life in Canberra.

W. GOULDING,
President,
Weston Creek Football & Sports Club
Stirling

Times past

From The Canberra Times of 25 years ago.

December 13, 1961: Renewed counting of votes indicated that the Government would have a majority of only two in the House of Representatives, prompting the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Calwell, to predict a new election within months.

Role reversal in Australia Card debate

By ANDREW FRASER

THERE HAS been a certain air of unreality about the whole debate on the Australia Card which culminated in the Senate this week, with both the Government and the Opposition giving the distinct impression that they would be happier if their roles were reversed.

For example, who said: "What we need in Australia to effectively fight all forms of abuse is a proper identification of each Australian with a number, photograph, and even a fingerprint?"

None other than the "shadow minister" for trade, Mr Ray Braithwaite, who was, of course, talking last year, before the Government tried to introduce their Australia Card.

And who said: "Nothing can be more un-Australian than the need to provide one's identity on the call of an official, be it a policeman or a bureaucrat. It would be more appropriate for the proposed card to be called a Hitlercard or Stalin-

card?" That was ALP backbencher Lewis Kent, earlier this year — but he was promptly carpeted for his troubles and has been fairly quiet ever since.

Like environmental issues, civil liberties didn't worry too many people 20 years ago, but they have come to the fore with the middle-classing of the ALP. People such as the Minister for Resources and Energy, Senator Evans, have come to political prominence through their concern for civil liberties.

This concern, in particular for the legal rights of the individual, is still an article of faith in some sections of the ALP, as evidenced by the departure of Senator Georges from the party. After Senator Georges and the Minister for Finance, Senator Walsh, had their little altercation on Wednesday night when Senator Georges announced he would retire, a Liberal senator, Senator Short, rose to speak and paid tribute to Senator Georges' courage, which led to the following exchange.

Senator Elstob (Lab, SA) — "He is an old scab, that is what he is."

Senator McKiernan (Lab, SA) — "I take a point of order. There was a reference, unfortunately from my own side of the chamber, made to a senator, and I would ask that it be withdrawn."

The acting deputy president, Senator Bjelke-Petersen (NP, Qld) — "Senator Elstob, I think you should withdraw that reference to Senator Georges. That is not a parliamentary expression and I regret you made it."

Senator Elstob — "It may not be a parliamentary expression. It is the truth, but I will withdraw it."

Senator Childs (Lab, NSW) — "I raise a point of order. The word scab is very offensive to anybody who has a with the Labor movement and any trade unionist should not dare to qualify the withdrawal. I demand that the honourable senator withdraw the word scab."

Senator Elstob did, and other than Senator Bjelke-Petersen, all of the senators in the above exchange were ALP senators. The spirited defence of Senator Georges by two of his factional colleagues shows

the depth of respect that existed within the ALP for Senator Georges and his stand.

The Government's main argument was that the card was a necessary measure to stop organised crime, and anyone who opposed it was a friend of organised crime, which was hardly a libertarian line to push, let alone a civil one. But politics is rarely civil, and Government senators looked far more comfortable during the week calling the Opposition "friends of tax cheats" rather than pointing to their privacy legislation, which was an attempt to pacify the civil liberties concerns.

For their part, most Opposition senators looked distinctly uncomfortable talking about civil liberties, and it is not beyond the realm of possibility to find that with a change of Government, it would be the coalition who would be keen to introduce a national identity card, and the ALP, in opposition, strictly opposing such a measure.

But on a non-party basis, what sort of year was it for the civil

libertarians? According to the secretary of the Australian Council of Civil Liberties, Ms Beverley Schurr, it was a fairly "mixed" year, with the defeat of the Australia card legislation providing an upbeat end to the civil libertarians' year.

On the plus side for civil libertarians, the proposal to give state police the right to tap telephones was rejected, and the appointment of a woman to the High Court "showed that the Government was taking equal opportunity seriously".

But on the negative side, the Bill of Rights was withdrawn, and freedom of expression will be further limited by the increasingly limited ownership of the media. "The Government's failure to support Mr Wright's attempts to publish his book in the M15 case also reveals a Government overconcerned with the interests of foreign secret agencies rather than Australian citizens' right to know," said Ms Schurr.

