

Resolving Conflict: A Practical Approach, Gregory Tillett, Oxford University Press/Sydney University Press, 1991, 180 pages, \$22.95.

- Review by Andrew Beatty,
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Dr Tillett is Director of the recently established Centre for Conflict Resolution at Macquarie University. This book is used as a teaching text in courses offered by the Centre.

Although consideration of certain types of conflict and their causes (wars, strikes) clearly forms part of traditional academic disciplines such as, for example, history, and more recently, industrial relations, the examination of the notion of conflict and its resolution is a relatively new area of study now competing for the attention of both students and decision makers.

The author has distinguished "conflict" from other members of the genus (problems and disputes) and defines it as a perception in two or more groups (or people) that their values are incompatible. The very width of this definition suggests its applicability to virtually every aspect of human endeavour. Likewise, it may be so broad a definition as to limit one's ability to reach anything but the most general conclusions about the phenomenon.

In a logical and very readable way, Dr Tillett distils the main strands of current academic thinking on conflict resolution. He discusses and applies various strategies to a number of case studies and examines conflict resolution mechanisms some of which are already familiar to us - for example, mediation and arbitration. He also considers the application of practical psychology in aid of interpersonal conflict resolution and the dynamics of conflict and its resolution in special areas such as the environment, industry and commerce.

Although Dr Tillett is chiefly concerned with strategies for resolving conflict, he recognises that conflict makes positive contributions to society by, amongst other things, stimulating creative action and warding off stagnation. Perhaps because the benefits wrought by conflict tend to accrue to groups larger than those engaged in it or only be enjoyed in future or recognised in hindsight, the idea of identifying certain types of conflict as being intrinsically useful or beneficial to society is not specifically explored in this book. The author comes closest to applying a utilitarian approach to his subject in his reference to the invented concept of "provention" being the development and implementation of processes which en-

courage a conflict to emerge to enable it to be resolved creatively.

Whether a conflict is "good" or "bad" might seem like a trite question. However, to fail to address this question is likely to promote an automatic response of conflict resolution when to permit a conflict to continue, or even to encourage its continuance, might yield a better result.

Those involved in dealing with disputes will find Dr Tillett's text both thought provoking and, in some cases, a useful aid to conflict resolution. □