



# INFORM-ACTION

Newsletter of the Social Action Office - Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes Queensland

## A DEVOUT Catholic?

So often in the media these days we are hearing views expressed by some politicians who claim to be or are portrayed as “devout Catholics”. Most often there is clearly a great discrepancy between their views and the most common understanding or interpretation of Catholic teaching, especially Catholic Social Teaching. I would really challenge these people to thoroughly study and reflect on issues in the light of Church documents – for example, *Gaudium et Spes*, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (the 40th Anniversary of which we celebrate this year) or *Laborem Exercens* - On Human Work – and see if they can really stand by the things they are saying and still say they are “devout Catholics”.

So what really is a “devout Catholic”? The next time one says it or reads the words, maybe have another think about what it really means. Isn't such a person one who knows how to listen deeply to God – one whose heart is so moved by God's unconditional love for **all** that their heart is moved to action? Being a “devout Catholic” is a movement, a way of life that includes daily practices that nourish faith and relationship with God, participation in the faith and sacramental community, service and advocacy, especially for those most disadvantaged. Comments made from this type of “devout Catholic” are **well worth hearing!**

There are so many challenging issues confronting us at present that need vigilant reflection and action. At the federal level we have the **welfare to work legislation** that will obviously further disadvantage those most disadvantaged; and there are the changes to the **Industrial Relations legislation** that

from all indications will unravel the foundational values and principles of a system that has served this country since Federation – this is most disturbing. An **IR Circle** of SAO Partners is working with Project Officer Angela Ballard on this project. A Briefing Paper on the IR changes and SAO campaign strategies are under way. Please see the article on page 2.

*We must therefore encourage and support the “ecological conversion” which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading. Man (sic) is no longer the Creator’s “steward”, but an autonomous despot, who is finally beginning to understand that he must stop at the edge of the abyss.*

Pope John Paul II  
24 January 2001

On the global scene we have witnessed the disaster created by hurricanes and the shameful situation in New Orleans where, once again, those already most disadvantaged are being treated appallingly. This situation alone calls for great reflection. There is much discussion worldwide as to whether the severity of these hurricanes is related to climate change or not, with much of the discussion indicating that it is. As we wait for further analysis and discussion on this matter we are daily confronted with the severe drought in our own

country. The consequences of this are being felt in very practical ways with unprecedented water restrictions – but we must go beyond such practical measures if true **ecological conversion** is to take place. The practical measures may help the



immediate situation but in the long run there must be a change of heart – we have to live more sustainably on this planet. Is this a choice we want to make?

Annette Arnold rsj  
SAO Director

**NATIONAL WATER WEEK**  
16-22 October 2005

# A Fair Go? The Common Good?

**Catholic Social Teaching sees the basis of society not in competition but in co-operation.**

Our Australian identity and society, long associated with the fair go, has reflected this. Co-operation and fairness are ideas bound up with justice and the Common Good - for individuals *in* communities and communities *as part of* the wider society. The fair go and a co-operative society also includes economic justice but this is in dire danger of being lost to a competitive society based in the cult of the individual: where each person fends for themselves and their own without regard to the Common Good or the communities of others in which they live and work.

Two broad Howard Government agendas in particular have the capacity to tear the fabric of our fair society and cause hardship and suffering to those who are already amongst the poorest and most vulnerable in our communities.

**The Howard Government is proposing sweeping and radical changes to the industrial relations system.** The changes seem designed to undermine opportunities for workers co-operating and associating together to collectively bargain for fair outcomes and as such are contrary to Catholic Social Teaching which upholds co-operation and workers' rights to association. The changes will dismantle a system set up independent of government to balance the interests of workers and businesses, a system that has been significantly influenced by Pope Leo XIII's teaching on the just wage in *Rerum Novarum*.

Our IR system since Federation has been "conciliation and arbitration; a form of collective bargaining with resort to a neutral umpire." In recent years workers have had protection against unfair dismissal and a safety net for wages and conditions with the "No Disadvantage Test". Over the years workers and their unions have also won significant rights to Award conditions such as superannuation, notice of termination and long service leave. All these **protections and rights are to be removed**, although the Unfair Dismissal laws will still operate for workers employed by companies with more than 100 employees.

These changes proposed by the Government will likely affect 85% of Australian workers.

The underlying aims seem to be to push workers into individual agreements with their employers, tipping the bargaining balance in favour of the employer, and to replace the independent system with one of the current government's choosing. This will also further tip the balance in favour of the demands of business rather than

the needs of families. Independent wage setting through the current IR system factors in the living/social needs of people and communities rather than taking the overly economic view that business and government prefer.

**Catholic Social Teaching privileges labour over capital. These radical changes will create conditions that privilege capital over the rights of workers.**

The other great concern is the move to force vulnerable pensioners into this deregulated and unfair employment arena with the Government's "**Welfare to Work**" policy. Recent research shows that a single mum with one child

who does find work for 15 hours a week at the minimum of \$12.75 an hour will be \$92 a week worse off after June 2006.