But civil liberties is one issue that the Opposition, regardless of

which party it is, will always make the running on. During a debate on freedom of information legislation about two months ago, the "shadow attorney-general", Mr Spender, rose to his feet.

"The Opposition remains fully committed to freedom of information legislation," he said.

Mr Spender is not the first person in opposition who has been a staunch advocate of wide-ranging freedom of information legislation and enhanced civil liberties generally. Almost by definition, oppositions, whatever their political hue, are committed to open Government and a fair go for all. It is when they are in Government that their commitment is tested.



Abusive exchanges ring through Senate

Gun loaded for double dissolution

By PAUL MALONE,
Political Correspondent

THE GOVERNMENT not only lost the vote on the Australia Card this week, it lost the debate.

As the two-day debate drew to a close on Wednesday night, the Minister for Finance, Senator Walsh, was reduced to abusive interjections in an attempt to answer the Opposition's arguments.

At about 10pm on Wednesday, as the thirty-second speaker, the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Senator Chaney, summed up his side's arguments, Senator Walsh, who was to be the last speaker, could not resist the temptation to interject.

Senator Chaney named many individuals and organisations opposed to the introduction of the card and included among them the Assistant Bishop of Perth, Michael Challen.

"He is pig-ignorant about this subject," Senator Walsh shouted.

Senator Walsh has a justifiably good reputation as a Finance Minister. He is willing to cop the flak for the hard decisions which must be made in allocating Government expenditure.

But in Parliament he seems unable to restrain himself and frequently goes over the top. The odd abusive exchange can add a bit of life to proceedings but when serious matters are being dealt with, it is no substitute for argument.

It is a measure of the fact that the Opposition is winning the argument on this issue that Government members have frequently been driven into a frenzy in debate.

The Minister for Health, Dr Blewett, who has responsibility for the legislation and who has the proven ability to turn any political winner into a sure-fire loser, regularly gets into a hysterical rage when answering Dorothy Dix questions on the Card.

Dr Blewett has said the Govern-

ment will keep re-introducing the Bill until it is passed. But there is no hope of this. The conservative Senators who had expressed some support for an identity card are now on the record opposing the Australia Card legislation, and there is no reason why they should change their minds again.

According to Senator Chaney, the public sympathy for the card, which was about 80 per cent, has dropped to somewhere in the fifties.

The opposition maintains the card is a "genuine threat to the civil liberties of Australians". The Government has scoffed at the Opposition's new-found concern for civil liberties.

"I cannot accept that the party which gave us conscription and Vietnam has genuine civil libertarian concerns about anything," Senator Walsh said.

The Government claims the coalition members are friends of the tax and social security cheats.

The Opposition says the Government has not got its house in order and has ample powers to tighten up in this area without the need for a card.

Dr Blewett has the major responsibility for getting the message across, and so far he has clearly failed.

No party has a united history of support or opposition for an identity card. Political scoring points have been recorded by quoting opponents' earlier views on the issue.

The Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, quotes the past statements of the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Howard. Senator Chaney quotes left-wing Victorian MP, Mrs Joan Coxswell, Senator George Georges or Mr John Sanderson, and so on.

There is a remote possibility that there is a quiet abstainer or two in the opposition who would consider voting with the Government on the Bill when it next comes before the Senate. But not enough

to give the Government a majority, especially as Senator Georges intends to vote with the Opposition next time.

So when the Bill is resubmitted and defeated, the Government will have the gun loaded for a double dissolution.

The former Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, went to the electorate early in 1983 using the Senate's rejection of the Sales Tax Bills as an excuse. It was clearly a bad decision. Although the ostensible reason for calling an early election is frequently quickly forgotten, it is wise to choose an issue which does not produce a negative reaction from the population. Making the issue the desire to impose a new sales tax was hardly wise.

In the event, the economy and Bob Hawke as Prime Minister became the issues.

The Government's survival now is clearly dependent on how the economy performs. If the current account deficit is really being

sharply cut, as this week's figures indicate, it will be possible to cut interest rates with all that this means for a boost to the economy. A dramatic improvement might tempt the Government to go early.

