



ACSJC BRIEFING

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From the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, the social justice and human rights agency of the Catholic Church in Australia - www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

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FROM THE SECRETARIAT

Dear Friends,

The Australian Young Christian Workers have just produced a paper in the ACSJC's Catholic Social Justice Series entitled "From Money to Meaning: Young People and Work". The paper has great relevance to the current debate on the Federal Government's industrial relations changes.

In the week 'WorkChoices' came into force, the media were already reporting cases of employees being disadvantaged by the loss of unfair dismissal protections, by contracts removing established entitlements and conditions, and by the imposition of increased flexibility in work-time arrangements.

These are early days. Low-paid and vulnerable workers are more likely to feel the impact earlier. However, there is no guarantee, even in a tight labour market, that there will not be a more widespread erosion of the socially accepted terms and conditions of employment.

It is not immediately clear when the Government's promised economic benefits will flow to workers and their families. The Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews has said the system will not deliver immediately.

"This reform is probably going to take three to five or six years to have the economic effect... if we can engender some more flexibility in our workplaces and grow our productivity, then that's going to have a major impact on our economic growth in Australia and, therefore, the well-being of ordinary Australians", the Minister said. (refer:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200603/s1602485.htm>)

The Federal Government has focused strongly on the proposed economic benefits of its policy package. Now is an opportune time to appreciate the deeper value of work in the lives of ordinary workers and their families, who depend on basic wages and reasonable conditions to make ends meet.

The three authors of the Young Christian Workers paper, David Alonso Love, Sara Kane and Greg D.S. have said, "Now, more than ever, we see that in Australian culture work is being valued predominantly in terms of its monetary worth and consumer potential... The current political debate on workplace relations has continued to narrow the dialogue on work around economic benefits, which in turn has distracted young workers from questioning the quality of work".

POPE BENEDICT XVI ON THE VALUE OF WORK

The Holy Father spoke of the deeper value of work when he delivered his homily during a Mass dedicated to workers on 19 March in St Peter's Basilica.

What did he say were the essential qualities of work? "Work is of fundamental importance to the fulfillment of the human being and to the development of society. Thus, it must always be organised and carried out with full respect for human dignity and must always serve the common good" he said, noting that the reality of work now exists "in the midst of rapid and complex changes".

The Pope highlighted that work is to serve humanity – "it is indispensable that people not allow themselves to be enslaved by work or idolise it, claiming to find in it the ultimate and definitive meaning of life." Special mention was made of the need to ensure that time for rest, rejuvenation and the worship of God is not impeded by work arrangements.

St. Joseph is held up as a model of spirituality in work. "A spirituality must be lived that will help believers to sanctify themselves through their work, imitating St. Joseph, who every day had to provide for the needs of the Holy Family with his hands, and who because of this the Church indicates as patron of workers. His testimony shows that man is subject and protagonist of work."

The circumstances of disadvantaged workers were mentioned in the homily. The Pope said, "I would like to entrust to St. Joseph those young people who are finding integration into the working world difficult, the unemployed and everyone who is suffering hardship due to the widespread employment crisis." (refer: <http://www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=86688>)

While the Holy Father was speaking to all workers of the world, his words also have relevance to the particular challenges faced by vulnerable workers in Australia at this time.

YOUNG WORKERS HAVE A UNIQUE AND VALUABLE STORY

The exposure of the Australian economy to global competition has seen labour market changes over the past two decades that have had significant implications for young workers. More and more employers prefer a casual labour force to manage fluctuations in demand, and it has been young workers in particular who have lost the benefits of secure full-time work with the opportunity for advancement.

Casual work may provide some opportunity to finance study or for getting a toe-hold in the full-time labour market. However, for many it offers little and is characterised by low wages, no security, unreasonable hours, poor conditions and no training.

The authors of "From Money to Meaning" have analysed the real-life experiences of young women and men who have just entered the workforce. What issues do young workers raise that may assist others?

Here are some brief excerpts from the paper:

* "At this critical time in the history of Australia's industrial relations – when far-reaching workplace changes are being introduced that are likely to result in the expansion of casualisation, marginalisation, and exploitation within the fabric of the labour market – the AYCW has addressed the fundamental importance of work in the lives of young Australians."

* "Unfortunately, many young people tend to be ushered into the labour market with very little preparation and knowledge... Often – when the new employees are more eager to find out how much they're going to get paid, rather than learning their responsibilities and rights – the likelihood of young people having a positive experience in work relies greatly on the integrity of the employer."

* "With the work environment turning increasingly towards individual contracts... the desire for job security on the part of the employee, the lack of bargaining skills among many young workers, and the possibility of intimidation on the part of the employer in negotiating agreements, makes the so-called 'casual mentality' an issue of growing concern."

* "The ease with which employers, under industrial law, can lay off casual workers or reduce their hours – giving them little alternative than to seek a new job – leaves young workers with a limited sense of control over their working lives and vulnerable to spells in and out of employment."

