

The Canberra Times

Sunday, February 7, 1988

ROYALS STILL WELCOME

SOME years ago the word "informality" was used so often in relation to Royal tours of Australia that it almost became a cliché. Many will remember the phrase "informality was the keynote of the visit". However, there was little informality about most Royal tours, then or now, and security advisers were anxious that their charges did not break ranks and kept to their tight schedules. Yet many people would accept that the recent visit to Australia of Prince Charles and the Princess of Wales for the bicentennial celebrations had many informal moments as the couple left their hosts to mix with the ordinary people.

The photographs of the Princess cuddling an orphan child at the Barnardo's School in Sydney will live long in the memory, as will those of Prince Charles playing the cello at the Victorian College of the Arts and wearing his "digger's" hat at the Tall Ships' sail-past on Sydney Harbour. Despite the intense heat during the tour and the packed daily schedule, the couple never flagged and they took every new engagement as keenly as the first.

Some people have queried why members of the British Royal family were invited to be the honoured guests at Australia's major bicentennial celebration. In 1788 the British saw their new colony as a dumping ground for the overflow from its prison system, where the rift-riff and the political troublemakers would be out of sight and out of mind. After 200 years of European settlement and 86 years as a self-governing commonwealth, was it not time to cut the apron strings and start leaving the Royals off the guest list for grand events?

Australia's relationship with Britain, unlike that of many ex-colonies, is not marred by contempt or indifference. Australia did not have to rebel to gain independence, it came naturally as the new nation matured and, in many instances, such as in the development of judicial and political systems, the "old country" was a guiding light. Australia and other former colonies such as Canada and New Zealand have stayed in the Commonwealth family of nations for mutual benefit and because real affection exists between family members.

To have the Prince and Princess of Wales as bicentennial guests of honour or to ask the Queen to open the new Parliament House later in the year is not a case of grovelling to a foreign power or a display of obsequiousness. It is a recognition that this country's roots lie with Britain and that the Royal family symbolises the British Commonwealth. There is nothing in Royal visits to denigrate the contribution made to this nation by people of non-British origin. In fact, many of these accept the visits with pleasure. In a free nation like Australia, everyone has the right to ignore, or even criticise, the Royal family.

Australians' welcome to Prince Charles must not be taken as an indication that they want him to have any direct role in the governing of their country, as Governor-General, for instance. A return to a Governor-General from within the Royal family would look to most people like a backward step signifying reluctance by Australians to stand on their own feet.

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Letters to the Editor

Chess ignored

Received February 2
Sir, — Where's the chess? This game is played by six million Australians and yet the ABC and Capital 7 continue to ignore it. With more participants than even tennis (which at least receives token coverage), how long can this state of affairs continue?

SHAUN PRESS
Emu Ridge

Times past

From The Canberra Times of 25 and 50 years ago.
February 7, 1963: The Canadian Prime Minister, Mr. Diefenbaker, was twice defeated in the House of Commons on no-confidence motions.
February 7, 1938: Hitler was reported to have personally assumed command-in-chief of the German military forces in the wake of disagreements with his senior commanders.

Timed calls

Received February 3
Sir, — I would be more than happy to pay for timed telephone calls if Telecom were to give us a trade-off, such as free telephone installation and free telephone rental. The absence of any such offer tends to give the impression that Telecom is more interested in raising revenue than providing a service.

R. MILNE
Braddon

Evidence and role-playing

Received February 3
Sir, — Andrew Fraser's report "Soviets to help in war trials" (CT, February 2), quotes US lawyer Paul Zumbakis as saying, "I'm not saying that all the evidence from behind the Iron Curtain is bad, but you'd never know, for instance, which one of 10 witnesses would be good."

What Mr Zumbakis actually said

(as seen on ABC TV news the previous evening) was, "I'm not saying that all evidence coming from the Soviet Union is bad, but we will never know, for instance, which one of 10 witnesses might be a good actor."

J. J. S. DUTTON
Warramunga

Shewing the way

Received February 3
Sir, — Just why should Mr Peter Champness (CP, February 2) think that people who spell the word "shew" are being clever? I went to school in England. They only way we were taught to spell the word "shew" is with an "e". "Show" was used in other contexts — sideshow, Canberra show, art show, etc.

