

DOWN AT THE OLD BULL AND BUSH

Henry Ford, the State Department and the Editors

The Hotel Belvedere invokes thoughts of 19th century opulence, of tarnished gilt, plush and fleur-de-lis patterned carpets. But it is not like that at all. Small, plain, built in 1912 and face-lifted with green tiles in more recent times, it has none of the meretricious atmosphere of the more fashionable city hostleries and looks for all the world like an ordinary suburban pub wandering off course in the shadow of the Town Hall and St. Andrew's Cathedral. Its clientele comes from the business men, clerks and workers of the environs, appropriately separated in its various bars, and it offers a tasty, hot lunch service.

Rather surprisingly, the Belvedere was the venue, August 24th to 27th, of the Association for Cultural Freedom's seminar for editors of "little" (literary) magazines, the expenses being met from the bottomless coffers of the Ford Foundation.

A gathering of such people, the first of its kind in Australia, was expected to provide many examples of erudition and wit. However, only one dubious bon mot survived the historic occasion. It was made by the editor who rang room service just once again (the tasty, hot specials were not relished by the seminar), and apologetically remarked, "after all, they can afford it."

It was a strange place for some of Ford's blood, sweat and tear-gas stained dollars to finish up. Old Henry, a lifelong teetotaler and temperance advocate, would never have approved of the Hotel Belvedere, but he would have heartily endorsed the aims of the editors' conference.

The Association for Cultural Freedom is the Australian branch of the Congress of Cultural Freedom, U.S.A., which is the cultural wing of the U.S. State Department. The president, till recently, was Sir John Latham, former High Court Judge and Victorian Attorney-General, now replaced by Dr. Lloyd Ross. The Association publishes the ultra-right pseudo-literary journal *Quadrant*, edited by Professor James McAuley, poet and lay spokesman for certain organizations within the Catholic Church.

Not a dollar was spared to make the seminar successful. William Phillips, of the *Partisan Review* and Robie Macaulay, of the *Kenyon Review*, both came from America. Mr. Phillips was major-domo to the seminar. Also flown in were Wole Soyinka (Nigeria); F. Sionij Josa (Philippines); Kim Jum-Yop (South Korea) and Charles Brasch (N.Z.).

Some thirty or so Australian editors (including ex-editors, co-editors and contributors) attended. Prominent were *The Bulletin*, with a squad of Olympic Games proportions, and *Overland*. Prominent by their absence were the editors of *Meanjin*, *Nation* and

Outlook, *Realist Writer* ("now in issue No. 9 and going well"—S. J. Baker in the "Sydney Morning Herald"), was not invited. This need cause no heartburning for an invitation would not have been accepted.

The proceedings opened with a "there's a breathless hush in the close tonight" kind of atmosphere and closed on a note of palest bathos. Only one decision (publicly) was reached—

"We, the undersigned editors, while meeting in Sydney, have discussed *Overland's* request to the Commonwealth Literary Fund, and feel uneasy about the decision to exclude it from assistance. We suggest that the Commonwealth Literary Fund should reconsider the case. We also note with concern the effort of *Westerly* to develop and maintain under difficulties a literary magazine of quality in Western Australia and hope that the Commonwealth Literary Fund may find it possible to help this activity, having particular regard to the regional needs of that State."

Realist Writer supports the resolution and feels that there has been political discrimination against *Overland* among others. What remains to be considered is what the conference was all about.

There is at present something of a boom in publishing little magazines, with about fifteen appearing in varying degrees of regularity. The upsurge in journals of ideas is a reflection of the fact that ideas are on the march in our country today. There's a nip in the intellectual air that has not been present for many a long year and even magazines of the farthest right confirm, in an inverted way, the existence of new and vigorous thought.

The causes for this are not hard to find. Australia's closer proximity in time and politics to the great upheavals which have produced a dozen socialist countries, the breath-taking transformation of the former colonial countries into independent national States, the occurrence of the third economic crisis of recent years and the growing economic instability, the world-wide march of the fighters for peace—all of these factors and more have stimulated action and counter-action on the ideological front.