* "Young employees caught in the midst of this shift towards 'flexibility' are increasingly becoming cornered into work with fewer conditions but the same level of expected obligation in the employment relationship as with permanent work."

* "... evidence has been scarce in demonstrating how the [workplace relations] changes will improve the quality of work in Australia and address the already overwhelming number of problems faced by young people in the tidal wave of casualisation."

* "Will there be real opportunity for young people to choose between working under an award or within the predetermined conditions of an AWA [Australian Workplace Agreement]? Will young people really have the capacity to compare individual contracts to ascertain whether they are getting a fair deal or not?"

At a time when the Australian workforce is facing more flexible working arrangements, we would do well to listen to the experiences of young workers who have already encountered and continue to endure the challenges of a deregulated labour market. To order a copy of this paper visit:
http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/social_justice_papers.html

MINIMUM WAGE CONCERNS

The Catholic Church's industrial relations body, the Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations, has again voiced concerns that the minimum wage could be eroded under the new WorkChoices regime.

The ACCER is also concerned that the new Australian Fair Pay Commission, which has replaced the Industrial Relations Commission in determining minimum wage rates, will not take into account the need for workers to support their families and that it will not be able to influence the Commonwealth's taxation and welfare policies on low income earners.

Mr John Ryan, ACCER executive officer, said, "The neglect of low income earners in the tax debate has come at a time when their tax rates are at historically high levels. Over the last 40 years, the wage earner on the Basic Wage/Federal Minimum Wage has seen his or her income tax increase from 8.71% to 13.27%, a 52.4% increase in the tax burden. Their marginal tax rates have increased from 17.6% to 34%, an astonishing 93%."

For vulnerable workers and families, income and employment is at risk if wages policy is not properly integrated with tax and welfare policies. "The current tax debate is focused on the top end. There also needs to be a focus on those at the bottom of the income scale who are confronted with higher marginal tax rates as they earn more in wages", Mr Ryan said

This concern follows comments by the Chairperson of the new Fair Pay Commission that "minimum wages in Australia, as far as is practicable and over time, do not impede unemployed people from gaining employment and do not induce employers to shed low-paid workers".

This risk that the erosion of minimum wages might be justified on the basis of job generation, has been highlighted by Bishop Christopher Saunders, Chairman of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council. On the Feast of St. Joseph the worker last year he said that, "those seeking to restrain minimum wage increases often argue that it impedes employer demand and keeps people who are unemployed out of work. But a failure to appreciate the common interests and experiences of the unemployed, the underemployed and the low paid is likely to result in unjust proposals for the reduction of minimum wages and the creation of jobs.

"The burden of providing work for all should not fall on the low paid but on society as a whole. And those who are unemployed and underemployed must be assured the work they seek will provide a fair and just wage that will keep them out of poverty." he said. (refer:

http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/issues/pastoral_letter_st_joseph_the_worker_may_2005.html)

The ACCER has called for the Fair Pay Commission to evaluate the impact that income tax has on the employment of low income workers, so that there can be a more considered public debate about the impact of wage and taxation levels on employment in the globalised market place. (refer:

<http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/org/accer/200603264.htm>)

John Ferguson
National Executive Officer

CURRENT ISSUES/RESOURCES

MEDIA RELEASE – AUSTRALIA SHOULD FOLLOW UK, COMMONWEALTH LEAD ON HICKS – 28 March 2006

Coinciding with the visit of Prime Minister Tony Blair, the ACSJC has called upon the Australian Government to follow the lead of Commonwealth countries such as Britain and Canada who have secured the release of their own nationals from detention at Guantanamo Bay. Bishop Christopher Saunders, ACSJC Chairman, said, "International momentum is growing for the US to close its facilities at Guantanamo Bay and to afford detainees basic justice. The Australian Government could play its part by advocating on behalf of its citizen with the same determination as governments including Britain and Canada, which would not have their nationals exposed to the inferior justice of the military commissions."

(refer: <http://www.acsjc.org.au>)

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS CLEARINGHOUSE

The Good Shepherd Social Justice Network has just launched its "Trafficking in Persons Clearinghouse" - a central access point for information on the global problem of trafficking in persons which impacts particularly on women and children. The site hosts published and unpublished resources; information regarding projects aimed at combating trafficking; and substantial information on trafficking within, and initiatives aimed at eliminating, trafficking in persons in Australia and the Asia Pacific region. An NGO Shadow Report On Trafficked Women in Australia, produced by the religious congregations with Jennifer Burn and Frances Simmons and endorsed by many religious congregations and organisations was submitted to the 34th Session of the UN Committee for the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This report is available at the Clearinghouse website. Visit: <http://www.goodshepherd.com.au/justice/trafficking.html>

WEBSITE: "DOM HELDER CAMARA LECTURE SERIES"