The Federal Government would be the major beneficiary: Mum will keep just \$81 a week of her \$195 a week earnings while the Government takes the other \$114 through reduced NewStart Allowance and increased income tax payments. There is insufficient appropriate support or training for people entering or returning to the workforce for the first time in years and little understanding or

concern from the Government as to the difficulties - transport, out of school hours care, ongoing health issues - a single parent and/or a person with a disability such as an episodic mental illness will face in getting and keeping a job that suits their already challenging life circumstances.

**These Government policies will do great harm to those most disadvantaged and marginalised in our society.**

*... 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 or underemployed must be assured that the work they seek will provide a just wage that will keep them out of poverty.*

Bishop Christopher Saunders, Broome  
(Pastoral Letter for the Feast of St Joseph the Worker)

**Want to know more?** Please see the SAO website - <http://sao.clriq.org.au/social.html> - for the full Briefing Paper, Theological Reflections and Urgent Actions on this issue or contact Angela on (07) 3891 5866 or [angela@sao.clriq.org.au](mailto:angela@sao.clriq.org.au) to be involved in the IR Circles.

*Angela Ballard*  
SAO Project Officer

# Anti-Poverty Day - 17 October

This year celebrates the 40th anniversary of *Gaudium et Spes*, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World given to us by the Second Vatican Council in 1965. It is very timely to reflect once again on the message of this powerful document which reminds us *that men (sic) are obliged to come to the relief of the poor and to do so not merely out of their superfluous goods.*[10] *If one is in extreme necessity, he has the right to procure for himself what he needs out of the riches of others.*[11] *Since there are so many people prostrate with hunger in the world, this sacred council urges all, both individuals and governments, to remember the aphorism of the Fathers, "Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you have not fed him, you have killed him,"*[12] *and really to share and employ their earthly goods, according to the ability of each, especially by supporting individuals or peoples with the aid by which they may be able to help and develop themselves.*

Being involved in the activities of Anti-Poverty Week is a very concrete way of picking up on the above challenge. Anti-Poverty Week was established several years ago in Australia as an expansion of the UN's annual International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The main aims of Anti-Poverty Week are to:

- strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and hardship around the world and in Australia;
- encourage research, discussion and action to address these problems, including action by individuals, communities, organisations and governments.

Everyone who is interested in helping to reduce poverty and hardship in Australia or overseas is encouraged to **organise their own activities** during the Week or join in events being



The Social Action Office  
and the  
Catholic Justice and Peace Commission  
are hosting the 4th Annual  
**Common Wealth for the Common Good Address.**

The Address will be delivered by  
**Mr John Ryan**  
Executive Officer  
Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations.

The topic of the address is  
*The Common Good and Industrial Relations Reform:  
The Challenge of Distributing Wealth Fairly in Australia*

It will be held on  
**Monday 17 October 2005, 7.00 to 9.00pm**  
Marymac Community Centre, Ipswich Road, Annerley Qld

RSVP essential by Wednesday 12 October  
Reply to Helen Allen on (07) 3891 5866 –  
please leave a message if unattended  
or email [sao.admin@sao.clriq.org.au](mailto:sao.admin@sao.clriq.org.au)

organised by other people. The activities can be large or small, and events at the local level are especially welcome. Last year, about 150 groups organised activities involving more than 4,000 people around the country. There were more than 300 media references to activities during the Week.

The Australian Education Union has a special **Anti-Poverty schools website** which provides all the help people in schools need to participate in the Week: <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Campaigns/antipoverty.html>

This website – <http://www.antipovertyweek.org.au/> – gives a list of activities in all States of Australia that are already organised.

## Anti-Poverty Week

16-22 October 2005

### New SAO Staff

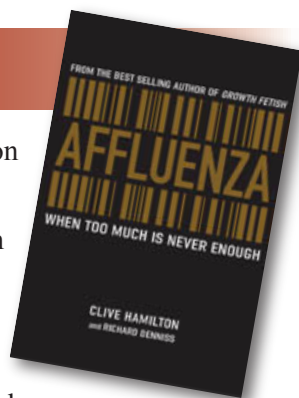
**Helen Allen** (pictured on the left) joined the SAO team as **Administrative Assistant** at the beginning of August this year. Helen returned from living overseas for five years in 2003. Amongst her travels she worked for two years for the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education before returning home to study a Bachelor of Special Education at Griffith University. Helen currently works at SAO on Monday and Thursday afternoons and can be contacted at [sao.admin@sao.clriq.org.au](mailto:sao.admin@sao.clriq.org.au).