But I doubt it. So far Mr Hawke has shown no sign that he wants to take an early shot at the polls. He has stated on a number of occasions that the Government will run its full term. My betting is that the election will be held in November next year, by which time the Government will have had the opportunity to do a bit of pork-barrelling in the budget, will have delivered the tax cuts, and will have had a period during which the nasty mid-term decisions will have faded into the background.

A March 1988 election is unlikely because by November all parties will be in election mode, and the Government has nothing to gain by having another long campaign.

Letters to the Editor

Panic in SBS

Received December 10

Sir, — The panic of the impending merger with the ABC has apparently affected the highly paid translators of the ethnic station. The following was advertised as David Stratton's Movie of the Week on Friday, December 5: "Stranler v Strangler. Two men fight for the hear of a woman, but this bizarre tale lives a new twist to the is old theme." Res ipsa loquitur.

GEORGE NIKOLIC
Woden

Firemen not for rescues

Received December 10

Sir, — Again I read in *The Canberra Times* about all the good work firemen would have done if they had been called to Casuarina Sands on November 23, when a young lad tragically drowned.

I even read how the firemen were trained in basic water rescue. Other comments and letters have previously appeared in *The Canberra Times*, questioning the police motivation in not calling the firemen to the scene.

Having some experience in flood rescues, let me say that I am pleased that the half-trained firemen were not called to the scene. A fully trained policeman almost lost his life in the rescue attempt, and, although the intentions of the firemen would have been good, they are inadequate for the job.

In 1966 I was at Casuarina Sands when a man got into difficulties and drowned. So did two rescuers who were ill prepared for the job, although their intentions were also good.

It seems that the firemen think they can embarrass the police on this issue to such an extent that they, the firemen, will be given rescue responsibilities in the ACT. The reality is, of course, that there is little the firemen could have done on this occasion and they would do well to stop their bickering and concentrate on fighting fires and improving their training so that they can assist the police in future as they did in the past before all this nonsense started.

J. BROWN
National Senior Vice-President,
Australian Federal Police Association
Curtin

Bureaucratic doubletalk

Received December 11

Sir, — Enough. We've had it. As residents of the inner north we are fed up with the bureaucratic ineptitude which is choking our suburb with traffic, parking and air and noise pollution.

It is apparent to us that as far as this problem goes the Department of Territories and the NCDC are working not only against the interests of Canberrans but against each other.

We are being fed two contradictory policies: one of an expanding Civic Centre (developments are still being approved in the area without adequate provisions for parking) and the other of reduced car parking and traffic mobility.

We have the contradiction of dual-density occupancy — urban infill alongside declining quality of urban occupancy due to safety problems, traffic congestion, parking difficulties and environmental blight.

In short, bureaucratic inconsistency and doubletalk which threatens to subvert the most depressing "Yes Ministerial" traditions. The infuriating thing is that it is not the individuals in Territories and the NCDC, who are no doubt sincere and well-meaning in their jobs, who have created this mess. It is the ridiculous and moribund bureaucracy — apparently out of control — that we Canberrans have to suffer.

What do the residents of this city have to do to get a fair deal?

M. and J. KELAHER
Reid

Exercise in futility

Received December 10

Sir, — Canberrans should be made aware of the shabby approach to public participation in planning as currently practised by the NCDC and the Department of Territories in the local-area traffic-management study of the Reid-Braddon heritage areas. After first denying the existence of any traffic or parking problem at all, both authorities finally agreed to the joint exercise, and then declined to have their officers attend the public meetings.

Instead, they have engaged an agent from out of town with no local knowledge, failed to keep the agent informed of their ongoing

VICE-REGAL

The Governor-General, Sir Ninian Stephen, received Mr F. R. Dalrymple, Ambassador of Australia to the United States, at Government House, Canberra, yesterday morning.

Sir Ninian and Lady Stephen gave a lunch at Government House yesterday. Guests were: Major-General and Mrs B. H. Hockney, the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Begum Khan, Major-General and Mrs R. A. Grey, Mrs B. Hawkins and Miss C. Hockney.

Sir Ninian and Lady Stephen arrived in Sydney from Canberra in the afternoon.

