JOHN LEGGAT

GUEST COLUMN
PROFESSOR TARIQ RAMADAN

Time to leave our intellectual ghettos

We all oppose the clash of civilisations. But if you listen to people on the ground here in Europe, in the States, and in the Islamic-majority countries, there is a definite feeling of 'us' versus 'them'. We deny the reality of this theory intellectually but emotionally there is something in the atmosphere.

The first way to find a remedy to a problem, or to a sickness, is to face it. The great majority of people are scared about the future of their society. 'Old' Europeans ask: what will Europe be like in 50 years, will it still be a European continent? If you speak to Muslims it's the same. They're scared of losing their identity, their principles. How, they ask, in a secular society, will I transmit my values to my children?

There are fears on both sides. You may not be paralysed by these questions but you cannot deny that people are asking them. Nor can you say to someone, 'You are wrong to be scared.'

State of deafness

We are losing reasonable approaches because we are colonised by emotions. Emotions are good at the right time, but when you are dealing with social problems you have to be reasonable to be wise. For example, after the crisis over the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed published by a Danish newspaper what we needed was reason, but we were overwhelmed by emotions and strong statements.

When we are overcome by an emotion such as fear we neither listen nor trust. Once passion is involved, the problem is not that we are not talking, but that we are not listening. There's a state of deafness. Sometimes people say to Muslims, 'What you are saying is so beautiful, maybe it's double-talk'. My answer is, 'Maybe you have double hearing'.

The reality now is that we have Western Muslims and that they are part of the solution, as are Western Jews, Christians, Buddhists and atheists. There are differences between us but also similarities and common values. So we should all be against what happened in Denmark, for example, because we know that some of those involved were just provoking the Muslims.

Multiple identity

There are new generations of young Muslims, born in countries like France and Britain, for whom Europe is home. They think in terms of 'our citizenship', 'our common belonging'. They are Muslim by religion, French or British by culture and therefore have a multiple identity. You have to listen if you want to hear these people because they are not as noisy as the suicide bombers.

Loyalty to a country doesn't mean blind support of its policies. Loyalty can also involve being able to say, 'I think what you are doing is wrong.'

Millions of people demonstrated against the war in Iraq, not only Muslims. It was not a Muslim issue but a citizenship issue. What we got was, 'It's understandable for a white British man or woman to attack the war but for a Muslim to do so is questionable.' We need true loyalty to principles, not blind loyalty to everything that is done in the name of a country. That would be hypocrisy. To be critical of my country when what it is doing is unjust is the best example of citizenship you can get. In this way, Muslims ought to speak out about issues like restrictions on Christians in Islamic-majority countries like Sudan and Malaysia.

We all need to step out of our respective intellectual ghettos. In our specific spheres we talk to people who are exactly the same as us and we say, 'I am open-minded'. That's just words. In the last week, how many people from a different cultural or religious background have you met? We live in a multicultural society but very often the reality is that we have a patchwork of communities.

Critical dialogue

Living together takes effort. Non-Muslims need to meet Muslims, read about Islam, ask questions. And Muslims should know about Britain: the constitution, the legacy, the memory. We all need to know more. There is no pluralistic society without knowledge.

Not only that, we need critical dialogue. Strong and difficult questions from both sides are essential to building trust. Asking questions out of trust will build a strong society, avoiding questions out of fear will not.

My hope for Britain is to see a national movement of local initiatives. It will not be at the government level but the local level. People building spaces of trust, working against the common enemies: ignorance, marginalisation, injustice, and a narrow understanding of religion which says, 'I am who I am because I am against you'.

If things are to change we need to work together for a reformed society. Unfortunately, it's easier to be together 'against' than together 'for'.

__Professor Tariq Ramadan__ is Visiting Professor at St Anthony's College, Oxford University. This article is based on his recent talk to a Greencoat Forum at the IofC centre in London.

Next Issue

SPECIAL ISSUE: *Globalising integrity, personalising integrity—For A Change reports from the 60th anniversary conferences at the Initiatives of Change centre in Caux, Switzerland*