This is still the only way I spell the word "shew". I consider myself neither clever nor archaic at 48.

CEDRIC BRYANT
Yass

Drawbacks of using aspirin

Received February 2
Sir, — The Award of the Left-Footed Camel to The Canberra Times for irresponsible reporting on the use of aspirin to reduce the risk of heart attack (CT, January 30). With Australians having record rates of kidney failure due to the uncontrolled use of analgesics in the past, the "Bayer a Day" slogan should be banned here.

At least you could have added a final paragraph stating that in addition to its beneficial aspects aspirin has bad side-effects, eg, causing stomach hemorrhaging and kidney problems. A warning should also have been given that people with heart problems should not be dosing themselves unless on advice of their doctor.

I trust the medical profession will be giving you a blast about this article.

MARALYN WHALING
Latham

Display of arms on birthday

Received February 2
Sir, — Apropos the letter (February 1) from G. J. O'Brien, My question after viewing the Australia Day events was not whether the "second-class" military persons had donated extra time but rather why the rest of us should be subjected to displays of weapons of war on our birthday.

I assumed it was because our Government wished us all to see at first hand just how it disposes of a significant proportion of our taxes.

JON LARSON
Macquarie

Short letters get preference. Please keep them to less than 250 words. 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 be signed and bear the author's full address, for reference. A telephone number as well is desirable. Address the envelope: "Letters to the Editor", The Canberra Times, GPO Box 218, Canberra City, 2601.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD

There's more than one way to spell a rabbit

WHEN I was a boy, my father used to build model yachts for me to sail on the local lake.

Great big yachts they were, too, some of them up to a metre in length, but the strange thing about them was that they were not assembled from prefabricated pieces of plastic, as is the custom nowadays, but were hand-carved from a solid block of wood. To hollow out the inside, he had a fascinating collection of tools which I was not allowed to touch, as they were very sharp. One, which was used to smooth the hull, had a special attraction for me, not because of its shape, but because of its name. It was a "spokeshave", and was, of course, originally designed for "shaving" or smoothing the heavy wooden spokes of cartwheels.

Then, one day, I noticed my father using a very strange plane which not only smoothed the wood, but also produced a step or lip along the edge.

"What's that called, Dad?" I asked. "A rabbiting plane" came the answer. "Rabbiting?" I knew better than to ask any more questions because, if I did, I would have been given the tiresome task of clearing up all the shavings, so I kept quiet. Many years passed before it occurred to me that there might be two words "rabbit", and sure enough, a quick look at a dictionary confirmed my suspicions.

The strange tool was a "rabbiting" plane; that is, one with a stepped blade which produced a "lip" (or "rebate") along the edge.

Somehow the "e" and the "a" had changed places over the years, which is not unusual, but which to my knowledge has never been satisfactorily explained.

Take the word "riding", for example — not "riding" as in "horse riding", but as in "West Riding", and administrative division of the County of Yorkshire in England. There is also a North Riding and an East Riding, but no South Rid-

ing, which is very convenient for novelists who can place their characters in that fictional district without fear of lawsuits. The reason for the apparent omission is that Yorkshire, like Gaul, was divided into three parts — or "ridings" as they were called. The "i" and the "r" soon changed places, turning the word into "thriding". Then the "th" disappeared, being absorbed into the "h" ending of the word "North", giving us "North Riding" and eventually East and West Riding followed suit.

It is wonderful what a treasure house is opened up when you delve into the origin of words — and, incidentally, the word "treasure" itself is a victim of this transposing of letters. It comes from the Greek "thesauros", with the "r" and the "s" changing places and the "th" degenerating into a plain "t".

— ARTHUR JONES

Contrast to wilful wives who storm off in a huff

A WOMAN told Sydney's Central Criminal Court that her husband had pushed her over a 17m cliff while they were attending a Mormon church camp.