Dom Helder Camara of Recife, Brazil visited Australia in May 1985. To commemorate this visit an annual series of lectures was begun to continue his message of peace and justice for all. For 20 years the Marist Brothers, assisted by Noel and Carmel O'Brien, have organised the lecture visits of many eminent Catholic global leaders. The lecture series is now formally associated with Newman College, University of Melbourne. Br Mark O'Connor fms has established a website that provides information about forthcoming lecture events and also some MP3 audio files and texts of past lectures. This is a great resource for Catholics and Australians of all faiths who wish to develop a more just and compassionate society. Visit: <http://newman.unimelb.edu.au/camara/>

UNIYA/JESUIT SOCIAL SERVICES PAPERS

Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre and Jesuit Social Services have recently released a series of briefing papers related to the Government's policies of 'mutual obligation'. Minh Nguyen considers developments in welfare and development assistance in "Mutual Trust: an alternative to mutual obligation in overseas aid". Tim Martyn investigates the mutual obligation policies imposed on people who are unemployed in "Training for work is more effective than Working for the Dole". Valentin Di Sisto looks at reforms to the Community Development Employment Programme in "CDEP: mutual obligation that works". These papers can be accessed at:
http://www.uniya.org/research/mutual_obligation.html

WEBSITE: "BEYOND BARS – ALTERNATIVES TO CUSTODY"

The Beyond Bars Alliance is a coalition of community and church organisations, activist groups, academics and individuals with an interest in social justice. The purpose of the alliance is to promote social justice solutions to a range of criminal justice system issues with a particular focus on finding alternatives to imprisonment. It also aims to dispel common myths about 'law and order'. The Beyond Bars website provides access to commentators on criminal justice issues including Dr Eileen Baldry and Fr Peter Norden SJ, facts and information for students, politicians and interested citizens and useful links to related sites. The website can be found at: <http://www.beyondbars.org.au>

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SOCIAL JUSTICE REPORT

Mr Tom Calma, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner has released the Social Justice Report for 2005. The Report considers issues relating to Indigenous health, new arrangements for the administration of Indigenous Affairs, guidelines for Shared Responsibility Agreements and access to 'mainstreamed services'. The full report can be accessed at: http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/sjreport05/index.html This webpage also contains helpful Fact Sheets relating to key aspects of the report.

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

(orders Tel: 02 9956 5811 or download an order form from the ACSJC website: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/CONTENT/PDF/TEMPLATE-ORDERFORM.pdf>)

STILL AVAILABLE - 2006 SOCIAL JUSTICE DIARY

The ACSJC's 2006 Social Justice Diary, Seasons of Social Justice, focuses on social justice for Indigenous people. Each month, significant events for Indigenous Australians are noted and particular social justice issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are identified. Information and ideas for prayer and reflection are included. An excellent resource for parishes, schools and social justice groups, the diary is an educational and spiritual resource. Cost: \$6.60 (inc. GST), plus postage. To download an order form, go to:
http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/social_justice_calendar.html

ACSJC DISCUSSION GUIDE: WORLD DAY OF PEACE MESSAGE

The discussion guide consists of: an overview of the Pope's message; some points for reflection and discussion; a prayer; and a guide to additional resources. It is available on the ACSJC website: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au>

ACSJC BACKGROUND PAPER: STOLEN WAGES – AN OPPORTUNITY FOR JUSTICE?

This Background paper provides basic information on the circumstances facing many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families seeking wages they were not paid for years of work. The Paper is available on the ACSJC's website:

http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/Content/pdf/2006_1_23stolen_wages_-_an_opportunity_for_justice.pdf

SERIES PAPER: FROM MONEY TO MEANING: YOUNG PEOPLE AND WORK

Catholic Social Justice Series No.56 by the Australian Young Christian Workers. The paper addresses the issue of young people and casual work. It looks at young people's experiences and attitudes to work. Some of the concerns raised include the working conditions, wages, study, security and protection of casual employees. (Cost \$6.60 plus postage) (postage rates listed below)

SERIES PAPER: A LOVE THAT DOES JUSTICE

Catholic Social Justice Series No. 55 – Fr Neil Brown. Father Neil Brown discusses the fundamental issues of charity, morality, love and justice, and considers their interconnections in a Christian life. (Cost \$6.60 plus postage) (postage rates listed below)

2005 SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY STATEMENT

The Australian Catholic Bishops' 2005 Social Justice Sunday Statement is entitled "Jesus, Light for the World – Living the Gospel today". The ACSJC is still taking orders of 10 or more for the Statement. An order form is available on the ACSJC website: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au> The Statement can be downloaded at: <http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/latest.html> and http://www.acsjc.org.au/CONTENT/publications/documentation/documentation_js01.html

LEAFLET & PRAYER CARD: TEN STEPS TOWARDS LIVING THE GOSPEL TODAY Call (02) 9956 5811

Other resources including teachers' resources and a powerpoint presentation are available on the ACSJC website: www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

(Postage rates for Catholic Social Justice Series Papers: 1 copy \$1; 2-3 copies \$1.45; 4-5 copies \$2.45)