Australia has always been cast for a very definite role in the eyes of the English and more recently, American, masters of thought. Their dream is that Australia will be kept safe for "democracy," safe as a base for use against the ever-growing

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

national independence movements in South-East Asia. This strategy was the genesis of the seminar of little magazine editors, which took place in an attempt to control and direct the upsurge of ideas in Australia into channels acceptable to American ruling circles.

The editors of Meanjin, Outlook and Nation, who accurately reflected the views of their supporters, were correct in declining to participate in the seminar. Others were there because they probably did not realise the issues involved. The whole affair had the flavour of a lost week-end because its sessions were so sterile but undoubtedly the real business was not conducted in the public eye, or with all delegates in attendance.

One outcome of the discussions was the renewal of attacks on the Commonwealth Literary Fund, under cover of support for Overland's claim to a subsidy. Realist Writer has not applied for a grant and has no immediate intention of doing so, hence has no axe to grind. The C.L.F. has always sat ill on the stomachs of tory politicians and The Bulletin's new offensive is not surprising.

Patronage is death to art, but the kind of disinterested assistance that it is possible for the C.L.F. to provide is of positive benefit to writers and literature. Things that are wrong with the Literary Fund today are the inadequacy in both number and amount of the fellowships granted and the bias in favour of the major publishing concerns.

Advisory Board members are politically appointed and their decisions are subject to ratification by a committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and a Country Party representative. In practice, Mr. Menzies decides.

Political influences could never be eliminated from such a body, but the direct political control should be ended.

Another hoped for result of the seminar was to present the Association for Cultural Freedom as a benevolent, tolerant, purely cultural organisation with malice towards none, except communists. The absence of the three invited journals and Realist Writer dispelled this myth before it could take definite shape.

The so-called little magazines occupy the same position in literature as little theatre does in drama. They are primarily journals of ideas and comment, expressing and moulding opinion on behalf of the circles which produce them. Many such magazines are born, few survive. The established ones are those which represent and adhere to a decided trend in national thought. For example, Meanjin and Southerly have consistently expressed liberal academic views, and so retain support from influential intellectual circles.

At the present time there is something of a boom in such journals in Australia, with about fifteen being published with varying degrees of regularity. In the main

they are quarterlies and as such tend to be reflective, not given to hasty judgements and on the spot reporting. Journals such as The Bulletin which is a weekly newspaper, and the fortnightly Nation, do not really belong in this category. The Bulletin was at the seminar because it is the spearhead of pro-American smear journalism and because of the key organising role played by some of its staff.

Another interesting feature of some journals which survive is their tendency to begin in radical vein, then become more and more respectable. The most illustrative case is The Bulletin, which was one of the focal and motivating forces in the formation of our national literature in the eighteen-eighties and is now the voice of reaction. From Archibald and Stephens to Packer and Home is a retrogression too dreadful to contemplate. Overland began life as the original Realist Writer and was firmly allied to the labour movement. Of its first issue Miles Franklin said: "A most interesting magazine alive in every pore. That is the way to do it when the population is not big enough to support pompous glossy affairs full of rhetoric, notes on minor issues and sawdust." Overland severed its connections with the labour movement, discarded its firm standpoint and has now won the embarrassing support of The Bulletin.

The answer to all this is that only a magazine bound with every fibre of its being to the most progressive and forward looking social forces in our society, will ever maintain its standpoint and integrity.

The little magazines have, as mentioned before, always been mainly concerned with presentation of ideas. In the past this was quite natural because most creative material suitable to them (short stories, poems) was readily accepted by periodicals and newspapers. The short story in particular, is not published today apart from the literary magazines, and this has always been a major literary form in our country.

Because of this, Realist Writer has and will continue to devote the bulk of its space to creative and imaginative writing. But this will not exhaust its role and it will continue to voice in more direct form the ideas for which it stands.