Presenting an admirable contrast to all those wilfully impulsive wives who storm away from their marriages in a huff the moment they are slapped or spoken to harshly, the woman told Sydney's Central Criminal Court that she had continued to live with her husband for 18 months after her 17m plummet because it had taken her that long to decide that he could have been such a swine as to have actually pushed her on purpose.

IN ENGLAND, details emerged of the will of the late Amy Bell, who died at the age of 84 after a lifetime spent expressing her widely shared loathing of the taxman. In order to thwart the taxman and his henchmen and to keep their sweaty palms off her doubleboons after her death, she chose to leave her \$7 million to animal charities. The churlish executor of her will grumbled to reporters that he thought it wrong that all this money should go to provide caviar for budgies when it might have provided bread and butter for hungry humans.

Ms Bell would have found our own tax-gatherers fairly rapacious,

too, and, at his welcome as new Chief Judge of the Family Court, Mr Justice Nicholson said that Family Court judges needed to be paid more because more than half of their attractive-looking \$94,000 a year was purloined as tax. He said that with one in three Australian marriages ending in divorce, it was important that Family Court judges be the best brains available and that a trifling \$94,000 a year was not enough to seduce those best brains into the Court's service.

IN DILAPIDATED and thisle-infested Scotland, a Japanese "TV personality" bought a dilapidated castle with the intention of transporting every stone of it to castle-free Japan so that it might be re-assembled there. The thousands of tonnes of stone were to be taken to Japan, via Siberia, on a convoy of four groaning trains.

In Australia, another Japanese paid between \$10 and \$15 million for the dreadful but unaccountably popular Lone Pine koala sanctuary where visitors are met at the wharf after a cruise down the ugly Brisbane River (with a running commentary from a guide who points out such attractions as the third-largest cement factory in the southern hemisphere) by a terrified koala riding on the back of a German shepherd dog. The deputy leader of the Labor Party in

SUNDAY

REFLECTIONS
The week in review

Queensland, Mr Tom Burns, protested at this surrender of a piece of Australian "heritage" to foreigners.

IN SPITEFUL Pakistan, a man who had murdered a five-year-old boy and then presented a bowl of the infant's blood to the woman he loved was hanged in public. From the admittedly indistinct picture sent to this newspaper the execution attracted, in entertainment-starved Multan City, the kind of crowd attracted to the Melbourne Cricket Ground for a VFL grand final. The hanged man had pestered the woman he loved, whereupon the exasperated baggage snapped that if he really loved her he would bring her a bowl of his blood as proof. Too squeamish

to puncture himself for this purpose, the swain killed the little boy instead.

THE FEARLESS ABC attracted criticism after what the tabloid newspapers called "sexually explicit" scenes appeared in a television program, *Blah Blah Blah*, in which members of the studio audience were asked to dress carrots and cucumbers with condoms. Defenders of the program argued that it had some educational value in the fight against AIDS and that it had been made to show people how to put condoms on and it was difficult to see how anyone, other than perhaps the odd radical vegan, could have found the substitution of vegetables for this purpose "sexually explicit".

VICTORIA'S state historian, Dr Bernard Barrett, speculated that The Man from Snowy River in A.B. Paterson's banal poem of that name may have been an Aborigine. Given that the man in Paterson's poem is unappealingly cruel to his horse and, if dobed in, would have been prosecuted by the RSPCA, this did not seem to be an honour that Aborigines would be quick to claim. Dr Barrett thought that Paterson may have borrowed the man in his poem from a story, *The Brumby*, by C.W. Neville-Rolfe, in which a sable Australian

displays great feats of horsemanship in the high country.

AS THEIR contribution to what Professor Manning Clark likes to call the conversation of mankind, sundry Melbourne theatre critics wrote disparaging things about the production *History of Australia — The Musical* and helped to close it down after less than three weeks. It had been losing hundreds of thousands of dollars and had cost \$2 million to stage. Professor Clark wrote a great deal of the entertainment and, with Captain Cook and Dame Nellie Melba, appeared in it as a character (a narrator played by an actor). Explaining the flop, various observers speculated that in addition to the poor reviews the entertainment had suffered from being too left-wing, from the apathy of Australians attuned to more superficial things, and from being quite, quite awful.