APRIL NOTICES

APRIL 1: PUBLIC FORUM, "NATIVE TITLE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTIONS – A FAILING SYSTEM?" (NSW). A forum on the current state of native title and cultural heritage laws in N.S.W. From the extinguishment of native title on Western land leases in N.S.W to the destruction of cultural heritage at industrial sites across NSW, why aren't the laws working, where to from here and what can we do about it? Speakers include Tony McAvoy, Michael Anderson, and Ellie Gilbert. 3.30pm, Boomalli Aboriginal Gallery, 55-59 Flood Street, Leichardt, Sydney. Entry by donation. (refer: <http://www.active.org.au/sydney/calendar/?display=zoom&event=3450>)

APRIL 2: LAUNCH, "COALITION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE IN PALESTINE" (NSW). The new Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine will be launched in Lidcombe. It will be an independent, non-party organisation, committed to: a just peace in Palestine; an end to the apartheid policies of the Israeli government; demolition of the Apartheid Wall; respect for human rights in the region; working with others for justice in Palestine; raising awareness of Palestinian issues in the wider Australian community. Speakers will include Greens Senator Kerry Nettle, CFMEU State Secretary Andrew Ferguson and Palestinian author Nejme Habib. 3.00 to 5.00pm, CFMEU Building, 12 Railway Street, Lidcombe, Sydney. For further info call 0413 467 367 or email coalitionforpalestine@yahoo.com.au. (refer: <http://www.active.org.au/sydney/calendar/?display=zoom&event=3431>)

APRIL 2: PICNIC, "WORKERS & COMMUNITIES SOLIDARITY" (VIC). Event for workers' rights and conditions and community living standards. Speakers, entertainment, childrens' activities, food stalls etc. Endorsed and organised by trade unions, church and community groups. 1.00pm to 6.00pm, cnr Hyde Street and Somerville Road, Footscray (5 minute walk from Seddon Station). (refer: http://www.melbourne.indymedia.org/calendar/event_display_detail.php?event_id=1594&day=2&month=4&year=2006)

APRIL 3: PUBLIC LECTURE, "HOW TO BE AN ADULT: STOPPING THE BLAME GAME" (ACT). Sr Patty Fawkner SGS, will deliver a lecture as part of the 'People in Dialogue: Living in a Multifaith Society' series being held in the Graduate Certificate in Interfaith Relations course which has been developed by ACU National and run in conjunction with the Commission for Australian Catholic Women's Young Catholic Women's Interfaith Fellowship Program. 7.00 to 8.00pm, ACU National Canberra Campus (Signadou), Antill Street, Watson, ACT. For more info call the School of Theology on (02) 6209 1172 or the CACW on (02) 6201 9864. (refer: http://www.acu.edu.au/acu_national/News___Events_Calendar/Events.cfm)

APRIL 3: PUBLIC FORUM, PEOPLE'S INQUIRY INTO DETENTION (VIC).

A citizen-led investigation into the experiences of people held in immigration detention. Hearings have so far been held in Port Augusta, Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Launceston, Swan Hill, Shepparton, with Canberra and Adelaide to follow. The inquiry is completely independent, staffed by volunteers and to date only received a small amount of funding. 5.30pm, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, 67 Jeffcott Street, West Melbourne. For further info call (03) 9925 1079 or email linda.briskman@rmit.edu.au (refer: http://www.ajustaustralia.com/whats happening_events.php)

APRIL 4: FORUM, "FACING THE INDIGENOUS HEALTH CHALLENGE – EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS" (NSW).

As the first of the seminar series "Reconciliation in Parliament 2006", Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation are running a forum about Indigenous health. The Forum will commence with the official launch of the seminar series followed by contributions from: Prof. Judy Atkinson, Gnibi College of Australian Indigenous Peoples; Ms Dixie Gordon, Black Out Violence; Ms Christine Robinson, CEO Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre; and Prof. Ken Wyatt, Director Aboriginal Health, NSW Dept. Health. 5.45 to 7.30pm, in the thetrette at NSW Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney. RSVP by 2 April to april4@antar.org.au

APRIL 4: DISCUSSION GROUP, "DETENTION AT GUANTANAMO BAY – LEGAL BLACK-HOLE?" (ACT).

The ANU Centre for International and Public Law is holding a discussion with Dr Michael Smith Visiting Fellow, ANU College of Law that will focus on the international and public law aspects of: unlawful combatants under international law; legal proceedings in the Courts of the Coalition; and foreign detention and "reasonable expectations" of national assistance in alleged cases of transnational terrorism. 5.30pm, Staff Library Level 1, ANU College of Law, (Bldg 5), cnr Fellows & East Roads, The ANU, Canberra. RSVP at cipl@law.anu.edu.au by cob 3 April. (refer: <http://law.anu.edu.au/cipl/events.asp>)

APRIL 5: PUBLIC LECTURE, "IRAQ'S PRESENT AND FUTURE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE" (VIC).

