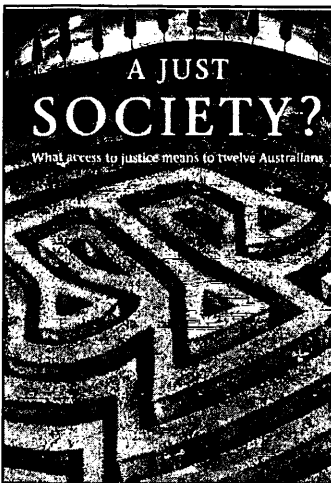


Reviews

A Just Society? What Justice Means to Twelve Australians
by the Victorian Law Foundation, Victorian Law Foundation Publishing 1999;
pp181; \$9.95.



A Just Society? describes itself as 'primarily designed as a plain-language educational resource for students', and contains papers written as personal reflections of the writers, rather than academic or research pieces – there is not a single footnote! The papers are written in

response to two questions:

- What does access to justice mean to you?
- How effectively is access to justice being achieved in Australian society?

Contributions are made by judges and magistrates, legal academics, and senior lawyers from legal centres and organisations specialising in Indigenous law, children's law, disability discrimination, refugee and immigration law, and gay and lesbian legal issues.

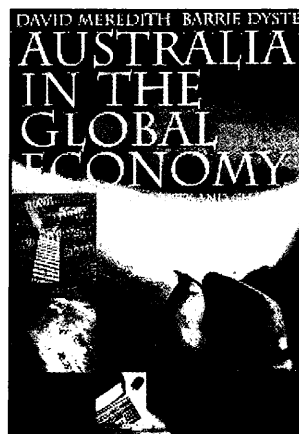
The contributions deal, on the one hand, with questions of justice on a moral or philosophical level, and as an imperative of the 'Rule of Law'. On the other hand, there is discussion of issues bearing on access to justice at an actual or practical level, with description of the experience of people encountering the justice system,

and problems which stem from marginalising factors such as disability, cultural, racial and sexual minority.

The range and depth of experience of the contributors is impressive. Consequently, while the questions posed are somewhat nebulous and invite responses that are vague or esoteric, the quality of contributors has ensured insightful opinions and fascinating anecdotes from a range of perspectives. Relevant legislation, international conventions and important cases are discussed, as well as the experiences of particular clients, and patterns which are seen to exist in the problems which occur when seeking access to justice, and the manner in which such problems are approached and dealt with by legal institutions.

– Matt Hall

Australia in the Global Economy. Continuity and Change by David Meredith & Barrie Dyster, University of Cambridge, 1999; pp388;
\$39.95.



These days just about every conference from law to motor mechanics mentions the 'g' word. It is extremely timely, then, that this book about Australia and the globalised economy has been published. The authors are leading economic historians from the University of NSW. Their book

attempts the ambitious task of summarising and analysing the 20th century Australian economy and the

global economy. They generally succeed in this task, although this broad canvas means that some of the political, social and cultural consequences of these changes – the human aspect to these forces – can only be glossed over.

The book focuses on Australia's imports and exports, the inflow and outflow of capital and immigration policy. It shows the continuing impact of the world economy on the Australian economy as it charts booms and busts, including the 'Long Boom' from the late 40s to the early 70s, the impact of the International Monetary Fund and the Cold War, the 'stagflation' of the later 70s and the current boom.

The book is succinct and concise and is written with an eye to allowing students and lay people to understand the story. There are convenient summary boxes, notes on further reading, a glossary of economic terms and a refreshing lack of jargon.