THE IMPATIENCE of the critics unable to endure the boredom of *History of Australia — The Musical* makes a sad contrast with the stoical powers of endurance of the Stevens family of Knoxville, Illinois, who lived with their father Carl for eight years after his death, imagining that he was not dead but just a poor conversationalist with a negligible appetite. His wife and his children, now 14 and 17, ministered to this very, very boring man for eight years until last week when

someone at last suspected that the tight-lipped Mr Stevens might have gone to gibber with the great majority.

IN CONTROVERSIAL South Africa there was a re-enactment of that happy day, 500 years ago, when Europeans arrived to put some pep into the lives of the jaded black tenants of the continent. Ten thousand palefaces attended the celebrations at Mossel Bay but blacks boycotted it so that the parts of the darkies who met Portugal's Bartolomeu Dias and 16 others on the beach in the re-enactment of that interface had to be played by white folks with blackened faces.

IN OPPRESSIVELY hot Australia Sir Donald Bradman was photographed sawing at the Bicentennial cricket Test match in Sydney, and Prince Charles fell asleep during an interminable display of clothes made from Australian wool. Across the world in more stimulating climes, cracky Poles threw snowballs at Polish riot police during demonstrations against dramatic increases in the price of food, and at the International Snow Festival in Grindelwald in Switzerland the British team, built with ice and snow, a giant effigy of Sherlock Holmes the fiddling detective.

— IAN WATKINS

The investigations of the Wiesenthal Centre deserve close scrutiny

By ANDREW FRASER

IT IS believable, but only just, that members of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee who sat on Monday and Tuesday last week may have relaxed after a hard day's hearings by watching the TV mini-series, *Sins*. In this epic, Joan Collins plays the wronged woman who, amongst other things, is seeking revenge for the terrible treatment she suffered at the hands of the Nazis years previously. The crunch is — does she or does she not believe the evidence the Russians offer?

Although Mr Bob Greenwood, QC, who is heading the Government's inquiry into alleged war crimes committed by Australian residents, wears a sober blue suit in contrast to Ms Collins' slinky gowns and (one hopes) adopts a more orthodox *modus operandi* in his investigations in contrast to the bed-hopping heroine, he faces a similar problem.

Virtually all cases involving alleged war crimes are based in countries now under the Soviet yoke and, obviously, evidence from there is going to play some role. In the end, Joan Collins does believe the Russians, and the counsel at the Soviet Embassy, Mr Yuri Belevor, urged Mr Greenwood to take a similar course, although he was quick to agree that

the balding but brave Mr Greenwood made no comparison for the husky *ferme fatale*.

At the moment, the committee is considering terms of reference of the War Crimes Amendment Bill, and has to report to the Senate by the time Parliament begins again the week after next.

The original impetus for this legislation was a series of ABC radio talk shows made about two years by Mr Mark Aarons, which led to a Government inquiry into suspected Nazis in Australia run by Mr Andrew Menzies, which in turn led to the current inquiry headed by Mr Greenwood.

Mr Menzies came up with a list of 70 names of people living in Australia whose alleged wartime activities warranted further investigation.

The Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Los Angeles gave him more names, and the Soviet Union still more. Mr Greenwood, who has been on the job for about nine months, has been given more names; the list now totals 450.

In hearings this week, Mr Greenwood said that about half of these could be discounted, and of the remainder, about 15 were priority cases. The alleged crimes of these 15 are either mass murder or brutal murder. The Wiesenthal Centre, which is regarded as the world's leader in hunting down former Nazis, has claimed that four of the 20 most wanted World War II criminals are currently living in Australia.

With this weight of suspicion, the Government has little choice but to act, but the implications of what it is doing are staggering. If one argument runs, we are to prosecute people for their actions committed during a war 43 years ago, then why shouldn't we also at least investigate the Vietnam War? After all, it is possible that in the many Vietnamese that have come to Australia, there are some who have committed war crimes against Australian citizens.