**Angela Ballard** recently joined the Social Action Office as **Project Officer**. Angela comes to us with a wealth of experience in community and development education both here in Australia where she co-ordinated the Arbour Project Refugee Learning Circles and in Asia where she was involved in grassroots leadership training for people from Burma and sustainable ecotourism. More recently back in Brisbane she has worked for Mercy Family Services and the Queensland Council of Social Service also as a Project Officer. Angela's email is [angela@sao.clriq.org.au](mailto:angela@sao.clriq.org.au).

# Book Review

**AFFLUENZA** by Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss



In this new book, authors Hamilton and Denniss look at why people in first world countries are obsessed with earning more and spending more. They call this unhealthy fixation “affluenza” as it has all the symptoms of a dangerous disease that spreads rapidly with serious debilitating consequences. The book is divided into 3 chapters that examine personal, economic and sociological trends in Australian society.

Part 1 looks at the trends of Australian spending. Materially, they claim, we are much better off than we were in the 1940s and 50s, but somehow we are not satisfied. “Deferred Pleasure Syndrome” has crept into the national psyche deluding us into believing that we will have happiness when we finally buy that car, boat or plasma TV. Coupled with this is “luxury fever”: the obsession with buying the latest expensive consumer goods. When is enough, enough?

Part 2 looks at our changing attitude to debt: “we buy and enjoy now and pay later”. As a result, we live beyond our means with excessive spending and waste. This creates pressure to work longer hours and this in turn exacts its toll on us in terms of our well-being. Marketing and advertising play key roles in manipulating our inadequacies to buy more to feel satisfied or safe. Increasingly, we find ourselves in a society which defines people in a utilitarian sense – “we are valued for what we do, not for who we are”.

And finally, in Part 3 the authors show how, as individuals and as a nation, our values have become distorted by self-preoccupation and economic rationalism. Personal decisions are too often reduced to a cost-benefit analysis, e.g. “How much will it cost us to have a baby?” Even the Aussie battler image has been reconfigured to allow for those suffering high “mortgage stress”. Hamilton and Denniss, in urging us to examine our values and priorities, put forward their own manifesto of well-being at the end of the book.

There is little new in this book for those who know and understand how the world works in terms of poverty and wealth. People of faith know that their dignity and everything we have comes as free gift from God. What is revealing is that the message comes from economists who use research to explode the urban myths that economic growth is the magic wand to all society’s ills and that globalisation will bring prosperity to all. A timely book for Christians who will feel reaffirmed by the evidence that excessive wealth and spending are like a disease that causes suffering not only to ourselves and others but also to our planet.

(It is worthwhile noting that elements of Clive Hamilton’s research have been quoted in the Catholic Bishops Social Justice Sunday Statement 2005 – *Jesus, Light for the World.*)

*Jim D’Arcy cfc*

# For Your Calendar

2005 International Year of Microcredit

[www.yearofmicrocredit.org/](http://www.yearofmicrocredit.org/)



## OCTOBER

- 1 World Wildlife Week commences
- 2 Mahatma Ghandi born in Gujarat, India 1869
- 4 St Francis of Assisi
- 7 Desmond Tutu born 1931
- 11 Opening Session of Vatican Council II
- 13 International Water Week commences
- 15 World Rural Women’s Day
- 16 World Food Day - Anti-Poverty Week commences
- 16 National Water Week commences
- 16 Rigoberta Menchu Tum (Guatemala) receives Nobel Peace Prize 1992
- 17 International Day for the Eradication of Poverty
- 17 **Common Wealth for the Common Good Address** 7-9pm at Marymac Community Centre, Ipswich Rd, Annerley – RSVP 12 October (07) 3891 5866
- 18 Death of Charles Perkins 2000, Aboriginal Activist
- 19 Amnesty International Candle Day
- 19 Sinking of Siev X
- 24 United Nations Day (founded 1945)
- 24 Disarmament Week commences
- 26 Uluru handed back to traditional owners, the Mutijuli people 1985
- 31 Racial Discrimination Act proclaimed 1975

## NOVEMBER

- 6 International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict
- 9 Tearing down of Berlin Wall begins 1989
- 10 Nine Nigerian environmentalists and human rights activists hanged 1995
- 11 Remembrance Day commemorating end of World War I 1918
- 12 Dili Massacre, East Timor 1991
- 13 Death of Karen Silkwood 1975
- 16 International Day for Tolerance
- 16 Six Jesuit priests and two housekeepers killed in El Salvador 1989
- 16-18 World Summit on the Information Society, Tunis, Africa
- 20 Anniversary of Declaration of Rights of the Child 1959 and Convention on Rights of the Child 1989
- 25 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
- 26 Sojourner Truth died in Battle Creek, Michigan 1883
- 29 Death of Dorothy Day 1980

## DATE CLAIMER

Tuesday 29 November  
End of Year SAO Gathering at 5.30pm  
Everyone welcome