Visiting Fellow, Professor Amatzia Baram has taught extensively on the modern history of the Middle East, and particularly on Iraq, in the United States and Israel. He has had a prominent public role and was involved in discussions in 2003-2004 at the US Department of State and the White House regarding developments and policies in Iraq. 6.30 to 7.45pm, Carrillo Gantner Theatre, The University of Melbourne. For more info call (03) 8344 5961 or email alewis@unimelb.edu.au (refer: http://events.unimelb.edu.au/eventid_2436.html)

APRIL 5: SEMINAR, "THE VIEW FROM THE GROUND" (ACT).

Janet Hunt, Fellow of the ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research will present preliminary findings from a comparative analysis of Indigenous community governance experience. The processes, structures, institutions, leadership, powers, capabilities, and cultural foundations of Indigenous community governance across rural, remote, and urban settings will be discussed. 12.30 to 2.00pm, CAEPR Seminar Room GO58, Ground Floor, Hanna Neumann Bldg #21, The Australian National University, Canberra. For further info call (02)6125 0587 or email: admin.caepr@anu.edu.au (refer: <http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/events.php>)

APRIL 7: SEMINAR, "ONE YEAR ON – PULLING BACK THE CURTAIN ON THE A&US FREE TRADE AGREEMENT" (NSW). The Australian Fair Trade & Investment Network (AFTINET) is holding a one day seminar with leading Australian academics, policy workers and campaigners on the impacts of the A&US FTA and the continuing campaign. The aim of the seminar is to share information and research on the emerging social and environmental impacts of the A&US FTA and to provide a forum for community groups, campaigners, policy workers and researchers to discuss the future campaigning opportunities. 9:00am - 5:00pm, Level 11, PSA House, 160 Clarence St, Sydney. Cost: \$66 full price / organisation / \$27.50 concession (GST incl., includes lunch and morning / afternoon tea). For registration details contact AFTINET on 02) 8898 6500 or jbailey@piac.asn.au. (refer: <http://www.aftinet.org.au/>)

APRIL 7: SEMINAR, "DEVELOPMENTS IN CITIZENSHIP LAW: A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE" (NSW). HREOC Legal Section is conducting a seminar on recent developments in High Court jurisprudence. The seminar will be chaired by the Human Rights and Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Mr Graeme Innes AM and will feature two speakers: Professor Kim Rubenstein, Director of the Centre for International and Public Law ANU College of Law; and Bruce Levet of the New South Wales Bar. Admission free. 1.00 to 2.30pm, The Hearing Room, HREOC, Level 8 Piccadilly Tower, 133 Castlereagh Street Sydney. RSVP: legal@humanrights.gov.au (refer: <http://www.ahrcentre.org/>)

APRIL 8: ADDRESS, "STILL WEARING A TEAPOT" (NSW). Michael Leunig is the guest speaker of the Aquinas Academy. 9.30am-3.30pm, The Parish Hall, Cnr Mary Street and Gladesville Rd, Hunters Hill, Sydney. Tea/coffee provided. BYO lunch. \$65 per person. Paid reservations essential: call 02 9247 4651. (refer: http://www.aquinas-academy.com/body_courses.htm)

APRIL 8: PRAYER, "WALKING WITH JESUS IN THE SPIRIT OF HOLY WEEK" (NSW). Sr Yvonne Parker sgs is presenting at this day of prayer, chant, scripture, ritual and reflection. 10.00am to 3.00pm at the Mount Saint Benedict Centre, 447A Pennant Hills Rd, Pennant Hills, Western Sydney. BYO lunch. Morning tea provided. Cost \$15. RSVP by 5th April on (02) 9484 7033.

APRIL 10: PUBLIC LECTURE, "BLACK GRASS: HOLOCAUST STORIES" (NSW). Holocaust survivor and author of 'The Golem of Auschwitz', Dr Bernard Otterman will be discussing his background and reading from his new short story collection entitled Black Grass: Holocaust Stories (Jewish Heritage Press). Event hosted by the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies. 12.30pm, Mackie Building, Room 107, Arundel St, The University of Sydney (near the Parramatta Rd footbridge). RSVP on 9351 7686 or by email reign.macmillan@arts.usyd.edu.au (refer: <http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/centres/cpacs/seminars.htm>)

APRIL 10: PUBLIC LECTURE, "INSPIRING LEADERS" (ACT). Deborah May, Fulbright Scholar, consultant and executive coach working to transform organisations through cultural change and leadership, will deliver a lecture as part of the 'People in Dialogue: Living in a Multifaith Society' series. 7.00 to 8.00pm, ACU National Canberra Campus (Signadou), Antill Street, Watson, ACT. For more info call the School of Theology on (02) 6209 1172 or the CACW on (02) 6201 9864. (refer: http://www.acu.edu.au/acu_national/News___Events_Calendar/Events.cfm)

