

AUSTRALIAN NOTES

Peter Coleman

John Howard had one of the best lines in the ABC's documentary *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion*. He said that, despite the follies, failures and madness of the Whitlam government, he found a lot to like in Whitlam. Gough could turn on the charm and be enjoyable company. I know what he means. I recall years ago at some constitutional convention, not long after my wife had published a biography of Adela Pankhurst, he seized her hand, kissed it, exclaimed 'The author!', and congratulated her. (No one in the Liberal party had bothered.) It's hard to dislike such a preposterous fellow. In his memoirs Howard reports that, when first elected, he found Whitlam the parliamentarian 'superior to anyone on our side'. He also observed 'a vicious streak'. It's another reason to look forward to Howard's final assessment of Whitlam in his book on Australian politics between 1949 and 1972.

I was, confessed Ross Terrill the other day, a Trojan horse. He was recalling the 1965 conference of the Victorian Labor Party. A Melbourne University Labor intellectual, he had himself selected as a delegate of the Meat Packers' Union. He was anti-communist and pro-Whitlam. Aghast at the communist hacks who dominated the conference, he wrote an exposure for the *Australian*. Whitlam advised a pseudonym. Rupert Murdoch gave him the byline 'A Special Correspondent'.

Terrill continued to be a democratic Trojan horse. It has never been easy to nail him down. He was an Australian citizen, then American. Now he is both. He was a confidant of his old Harvard teacher Henry Kissinger and Prime Minister Whitlam. The Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai called him a 'vanguard officer' for Whitlam.

So it is fitting that, after a long career as a Harvard-based China specialist, his latest publication is his essay on Australian and American policy to China since Whitlam's visit as opposition leader in 1971 and President Nixon's soon after. (*Facing the Dragon*, published by the



Australian Strategic Policy Institute.) Terrill was in Beijing in 1971 during both visits. But he knows how different they were. Whitlam was appeasing his left wing and appeared to have little grasp of China's foreign policy, especially of the ramifications of the Sino-Soviet split. When Zhou Enlai raised the issue of the threat from 'our northern neighbour', Whitlam said: 'You mean Japan.' The Premier replied curtly: 'I said to the north. Japan is to the east.' He meant Russia. But there was no such uncertainty in Richard Nixon's mind. He, with his entourage of 800, had profound geopolitical plans. Above all he wanted, and got, leverage against the Soviet Union. It was, as he said, a week that changed the world.

Whitlam was lucky in his timing. Had Labor party timetables forced him to postpone his visit he would have followed President Nixon and seemed a pathetic imitator. It would have destroyed him politically. As it was, it was easy to present himself as a trailblazing man of the future.

Now 40 years after those heady events, what of China policy? There are, writes Terrill, three issues: will China's economic success continue? How swift will be US decline? How would the Asia-Pacific nations react if China did eclipse the US? His answers are: China will slow down; critics underestimate American resilience; and the Asia-Pacific nations would robustly resist Chinese expansion. The Chinese civilian leaders understand all this. They do not look to lead the world. Terrill does not discuss the plans of China's military leaders.

Another anniversary. It is now 50 years since the poet Jim McAuley and the composer Richard Connolly published their first small, and, as it turned out, dramatic, collection of hymns *We Offer The Mass*. McAuley had for some years been deeply and personally involved, as pamphleteer, troubadour and foot soldier, in the apocalyptic politics of the 1950s: the Cold War, the Labor split, the formation of the Democratic Labor Party. Some of his poems of the time combine universal themes and local political sub-themes. So, some thought, did his hymns. When singing the stanza 'Should the powers of hell arise/ And our peace be trampled down,/ In that night of blood and lies/ Show us still your twelve-starred crown', some remembered permanent things while others thought of the Communist party and its appeasers in the Cold War at home and abroad. The political undertones were enough for Cardinal Gilroy to refuse his imprimatur to *We Offer The Mass*. But with the end of the Cold War and passing of the decades, any possible political interpretations have been forgotten and McAuley's hymns are now sung by faithful, and interdenominational, millions around the world. (The censorship they face today is political correctness — deleting 'son' for example and substituting 'child', regardless of the poetry.) To mark the 50th anniversary of their first publication, Willow Connection of Manly Vale NSW has issued *Year of Grace*, a collection of 27 hymns, all of which are composed by Richard Connolly with 22 written by McAuley. In his introduction, Connolly writes that his 'tunes' were 'strangely not mine — so nearly did the words seem to clothe themselves in music'. It is, he says, McAuley's words that make these hymns so 'outstanding'. In his foreword Cardinal Pell writes that the joint work of McAuley and Connolly is 'the finest body of hymns ever written in Australia'. They have 'long been part of my religious life'. Accompanying the book is a CD of 18 of the hymns, 13 of which are restored from an LP recording made by volunteer and barely rehearsed choristers in St Brigid's Church, Marrickville, one Saturday 50 years ago.