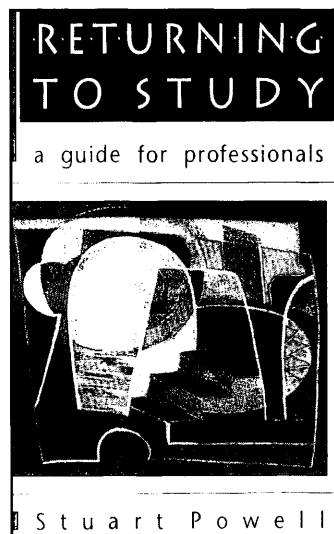
The material on immigration shows how this issue has been kicked around and politicised for the past 100 years and more. The piece on the greedy 80s is interesting but perhaps the authors were a tad too gentle on 'bold riders' like Alan Bond and Laurie Connell and financial institutions who, according to the text, made 'mistakes' and were 'overzealous'.

The authors conclude that Australia has never been absolutely 'isolationist' or 'inward looking'. The interaction between economies is much more complex than that. The book also asserts that globalisation is more the result of government policy than technological change, as vast and rapid as the latter has been. It suggests that the floating of the dollar, financial deregulation and a reduction in import protection were predominant factors in Australia's increasing 'globalisation' from the 80s onwards.

The book ends with some speculation about the future and the need for increased productivity across all sectors of the community, including investment in education, housing and health. The authors conclude with the hopeful suggestion that perhaps then Australia could progress from the 'lucky country' of the 60s to the clever country of this millennium.

- Michael Barnett

***Returning to study - a guide for professionals* by Stuart Powell, Open University Press, 1999; pp141; \$35.00**



Stuart Powell's book is a study guide with a focus on professionals encapsulating all of the study, research and writing techniques which most professionals would have (should have!) mastered the first time around. One disappointment is a lack of emphasis on mental and time factors, which most profes-

sionals would expect to be the major hurdles in returning to study. Powell does address these factors, but further attention is warranted in a book of this title.

The book does, however, provide an excellent refresher course. Powell has put together a quality study guide, based upon his own experiences of returning to study and those of students from various professional backgrounds whom he has assisted through their study programs. There are no 'alternative' study methods suggested, merely logical steps and guidelines to assist the individual to find their own style while meeting the expected tertiary standards. The chapters are interspersed with questions requiring the reader to consider points in context, accompanied by examples of responses from actual students. This brings a refreshing aspect to the text.

While this is an English book, Powell has deliberately attempted to provide guidance that would assist students worldwide. In this he has been largely successful, except in his reliance on English texts for further reading, which may not be as accessible in other countries.

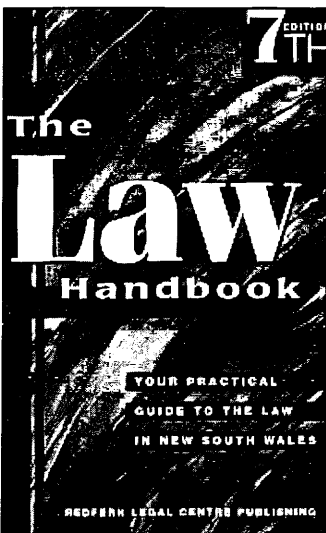
The major benefit of the book is Powell's interweaving of a positive attitude throughout the text – that returning to study will bring professional and personal benefits.

The attitude is catching, leaving the reader feeling positive about their decision and eager to commence their study. For this reason alone the book is worth reading by anyone having second thoughts about their decision to return to study.

– Lani Blackman

The Law Handbook: your practical guide to the law in NSW, 7th Edition, Redfern Legal Centre Publishing 1999, pp1,218; \$75.00.

The Law Handbook was first published in 1978 as an adjunct to the then recently established Redfern Legal



Centre (RLC). As one of the RLC's founders Mr Geoffrey Robertson QC describes the evolution of the handbook:

'when today I compare our slim loose-leaf effort with this magisterial and authoritative book, I am struck more than ever by the importance of this task of empowering citizens by giving them knowledge

of their legal rights'.

The law as it is faced by members of the community is diverse and complex, and reliable basic advice on particular legal problems can be elusive. Lawyers tend to be specialised. Finding one with the right specialty for the problem at hand is not always easy, and can be very expensive. My own experience as a volunteer solicitor at RLC is that, with the assistance of the Law Handbook, it is possible to walk into almost any client interview regarding a previously unknown legal problem, and give good, helpful advice. This is a big ask and a great achievement for the Law Handbook.