APRIL 11: PUBLIC LECTURE, "POLLUTION, POLITICS AND POWER" (NSW). Dr Chris Riedy of the Institute for Sustainable Futures will consider what Australia can do to meet the threat of climate change. The lecture examines the politics and opportunities associated with Australia's energy debate, exploring the potential of renewable energy and energy efficiency as well as the dangers of CO2 geosequestration and nuclear power. 6.00pm for 6:30pm start, Room 2, Level 3, Building 2 (Access from UTS main tower entrance), Broadway, Sydney. RSVP by Monday 10th April on (02) 9514 1734 or email robert.button@uts.edu.au (refer: <http://www.graduateconnections.uts.edu.au/events/utsspeaks110406.html>)

APRIL 19: SEMINAR, "IN SEARCH OF AN OUTSTATIONS POLICY FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA" (ACT). Outstations (or homelands) are small remote Indigenous communities, generally with populations under 100 and invariably located on the Indigenous-owned estate. Under the new administrative arrangements in Indigenous affairs, Commonwealth responsibility for outstation policy has been transferred from ATSIC to the Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Jon Altman, Director of the ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research and Libby Larsen, Research Assistant, examine some of the current debates about the cost-benefits, sustainability, viability and future of outstation communities and offers some perspectives for policy-making. 12.30 to 2.00pm, CAEPR Seminar Room GO58, Ground Floor, Hanna Neumann Bldg #21, The Australian National University, Canberra. For further info call (02)6125 0587 or email: admin.caepr@anu.edu.au (refer: <http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/events.php>)

APRIL 19: PUBLIC FORUM, "LIBERTY VS. SECURITY: A NECESSARY TRADE-OFF?" (VIC). Monash University in partnership with Victoria Police are conducting a forum examining the legislative and policy environment relevant to counter-terrorist policing. Speakers will include representatives from State Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria Police, the federal Attorney-General's Department, Monash and Melbourne University, Federation of Community Legal Centres as well as the Islamic Council of Victoria. 10.00am to 4.00pm, Monash Law Chambers, 472 Bourke Street, Melbourne. RSVP by Friday April 14 to Gareth.Shaw@hotmail.com

APRIL 22 - 23: WORKSHOP, "ANTI-RACISM URBAN YOUTH CAMP" (VIC). A chance for Indigenous & non-Indigenous young people aged 16 -30 from across Australia to come together & share, learn & become active in changing their world. Organised by SPARC - a network of young students, workers and activists which aims to increase the involvement and awareness of young people in promoting positive relationships between Indigenous people and the wider community through events, engagement and self-education. 22-23 April at the Maya Centre, 11 Rossmoyne Street, Thornbury, Melbourne. Food & accommodation included in \$15 registration fee. Assistance with transport costs available. For further info call 0413 763 786 or email Claire@animail.com. (refer: <http://www.sparconference2006.freeservers.com>)

APRIL 24: PUBLIC LECTURE, "POLITICALLY SPEAKING" (ACT). Catherine McGrath, chief political correspondent, ABC, will deliver a lecture as part of the 'People in Dialogue: Living in a Multifaith Society' series. 7.00 to 8.00pm, ACU National Canberra Campus (Signadou), Antill Street, Watson, ACT. For more info call the School of Theology on (02) 6209 1172 or the CACW on (02) 6201 9864. (refer: http://www.acu.edu.au/acu_national/News___Events_Calendar/Events.cfm)

APRIL 28: POLITICS IN THE PUB, "FUTURE OF INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA" (NSW). Speakers, Prof Larissa Behrendt, Director of Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, UTS and Prof Jon Altman, Aboriginal Economic Policy, ANU, will discuss alternatives to market economics and welfare dependency. 6.00 – 7.45pm, The Gaelic Club, 64 Devonshire St. Surry Hills, Sydney. (refer: <http://www.erc.org.au/events/>)

MAY 1: PUBLIC LECTURE, "RESPONDING NOT REACTING" (ACT). Carol Kiernan, coordinator of analytical services, Australian Federal Police, will deliver a lecture as part of the 'People in Dialogue: Living in a Multifaith Society' series. 7.00 to 8.00pm, ACU National Canberra Campus (Signadou), Antill Street, Watson, ACT. For more info call the School of Theology on (02) 6209 1172 or the CACW on (02) 6201 9864. (refer: http://www.acu.edu.au/acu_national/News___Events_Calendar/Events.cfm)

(email news of your forthcoming social justice event by the last week of each month to: admin@acsjc.org.au)

MARCH NEWS MONITOR

COUNCIL URGES AUSTRALIA TO FOLLOW UK LEAD ON HICKS: The Bishops' justice and peace agency called on the Government to follow the UK's lead in pursuing "real justice" for accused Australian terrorist David Hicks.

EMPLOYMENT BODY ECHOES CONCERN ON MINIMUM WAGE: The Church's industrial relations body backed growing concerns that the minimum wage could be eroded under the Federal Government's new industrial relations changes.

