

The Sydney Morning Herald

After the war crimes trials

THE ACQUITTAL of Mr Ivan Polyukhovich on charges of alleged involvement in Nazi war crimes has the potential to divide public opinion as sharply as the 1987 decision to investigate alleged Nazi war criminals. Critics of the Government's initiative may see in Mr Polyukhovich's acquittal a vindication of their claim that investigations were costly exercises in futility all along. Those who pushed for investigations may now ask who did commit the crimes. Mr Polyukhovich was wrongly accused of and they may argue that his acquittal makes it all the more necessary to resume the hunt. To that extent, it is encouraging that Mr Jeremy Jones of the Australian Council of Jewry has not only accepted the jury's verdict in this particular case but also the Government's handling of the whole war crimes issue. It is to be hoped the Government's critics can now do the same.

Investigating crimes committed 50 years ago, during wartime, on the other side of the world, was always going to be a tricky and controversial process. But that was no reason to avoid the effort. And if a reasonable case could be established for charging people in this country with war crimes, the rest of the community had a moral obligation to bring those charges and have them tested in a court of law. In the debate before the War Crimes Act was amended in 1988, much concern was raised about the fairness of any prosecutions under the changed legislation and whether they would not amount to "show trials". But the alternative was that the alleged offenders would be put on trial in other countries. That may have meant the accused would be denied the full rights they enjoy (presumption of innocence, legal representation, the right to face one's accusers, and

so on) under the ordinary criminal law in Australia. Last September's decision to abandon the hunt for suspected Nazi war criminals may have dismayed many people in the Jewish community. But investigations were only ever intended to continue for five years until June 1992 and a conscientious effort was made throughout that time. The results were never likely to satisfy everyone. The Australian taxpayer has spent \$20 million so far. Those people who most acutely felt the pain of Nazi atrocities have seen no retribution. And, it mustn't be forgotten, people like Mr Polyukhovich have suffered as well.

Moreover, the process had to have an ending sooner or later. For one thing, the practical difficulties of pursuing an investigation, identifying possible culprits, and proving a case against them, grows more difficult by the year. For another thing, time is fast catching up with Nazi war criminals even if justice isn't. There remains one more case to be brought before the Australian courts. But the whole process begun in 1987 is surely coming to an end.

Does that mean that the issue of Nazi war criminals will soon have been exercised in Australia as well? Not exactly. Justice was not the only thing sought by members of the Jewish community by means of war crime investigations. Those investigations were also a way of keeping alive the memory of the Holocaust. That remains a valuable pursuit but other ways must be found. Moreover, new war crimes are being committed every day, especially in Bosnia. After 1945, Nazi war criminals tried to evade detection by resettling abroad. Some of Bosnia's war criminals may try to do the same. Australia's security and immigration officials need to be much more alert to that possibility now than they were following the World War II.

The end of the Big Wal era

The announced resignation of the Leader of the National Party and Deputy Premier, Mr Wal Murray, has set up a keen contest within the party over who will be his successor. The Minister for Energy, Mr Garry West, was one of the first out of the blocks and is considered a strong candidate. Last month, the *Herald* reported that senior National Party figures were urging the Minis-

Murray. Much of the burden of Greinerism, in transport, education and health services, fell on the bush. Mr Murray became he was the epitome of a man from the bush, was able to sell the policies to his National Party colleagues and to National Party supporters in the country towns. A leader with a more civified image, perhaps Mr Murray's predecessor, Mr Leon Punch,



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Views on the Sydney 2000 Olympic bid

Sydney would be a fantastic host city for the 2000 Olympic Games. As a resident I am excited by the prospect. I would, however, be happy for Beijing to be awarded the Games if it were used as a political lever for China to end its pitiless destruction of Tibetan culture. Perhaps here is some chance to reverse the racial and religious "cleansing" of Tibet before it is too late.

David West,
Paddington.
May 14

Regardless of the merits of Sydney's offer rivals for the 2000 Olympics, I hope that visiting IOC head Juan Samaranch follows the example set by the Levi Strauss company. The leading jeans manufacturer recently withdrew a significant slice of its business from China on the basis of the appalling human rights record of the People's Republic.

Levi's has joined the growing trend around the world towards holistic business practices which recognise that civil rights and economic growth are inextricably bound. For it, China's human rights violations definitely do not "fit the legend".

Mr Samaranch, human rights violations are to be condemned, not rewarded.

Julia McKiernan,
Marrickville.
May 13

I strongly support the Sydney 2000 Olympic bid public-relations tactic of slobbering sycophancy because it is shooting ourselves in the foot.

Why is every surface in Sydney

being graffiti'd with the Olympic scribble? Who are the enormous banners in Circular Quay, Darling Harbour and the Bridge, not to mention the borrowed sculptures from Melbourne's failed bid, supposed to impress?

These superficial means of impressing the IOC chief assume that he must have the brain of an amoeba.

It is time this extravagant media whitewash is seriously questioned and the people of Sydney are informed of who will pay for the Olympics and who will make the money out of them. They are not the same.

Then I believe Sydneysiders will support the Anywhere-But-Sydney 2000 Bid.

Sam Marshall,
Sydney.
May 16

When, if ever, is this country going to get a leader or leaders who will realistically address the major problems confronting us - in particular our economic woes?

The money and effort being expended by both government agencies and others on matters such as republicanism, flags and Olympic Games is Abba-in-Wonderland mind-boggling stuff.

So far as the Olympic Games issue is concerned, why do we have to "sell" the city or country? Surely it stands or falls on its existing merits. What is going on is as infantile as a five-year-old trying to persuade his or her parents to provide a skateboard as a Christmas present.

And Sydney and Australia need the Olympic Games about as much as that child needs the skateboard.

