



BITS

Tomorrow's Law

edited by Hugh Selby; Federation Press 1995; 316 pp; \$25.00 softcover.

Go through any major Australian newspaper and you'll see that over half the stories touch on law or legal issues. Crime, euthanasia, drugs and the environment often put law on the front page and make the talkback lines run hot. The depth of coverage, however, tends towards superficiality as the media chews up one story and moves onto the next.

Tomorrow's Law is a collection of 12 essays that flesh out some recent and perennial media favourites, including: the role of forensic evidence, trust and betrayal in criminal justice, privacy, press freedom, law for a multicultural society, regulation of the legal profession, the Family Court and the changing role of the High Court.

A number of chapters are useful in providing an overview and context to topics that the reader often finds treated in a fragmentary fashion. In particular, the chapter by Mary Crock, 'The Peril of the Boat People', is an invaluable examination of Australia's responses to the various waves of refugees that have landed on our northern coastline. She dispassionately dissects the use of tit-for-tat legislation against the Cambodian boat people, the struggle between the government and migration lawyers and the consequences for the development of administrative law, and the effect of international treaties.

Similar comprehensive treatments of some long standing ethical dilemmas are found in David Kinley and Simon Bronitt's essay on undercover policing, suspects' rights and judicial oversight, David Lanham's chapter, 'Where Angels Fear to Tread', about the problems of legislating on euthanasia, and Beth Wilson's chapter 'Legal Straightjackets' on the difficulties the law faces in dealing with mental illness.

With the added benefit of Geoff Pryor's cartoons to provide insightful commentaries and visual relief, *Tomorrow's Law* is a good guide to some of the big questions that today's law faces. ● ME

Sweet & Sour

Stories from the working world of police, social workers, lawyers, judges, gaolers and occasional villains

by Rod Settle; Federation Press 1995; 181 pp; \$19.95 softcover.

The appeal of Rod Settle's collection of short stories, *Sweet and Sour*, rests on his 35 years experience working in the criminal justice systems of Papua New Guinea, the Northern Territory and Victoria. In clear and elegantly colloquial prose he tells his own stories and relates some his colleagues have shared with him.

The stories are wide ranging — murder trials and tribal warfare in the PNG highlands, the mixture of sordid tedium interlaced by drama faced by the young Victorian police recruit, the farcical results of culture clash in the NT outback — but they share a tone of laconic bleak humour. He has the ability to examine fundamental moral questions while remaining completely non-judgmental. For me, the book evoked an Australian Tom Waits (circa 'Closing Time') quietly telling tales over horrible late-night coffee in a glaring fluorescent-lit petrol station cafe.

The author, quoting Melbourne poet Laurence Collison, writes that he has tried to describe the feeling of 'being an integer in all of this most inelegant, most sad, and O most satisfying business of being human'. In a subtle and engrossing manner that mixes scepticism and humanity, this is exactly what he has done. ● ME

Liaison Interpreting

A Handbook

by Adolfo Gentile, Uldis Ozolins and Mary Vasilakakos; Melbourne University Press 1996; 144 pp; \$24.95.

For those of us who, as lawyers, have occasion to work with interpreters, this book is fascinating. The authors are professional interpreters and teachers in interpreting/translating and their book

provides the authoritative interpreters' eye view of the role of their profession.

The term 'liaison interpreting' is used to refer to the setting where the interpreter is physically present in the interview or meeting and uses the consecutive mode of interpreting (in contrast to the simultaneous mode used at international conferences). Thus liaison interpreting occurs between client and lawyer, patient and doctor, citizen and DSS etc.

The book is divided into two parts. The first six chapters deal with general principles: the historical background, general considerations, the role of the interpreter, the interpreted interview, ethics and professional socialisation. Each chapter concludes with a concise summary of the main points.

The remaining four chapters each focus on a specialist area: mental health, legal settings, business settings and speech pathology. The chapter on legal settings, by Ton-That Quynh-Du, an experienced Vietnamese interpreter, performs the dual function of explaining to interpreters the legal system and to lawyers the role of interpreters in that system. It analyses a number of extracts from transcripts of evidence and illuminates the difficulties of the task of the interpreter. This chapter alone makes the book extremely useful for lawyers who may not previously have appreciated the skills or function of interpreters.

But perhaps the most striking chapters are those on mental health and speech pathology, for these settings present the interpreter with the most formidable task, in accurately interpreting disjointed, or irrational or mispronounced speech from one language to another. One simple example from the speech pathology chapter demonstrates this point. The doctor asks the patient: 'Here are two words — 'frog' and 'Friday' — what do they have in common?' How does the interpreter translate that?

This book is highly recommended. If all judges and magistrates read it, they might finally stop telling an interpreter 'Just translate exactly what the witness said, Mr Interpreter' and, instead, appreciate the extraordinary skill and professionalism of the great majority of trained interpreters. ● SC

BITS was compiled by Susan Campbell, Frith Way and Michael Easton.