JESUITS WORRIED TEMPORARY PROTECTION IS SECOND RATE: The Jesuit Refugee Service voiced concern over the "second rate protection" offered to refugees, including the 42 West Papuan refugees granted temporary visas.

EDMUND RICE CONDEMNATION OF DETENTION OF VULNERABLE: The Edmund Rice Centre issued a call for immigration law reform to prevent "a return to the sorts of disgraceful situations highlighted in the cases of Mr T, Vivian Alvarez Solon, Cornelia Rau".

POPE SENDS ENVOY TO DEATH ROW INDONESIANS: An Indonesia bishop relayed a message of support from Pope Benedict XVI to three prisoners condemned to death after a controversial trial that many observers said was unjust.

POPE SAYS MEDIA IS FOR SERVICE, NOT PROFIT: Benedict XVI called on Catholics involved in social communications to harness the power of media for the good of society, and to denounce that which is morally destructive and merely profit-driven.

JUDGE SAYS MORALITY PLACE IN LAW: The University of Notre Dame Australia needs to instil in those who are studying law "a sense of morality and integrity which is very important in the ultimate to the achieving of justice", said retired English judge Sir Paul Kennedy.

REFORM TAX ON POOR, CATHOLIC WELFARE CHIEF SAYS: The government's tax inquiry provides an opportunity to examine the inequities and disincentives in Australia's tax system, Catholic Welfare Australia's Executive Director, Frank Quinlan said.

CATHOLIC HEALTH WANTS GOVT TO FUND ACTION AGAINST ABUSE: Catholic Health Australia head Francis Sullivan said the Federal Government must be willing to pour more money into the troubled aged care sector in order to curb the problem of abuse in nursing homes.

COMMISSION SEEKS ACTION ON WEST PAPUAN ASYLUM SEEKERS: Brisbane's Catholic Justice and Peace Commission was urging the Federal Government to expedite the processing of asylum claims by 43 West Papuans who arrived to Australia by boat in January.

JESUIT'S SILENT PROTEST AGAINST NOOSE: A Melbourne parish priest of Van Nguyen carried the Queen's Baton past the Richmond home and church of the executed man in silent protest against the death penalty.

RESEARCH CRITICISES MUTUAL OBLIGATION 'FRANCHISE': The Jesuit Social Services and Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre released two papers investigating the widening application of mutual obligation within Australian public policy.

CATHOLIC PARENTS CONCERNED BY SCHOOL SPY CAMERAS: Privacy issues were raised by the prospect of eye-scanning cameras may replacing rollcall at NSW schools if a trial is successful.

NUN ON DOWNER'S INTERFAITH DIALOGUE MISSION: Dominican sister Trish Madigan took part in the second Dialogue on Regional Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, Development and Human Dignity to be held in Cebu, Philippines from 14-16 March.

IRAQ PEACE ACTIVISTS MOURN TOM FOX'S DEATH: Colleagues of Christian peacemaker Tom Fox, whose body was found in Baghdad, paid tribute to his work and urged Christians not to demonise those responsible for his abduction and death.

CATHOLIC WELFARE: POVERTY REPORT A LOST OPPORTUNITY: The head of Catholic Welfare said the Government's response to a major Senate report on poverty is a lost opportunity for the country's battlers.

FAIR TRADE FOR POOR FARMERS, VATICAN SAYS: Justice requires that rich countries reconsider the subsidies they offer their own farmers and the barriers that they place on the import of agricultural products from poor countries, the Vatican said.

ELDER LEFT FOR DEAD 'SHOWS LOSS OF VALUES': The sad tale of Aunty Delmae Barton, a prominent indigenous elder left for dead after suffering a stroke, illustrates a modern Australia disconnected with the values of morality and mutual obligation, according to community leaders.

DISABLED DESERVE FULL RIGHTS, POPE SAYS: In a message sent to the Brazilian church, Pope Benedict XVI called for disabled individuals to be completely and compassionately inserted into society at large.

POPE TELLS BUSINESS OWNERS: DO JUSTICE, NOT JUST CHARITY: Business owners must avoid every form of worker exploitation, and they must adhere to the church's teachings about social justice in the workplace, Pope Benedict XVI told a group of Italian entrepreneurs and business leaders.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS POSITIVE BUT UNFINISHED: VATICAN UNDELEGATION: The worldwide women's movement has been substantially positive, "even if it is still unfinished," said the Holy See's delegation in 2 March remarks at the United Nation's 50th anniversary session of its Commission on the Status of Women.

PRIESTS VOICE SUPPORT FOR BELEAGUERED REDFERN MINISTRY: The Toowoomba Diocese Vicar General wrote a letter of solidarity to parishioners of the Sydney parish of Redfern who feel their parish priest destroyed the pastoral legacy of the late Fr Ted Kennedy.

HUMAN DIGNITY DENIED AT GUANTANAMO: Cardinal Renato Martino, president of Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, criticised American treatment of some 500 inmates at the Guantanamo Bay naval base prison, the Catholic News Agency reports.