Before I came to Australia I shared the popular misconception at home that it was important to avoid being seen here as a "whinging Pom". I needn't have worried. What I have found to my astonishment is that the whinging "blame-it-on-the-Poms" Australian.

In the past three months I have heard the British blamed for everything from the lack of initiative in the

board. Don't the "leaders" of the Olympic movement already know Sydney? If they don't, one is surely entitled to question why they hold their positions. Why all the bribery (the "dinners" and so on) - for which we all as taxpayers are paying?

Surely the money - and even the journalistic time - being directed towards such issues could more constructively be otherwise utilised.

R. M. Court,
Willoughby.
May 15

Sam North's feature, "Why Sydney won't get the Games" (*Herald* May 6), among other things, raised the concern of the African members of the IOC voting body.

In the past few months, reports reaching the African community in Sydney indicate that, contrary to what has been reported widely - that Africa would support China as a result of China's large aid budget to some African countries - most of these countries would support Sydney's bid.

The major concern expressed as far as Africa is concerned is whether ordinary Africans will be issued visas to Australia if Sydney wins the Games. Reports indicate that many Africans were denied visas to visit Australia to witness last year's boxing match between Azumah Nelson and Jeff Fenech.

A similar story recently emerged during the World Youth Soccer Cup. The Department of Immigration, the source says, believes that most of these people will refuse to go back after the events they come here to witness.

If the comments of the Federal Minister for Consumer Affairs, Ms McHugh, were reported fully and fairly (*Herald* May 15), her assurances that "consumers will be disadvantaged" by card fees are hollow.

Consumers already pay a fee for the card system, whether they use a card or not. The fee is the amount the trader adds to his price to offset the rebate he allows the bank when presenting his account for payment.

The banks are in for a rude shock when they introduce annual fees for their credit cards. With an average monthly card account bill of \$500 with an average credit-free period of 30 days, it will be cheaper to track the card

If there is any single issue which will cost Sydney the Games, I believe it is this one, and it must be addressed as soon as possible.

Martin Kwakwa,
Harris Park.
May 6

Once ambivalent, I am now set against holding the Olympics in our city. How dare the bid committee hang banners from our Harbour Bridge promoting this sporting event? It's a disgraceful use of a national icon. Is the Opera House to be desecrated next?

As for claims that 90 per cent of people support the bid, what rubbish! I do not personally know of one person holding that opinion; quite the reverse.

Matthew Allen,
Kirribilli.
May 15

Where are the *Herald's* renowned investigative journalists when the head of an international body, whose history is the subject of some controversy, comes availing? Probably drinking champagne with him at the Art Gallery, like everyone else.

Let our Olympic Committee ignore embarrassing questions. That's part of its job. Don't waste the front page with showbag stories which belong in the social pages of the Sunday tabloids.

For the record, I'm in favour of Sydney's bid, only because our anticipatory urban clearing program would be more humane than any conducted by Beijing.

David Ash,
Bondi Beach.
May 15

Affairs? Or has she overlooked the fact that those non-cardholders are also consumers?

R. J. Clark,
Sylvania.
May 15

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Segregation and its new advocates

IT HAS become an article of faith that girls do better in girls' schools and boys do better in co-educational schools. This puts mothers of sons like me in a sticky position.

As feminists we want womankind in general to excel. If that takes segregated classes and schools, then let's smash the co-ed system now. But on the other hand we want our sons to excel. If that takes co-education, we'll fight to the death for it.

It offends me that my sons will be considered not good enough to go to school with my friends' daughters. But it's a worry that if they do, they might harass them and dominate them and partly be responsible for their subsequent status as low-paid workers.

So what do I do? Put them into co-ed schools with the few unsuspecting girls left whose parents are so out of it they haven't yet jumped ship? Add to the sins of sexism, exploitation of the underclass?

Or gratefully fall back on a welter of recent feminist scholarship that debunks the whole business of sex-segregated education? Fortunately there is no shortage of women at the coal face of educational research, who have stared the beast of boyhood in the eye, sent their daughters to co-ed schools anyway.

The pell-mell rush to segregate the boys from the girls is an Australian idiosyncrasy. Elsewhere it is assumed that schools should reflect society. Boys and girls should learn to work out their differences. But here sex segregation, on the flimsiest evidence, has caught the public imagination.

In Victoria, a co-educational private school is having trouble retaining its girls. In NSW, there is some evidence that parents, given the choice of a girls' State school or a co-ed school, opt for the girls' school.

Peakhurst High, a co-ed school, has a huge imbalance of boys partly due to the proximity of Penshurst Girls' MacKellar Girls is overflowing despite flattering research by Sydney University's Ian Smith at two nearby schools, which became co-educational in 1988 to the measured benefit of the boys and the girls. There is some good evidence that boys do better in co-educational schools. But it is more useful to think that girls do better in single-sex schools.

"Segregating boys from girls is a simple, stupid solution," says Margaret Clark, author of *The Gender Divide: gender in the primary school*.

"To assume a single-sex school is better for girls is to be away with the fairies," says Jane Kenway, of Deakin University, the author of many papers on girls' education.

I had always suspected the solution was more complex since my own experience 25 years ago in Perth in an all-girls maths class at the local high school. It is possible that my grasp of algebra and geometry might have been even worse than it was but the absence of boys was not enough to overcome my maths phobia.

The idea that girls do better in single-sex schools stems partly from the sentimental reminiscences of some clever, privately-educated women who rose to prominence in Australia during the '70s.

In extolling the virtues of their single-sex schools, they discounted for the powerful effect of class and the school's selectivity.

The evidence is much more convincing that middle-class girls, wherever their school, will do well. In fact, most girls do quite well at school. It is only later, at postgraduate level or in the race up the career ladder, that girls founder, and this cannot be blamed on school.

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