The 7th edition of the Law Handbook includes the work of more than 70 lawyers, who are experts in the topics

covered by the book. They voluntarily wrote plain language expositions of the law and practical answers to common legal problems, including: family law; arrest, bail and court; accidents and compensation; consumer contracts, credit and debts; immigration and refugees; employment; health; housing; and wills, estates and funerals. The handbook also provides practical advice as to dealing with police, lawyers and government; contact details for additional help and information, including counselling, social security, housing and refuge, family assistance, community services and welfare organisations; and useful Internet sites.

The new edition updates the areas of law that have changed substantially since the 6th edition, in particular, de facto relationships, social security entitlement, native title, victims' compensation, superannuation, and environmental legislation. There is an expanded chapter on laws affecting children and young people and a complete revision of communications and media law sections.

At the launch of this edition of the Law Handbook, the president of the Law Foundation, Mr Simon Rice (who has a long history of involvement with and support of the book) commented on the importance of the handbook, and its expanding quality and utility, in a climate of shrinking resources and increased demand for legal services:

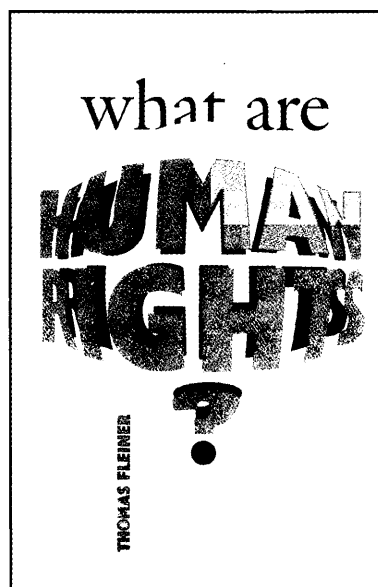
'While it is now the 'bible', the standard work in its field, it is still firmly positioned apart from the mainstream field of legal publishing. Its role still has an inherent political message, its commitment is still to a clear, simple and meaningful explanation of law. That is no longer revolutionary, but it is still different, and still representative of a philosophy of accessibility that inspires and drives many.'

This being said, the Law Handbook does not profess to be a substitute for face-to-face, informed legal advice and representation. It does, however, provide the information necessary to educate citizens about their legal rights in a vast array of situations, and the ability to make an informed choice about appropriate actions in furtherance of such rights and where to go for additional assistance.

– Matt Hall

**What are human rights? by
Thomas Fleiner, The Federa-
tion Press, 1999; pp168;
\$22.95.**

This is a slightly unusual book – it's a thin paperback with 35 chapters, each of no more than five pages in length, filled with anecdotes, arguments and homespun advice about human rights. Originally published in Ger-



man, it has since been published in Russian, French, Spanish and, soon we are told, Chinese. This edition is the first English edition of the text.

The text examines the perennial issues concerning human rights. What are they? Why do we need them? Are they universal? How

can they be realised and protected? It also considers human rights within a number of contexts: the role of courts; the rule of law; and reconciling human rights with majority rule in a democracy (this chapter should be sent to Dennis Burke and John Howard as they continue to stand steadfast in the face of criticisms of mandatory detention, for example). It also poses questions such as: Are the police all-powerful? Why does a murderer have human rights? And are asylum-seekers human?

At times it has a simplicity and clarity that human rights advocates (should) strive for, at others it makes you feel like you are reading 'Men are from Mars' or other such self-help books. Some of the anecdotes and case studies appear to be lost in the translation, and don't convince. But on other occasions it is mightily impressive.

Overall, a slight book that may be a good introduction to human rights issues for some.

- Darren Dick

So, law reform is important to you?

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- Access to current information about dispute resolution?

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