POPE SUPPORTS TALK ABOUT WOMEN'S ROLE: Pope Benedict XVI said that it is right to discuss how women can be more involved in church decision-making.

COMMISSION WELCOMES REFUGEE DECISIONS: Brisbane's Catholic Justice and Peace Commission welcomed positive decisions for two asylum seekers.

POPE TELLS FOOTBALLERS TO REJECT RACISM: Pope Benedict XVI issued a message against racism in soccer at the World Cup warm-up match between Italy and Germany.

BRENNAN CASTIGATES PUBLIC FOR COMPLICITY IN KICKBACKS: The public, not just the Government, turned a blind eye to the Australian wheat exporter AWB's kickbacks to the discredited regime of Saddam Hussein, according to Jesuit Fr Frank Brennan.

VATICAN ADMITS PREJUDICE AGAINST GYPSIES: The Vatican admitted past prejudice and neglect of the world's 15 million gypsies and called on governments to overcome "indifference or opposition" to the nomads

- courtesy Church Resources' CathNews, stories in detail at <http://www.cathnews.com/news/603>

APRIL SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR

APRIL 14 REFLECTION FOR GOOD FRIDAY

The illustration of the Maladigarra has helped Aboriginal people see Jesus as the Great Defender. A criminal sentenced to death has to stand before the tribal men to be speared. But the defendant obtains a Maladigarra, a champion or trained deflector of spears. All that the Maladigarra uses is a woomera. He tells his client: "You watch me and my movements, and do everything I do. Don't watch the spears." He places himself in front of his client, woomera in hand. He deflects all the spears and breaks them. When all the spears are broken, his client is set free.

This is a powerful illustration to help the Aboriginal know and realise what Jesus did for all people. He put his life at stake because of his love for all... For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that he might be the great Maladigarra for all people!

Pastor George Rosendale Milbi Dabaar, NATSIEC Prayer Diary

APRIL 15 ROYAL COMMISSION INTO ABORIGINAL DEATHS IN CUSTODY

In October, 1987, the Royal Commission was established to investigate the causes of deaths of Aboriginal people while held in State and Territory gaols, in response to a growing public concern that deaths in custody of Aboriginal people were too common and poorly explained. The Commission examined all deaths in custody in each State and Territory which occurred between 1 January 1980 and 31 May 1989, and the actions taken in respect of each death. The Commission's terms of reference enabled it to take account of social, cultural and legal factors which may have had a bearing on the deaths under investigation.

After investigating the individual deaths, the Commission tried to find larger social and economic factors to explain Aboriginal deaths in custody. The Commission noted that Aboriginal people had a higher rate of alcoholism, and of jailing, larger families and lower than average education than non-Aboriginal Australians. This led to an investigation into the wider underlying issues.

The disproportionate rate at which Aboriginal people are arrested and imprisoned in Australia has been identified as the principal and immediate explanation for the deaths in custody.

The final report, signed on 15 April 1991, made 339 recommendations, mainly concerned with procedures for persons in custody, liaison with Aboriginal groups, police education and improved accessibility to information.

Indigenous Australians and the criminal justice system

The criminal justice system's disproportionate focus on Aboriginal people is evidenced by the fact that they are 27 times more likely to be in police custody and nearly 16 times more likely to be in prison than non-Aboriginal Australians.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Indigenous women have been described as the "most legally disadvantaged group in Australia", and are the fastest growing prison population. Nationally, Aboriginal women are imprisoned at nearly 30 times the rate of non-Aboriginal women.

NSW has more Aboriginal women in prison than any other state. 31% of women in prison in NSW are Aboriginal, despite the fact that Aboriginal women make up only 2% of NSW's female population.

Consistently with patterns of female offending, Indigenous women are more likely to be in prison for non-violent property offences than for violent offences. These offenses are linked to disadvantage and/or drug use.

Many alternatives to jail, including the Drug Court (orders for treatment instead of a jail term), periodic and home detention and community service orders have limited availability in rural and remote areas.

In NSW, two-thirds of the Indigenous population live outside Sydney, and a large number live outside regional centres, which means that it is often not open to sentencing judges to order an alternative to prison. Also, there are not enough Indigenous-specific services in such alternatives – meaning that programs may be culturally inappropriate or not tailored to practical difference in Aboriginal life.

APRIL 16 REFLECTION FOR EASTER SUNDAY

A good spirit who lived in the sky sent out the Morning Star to warn the people on earth that soon the fire would be lit making the light. If the people did not welcome the light, then the sunfire would be lit no more. The spirits thought that some noise at dawn would herald the coming of the sun and waken the sleepers. Goo-Goor-Gaga, the kookaburra was chosen. Every morning he was to laugh his loudest to waken all sleepers before sunrise and prepare them to see the light and welcome the new day.

Creation story related by Joan Hendriks in "A Spirituality of Catholic Aborigines and the Struggle for Justice" - NATSIEC Prayer Diary

May the light of Christ be welcomed into our hearts and lives this Easter.

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