A lot more difficult than this question is also whether we also prosecute our own side. Stories of atrocities committed by Australian soldiers in Vietnam are widespread, and if we are to prosecute those who happened to be on the losing side in World War II, then surely we should be looking at them as well.

Also, should we be urging other countries to clean up their act in this area? I asked Mr Belevor whether the Soviet Union, which he said had always cooperated with other countries who wanted



Mr Bob Greenwood, QC

to prosecute war criminals, would be willing to investigate allegations of atrocities committed by Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan.

"It is a completely different story, because we are talking about war crimes committed in the Second World War, and the treaty which commits countries to prosecute war criminals," he said. "So far as other conflicts are concerned, they are covered by other international instruments and if those instruments are violated, the violations could be made public."

Would Western observers be allowed at any investigations?

"You see, our legal system is being changed drastically at this time and there will be many changes in all domestic and other laws, so I cannot tell for sure what we are changing in those procedures. There will be many changes — the criminal code will be revamped, the law on the press is being worked on — although again, I cannot jump to any conclusions, although the law in regard to bosses is being reformed."

The question of the reliability of Soviet evidence was widely canvassed this week, with the main advocate for accepting Soviet evidence being Mr Aarons, who argued that Australia would be out of step with other Western countries if we did not accept Soviet evidence in such cases. Mr Aarons further claimed that there was not one proved instance of the Soviet authorities fabricating evidence.

In view of the fact that many original Nazi documents were captured by Western countries, it is a practical impossibility for the Soviets to provide forged or perjured evidence inconsistent with Western-held documents," his submission reads in part.

The major argument against Soviet evidence came from an imported lawyer, Mr Paul Zumbakis, who was brought to Australia from the US by the Baltic Council of Australia. Mr Zumbakis, the author of *Soviet Evidence in North American Courts*, was portrayed in most sections of the media as simply a red-hot anti-communist

whose whose argument was that you can't trust the Russians because, well, they're communists, aren't they? (Much was made of the fact that he continually referred to the committee's chairman, Senator Bolkus, as "Senator Bonkers".)

Actually, his argument was far more sophisticated. What Mr Zumbakis really said was that not only does the Soviet Government play fast with the evidence that it has, but the US Government does as well. The central pivot of his argument concerned the case in Israel of a retired US motor mechanic, Mr John Demjanjuk, who allegedly was "Ivan the Terrible", a particularly malicious guard in a concentration camp in Poland during the war.

Mr Demjanjuk went to the US

from the Soviet Union after World War II, and lived what was apparently a normal life. But photographs showing a similarity between him and "Ivan the Terrible" opened the case; he was denaturalised in 1981, and deported to Israel in 1986, where he is now standing trial for war crimes. He faces the death penalty if found guilty.

In this case, two pieces of evidence have been supplied by the Soviet Government — an affidavit, and an identity card. Mr Zumbakis claimed that there was more evidence supplied by the Soviet Union, and the US Government had failed to pass this on. He and other lawyers have tried to use the US Freedom of Information Act to obtain all of what the Soviets supplied, but have so far been unsuccessful.

But Mr Zumbakis's real bombshell is a memo from Mr Brake Einhorn, an official of the US Government and the lead attorney in the US on the Demjanjuk case, in which the files should not be released, with the first being "concern over the integrity of the Israeli prosecution and of fairness to the defendant — release of our material now would, in all probability, reveal (and could easily undermine) the Israeli prosecution strategy." If true, this is a sensational charge, as it implies that the US is deliberately withholding material simply to help the state of Israel.

Within Australia, the matter has the potential to stir up huge ethnic divisions, specifically among people in the Baltic and Jewish communities. Baltic expatriates feel that the legislation is aimed at them, and Mr Zumbakis was to an extent a hired gun for them. His allegations and those like them — and there will be more like them to come — have, apart from all else, the potential to promote anti-semitism on a scale never before seen in Australia.

The legislation opens a can of worms that, once opened, cannot be closed. Yet the allegations of the Wiesenthal Centre, as well as the contents of Mr Aarons's programs, deserve close scrutiny. If anyone has any answers, the Senate committee, whose members have been agonising at some length this week over what course to take, would like to hear them.



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