

common situation: 'the quadriplegic athlete'; 'the seriously ill newborn' etc. People are far more diverse and life more complicated than this categorisation suggests — though time and space are, of course, limited!

In brief, there is much in the book that will interest legal readers about the

philosophical and ethical debate in relation to euthanasia, particularly its link with community attitudes to disability. Proponents and critics of euthanasia alike should find it provocative.

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Pink Triangle—The gay law reform debate in Tasmania

by Miranda Morris; UNSW Press, Sydney, 1995; 134 pp, index; \$27.95 softcover.

Few books display so vividly the complexities of the role and operation of law in our late 20th century society as Miranda Morris' *Pink Triangle — The gay law reform debate in Tasmania*. Disarmingly slim, the book nevertheless packs a heavy punch in its simple narration of the events and attitudes which thrust Tasmania into the world spotlight and earned it international condemnation from the United Nations Human Rights Committee. The continued refusal of Tasmania's Upper House to decriminalise acts of sexual intercourse between consenting adults of the same gender only serves to heighten the relevance of this book published late last year, and makes the essential questions asked by the author about Tasmanian society even more engrossing.

Pink Triangle charts the course of the homosexual law reform movement in Tasmania from its early beginnings at an information booth at the weekly Salamanca Markets in Hobart. The discrimination and persecution which the Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights Group (TGLRG) endured as the Hobart City Council sought to smother their voice by banning them from the marketplace is recounted in such a way that it is difficult for the reader to contain his or her indignation as the arrest toll mounts.

The activities of the TGLRG at Salamanca were remarkably mild and so the response of the Council and the police seem even more extraordinary. The display of various logos and slogans was prohibited as was the collection of signatures to petition for law reform. Morris forcefully recreates the sense of oppression which must have charged the air of the Salamanca Markets in 1988, and brings to the reader's attention parallels with the deprivations of human rights which occurred in Europe and culminated in World War II. This historical context is present throughout the book

(indeed it is a mental association made by the title) though thankfully it is employed with subtlety and without a tendency towards melodrama.

The outrage engendered by the early chapter on Salamanca is the powerhouse for the remainder of the book, which can easily be read in one sitting. Morris shifts the focus from the confrontations at Salamanca to the no less disturbing public debate which she methodically covers at various levels and stages. The most pleasing thing about this book is Morris' heavy reliance on quotations from Hansard, the media and private interviews. By skilfully blending the results of her research she presents the myriad of views which were exchanged in the reform debate which is the focus of her work. The frightening bigotry and ignorance reflected in some of the opinions (but notably those quoted in the chapter concerned with the Parliamentary debates) would be lost in any attempt to paraphrase. By letting the key figures speak for themselves, Morris is able to present as objective a narrative as possible. She also exposes the depth of passion felt on both sides of the struggle — passions which remain after a United Nations ruling, the involvement of Amnesty International, the enactment of the Commonwealth's *Human Rights (Sexual Conduct) Act 1994* and the continued efforts of politicians in the Tasmanian Lower House.

So absorbing is the story of the TGLRG's fight for law reform and the views of all those involved (the chapter dealing with the response of several religious denominations is particularly fascinating), it is perhaps easy to lose sight of the fact that all this activity and debate is the product of two legislative provisions contained in the *Criminal Code 1924* (Tas.). Indeed the style of the book is distinctly non-legalistic and this may frustrate some readers. However, it

is hardly surprising given that Morris is a social historian seeking to explore what it is about Tasmania — and more specifically its early history and relationship to the mainland — that led to such concerted and confrontational opposition to the recognition of gay rights.

While that is undoubtedly an interesting question, this reviewer found that the book's strength lay in its depiction of a battle where both sides recognised the power and authority of law in society. The feeble compromise suggested by some Tasmanians that the laws remain as a symbol of disapproval but not be actively enforced was unsatisfactory to both sides. The role of law in reflecting and, indeed, determining society's acceptance or rejection of homosexuals is just as important as the other factors which undoubtedly led to the formation of the key players' beliefs.

Additionally, the book provides a very good demonstration of the law-making process for lay people and law students. From the lobbying of citizen's interest groups, through government policy formulation, and then to debate in a bi-cameral Parliament, this example is rounded out by reference to the international law and Commonwealth legislation which sought to override the effect of the Tasmanian *Criminal Code*. The TGLRG is currently seeking a declaration from the High Court that the *Human Rights (Sexual Conduct) Act 1994* does indeed have this effect.

Inevitably, the question must arise — for whom is this book intended? I do not think it was a question which Morris addressed — nor need she have. This book is of interest to many sectors of the community, namely those which still suffer from discrimination due not only to sexuality, but also their gender, age, race or political beliefs. It also raises many questions for those of us involved in the law and can assist us in appreciating the enormous social impact of the area in which we work and our possible role as agents for legal change. But ultimately, *Pink Triangle* should be read, as Justice Kirby suggests in his foreword, by all 'those who believe that Australia is a basically tolerant country'. Morris' work serves as a reminder to us of the fragility of basic freedoms. It is the responsibility of all Australians, but in particular the legal community, to ensure that the hard won gains of this century are not lost as we enter the next.

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