From its inception, our journal has proclaimed its aims. We shall endeavour to carry on and develop the proud heritage of those who founded Australian literature. This is not done by confining ourselves to discussion of the eighteen-nineties, but most of all, and this is the test, by publishing those writers who carry on the positive humanism, the partisanship for the toiling people, the non-conforming rebel spirit of Lawson, Furphy, O'Dowd, Adams and company. We champion the cause of those who write in social protest or for social change, for such an outlook has always provided the sinews of our national literature.

We stand against those who would betray our national honour, who do not stand for world peace, who would trample on our

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Continued from previous page

literary traditions. We stand against those whose art can only deplete meanness and perversion of the human spirit.

These colours will never be struck, for they are nailed to our masthead. To the other literary magazines, on this basis, we make a simple offer—stand up and be counted!

So when it was all over and the last editor had made the last point, the Belvedere settled down once more to its humdrum ways. The public bar, the saloon bar and the lounge serviced their respective strata of the city's thirsty inhabitants and things were much as they had always been. Through all its fifty years the old pub had waited its moment of glory, for even the loftiest ideas can emerge in lowly places.

It was not to be. The Belvedere get-together was an ambitious step in the American thought control programme, but it appears to have had limited success. No doubt the two-day flow of intellectuals between Australia and America will continue, and perhaps even more people will get Fulbright scholarships.

But the battle of ideas is a thorough-going process. Policy will be tested against performance, and in the end only those ideas and those magazines can survive which spring from a progressive social awareness and maintain close links with the people.

The old pub on the corner will probably never enjoy another fling, and before long its licence will be quietly transferred to one of the new suburbs.

Editorial Board.

YARALIE

IN his latest novel, "Yaralie", Donald Stuart shows the same sensitive understanding of the problems of aboriginal and coloured people as he expressed in "Yandy" and "The Driven".

Yaralie is the daughter of a white prospector and a coloured mother, and the story tells how she emerges from childhood to youthful maturity in the harsh but eternally fascinating environment of North-Western Australia.

It is apparent that Donald Stuart can see no solution to the problems of the coloured except escape into the desert of individualism. Though his work occasionally reaches a level of emotion and imagery bordering on the poetic, the reader is sometimes left with a feeling of hopelessness.

In spite of its limitations, "Yaralie" presents a picture which is essentially true, and one which should help to break down the racial prejudice all too common in Australian country towns.

—(Georgian House, 18s.)

ARCHER CRAWFORD MEMORIAL SHORT STORY AWARD

ARCHER CRAWFORD was a foundation member of Sydney Realist Writers' Group and its Vice President for six years until his untimely death in September, 1960.

How well we remember him—writer of stories, poems, songs; engineer, carpenter and an artist with all manner of materials—paints, paper collages or wood. We see still his wide smile, his deep intelligent eyes as he marched on May Day.

The National Council of Realist Writers Groups of Australia is fortunate to have been given the means to sponsor an award to honour his work and memory. In the words of the donor of the Award: "Archer Crawford's life was a symbol of all those fine, talented writers who lived BEFORE the flowering. But for the 'Archers' the flowering would be much harder to achieve and it is not alone a question of remembering a dear friend but of establishing him as a symbol—sometimes even as a comfort—to all those who are condemned by capitalism to write under duress, in shackles and under great difficulty."

The Award is open to all writers. The first prize is £20 and the second prize £5 for stories submitted to "Realist Writer" during 1962. Stories at present under consideration will be eligible. Stories should be submitted to "Realist Writer," P.O. Box 12, Northbridge, N.S.W. Judges will be announced in the next issue.

Picnic Races

IN "Picnic Races," her latest novel, Dymphna Cusack has failed to come up to her usual high standards.

The story is built around the centenary celebration of a small Australian pastoral town which began its history as the tent town of a gold rush. There is conflict between two opposing groups of the district's property owners as to the form of celebrations should take. On the one hand are the old pioneers and their descendants, supported by progressives among the town's professionals, and on the other, a new element among the squatters and business people desirous of making themselves a local aristocracy.

Although there is no profundity in the theme or its treatment, the book is very readable, and there are numerous tilts at such phenomena as racism and the degeneracy of some of the squattocracy. (Heinemann, 20s.)