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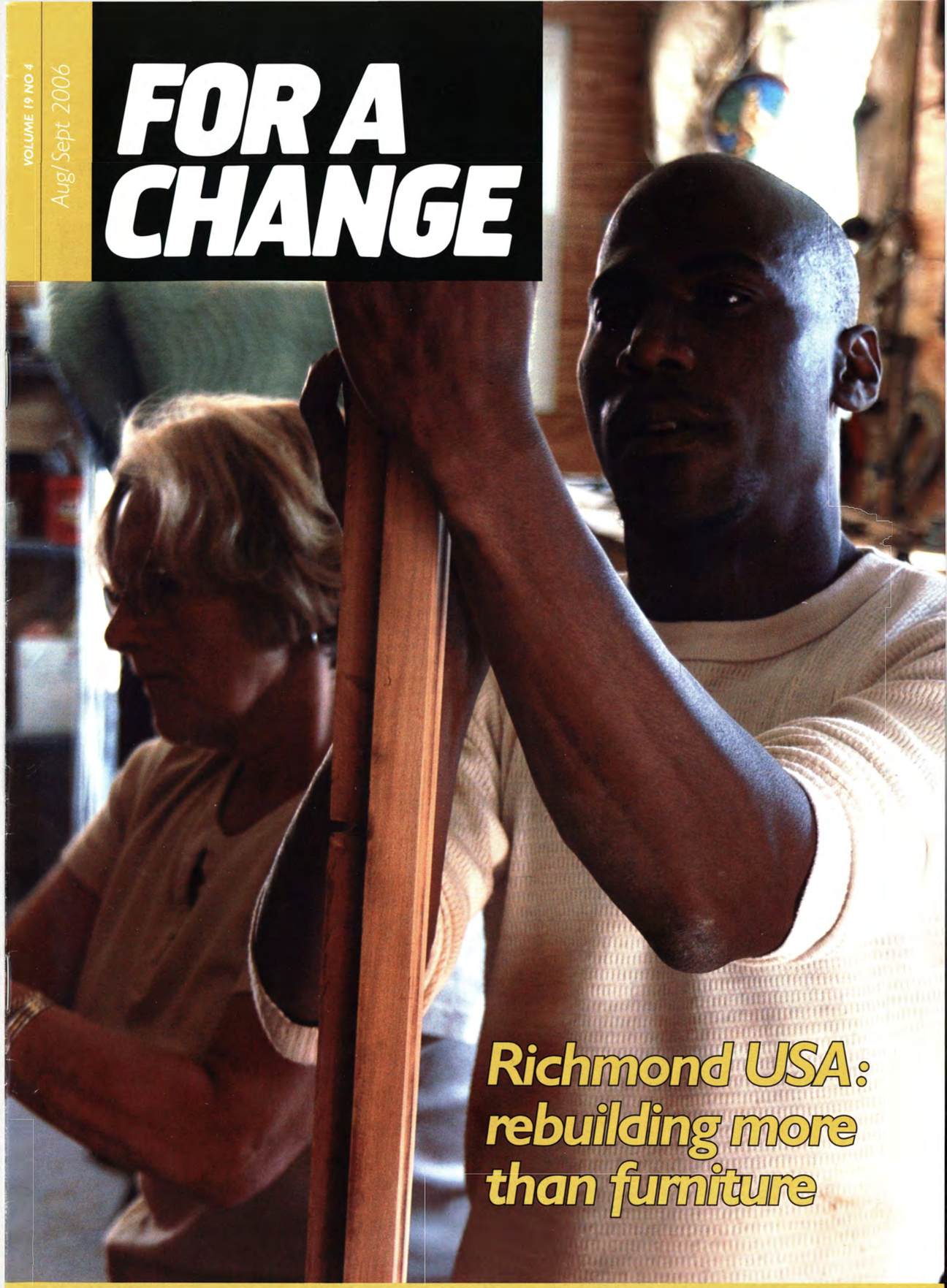
FOR A CHANGE



Richmond USA: rebuilding more than furniture

HEALING HISTORY/TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS/BUILDING COMMUNITY

EAR TO THE GROUND

FROM BEVERLEY ALMOND IN EGREMONT, MASSACHUSETTS

Fire!

Egremont is a town of 1,033 people, made up of two villages and governed by three 'Selectmen' (although right now one of them is a woman). Most of the town committees are composed of volunteers. My husband served on the Board of Health and I was a member of the Finance Committee for 12 years.

The Fire Department is manned by some 36 volunteers, eight of them emergency medical technicians. They respond to every medical emergency and road accident, as well as fires—and on one occasion to a cat stuck under a bathtub!

When one of the firemen got married, the marquee did not arrive in time, so it was arranged to have the wedding in the fire station. But when the minister and guests arrived, the fire trucks were just returning from a fire, so nothing was ready. Everyone hove to and arranged the chairs for the service.

The groom told the minister, 'If there's another call, the bride and I will get in the driver's cab, and will you please stand on the back of the truck as we take off.' The minister had a vivid picture of himself standing on the fire truck, his robes billowing in the breeze as they roared through the village. Luckily, perhaps, there was no call.

Random kindness

I recently made a purchase in a large department store. The cost was $4.25. As I had just four one dollar bills in my purse, I told the saleslady that I'd write a cheque. She promptly reached into her own pocket and plunked a 25 cent coin on the counter. 'I keep this for just such emergencies,' she said, with a smile. The man behind me agreed that this was indeed a 'random act of kindness'.

And there are many such acts in our community. Unless we are going to be away overnight, we never lock our doors. Neighbours share their garden produce and turn up with food and offers of help when anyone is sick or someone dies. When I was in hospital with a broken shoulder, some neighbours came in and cleaned the whole house!

For youth, by youth

A high school student in Great Barrington, our nearest big town, was so worried by the problem of drugs and of groups of teenagers hanging out on the streets that she started the Railroad Street Youth Project. One of her siblings had been on drugs.

The project started out by providing a place where young people could meet, but has grown amazingly and is now run by a staff of young people.

They help under-25s with anything they need: finding a job or somewhere to live, sorting out problems with parents or friends through mediation, going to court or finding a lawyer. They have started a nursery for promoting native plants, produced plays and organised dances.

Greening up

There are many Americans like us who feel that our country has 'blotted its copy book' around the world because of our arrogance and greed.

Many of us lament our government's flagrant disregard for the environment. Recently a weak bill with no teeth in it was passed to cut down on poisonous gases—presumably as a sop to those who are valiantly fighting for clean air. Now some districts are beginning to seek out ways to do this locally.

One way to solve the problem has evolved in our area of Massachusetts, under the name of 'Green up with greener watts'. For a minimal increase in charges, residents can sign up for electricity created by windpower, low-impact hydro-power and biomass, thereby cutting down on the use of fossil fuels.

Pencil power

The US is seen as a high-tech nation. A friend called his doctor's office recently to give him a number. The young lady who answered the phone told him he could use email.

'I don't have email,' he said. 'Do you have paper and a pencil?'

'Yes.'

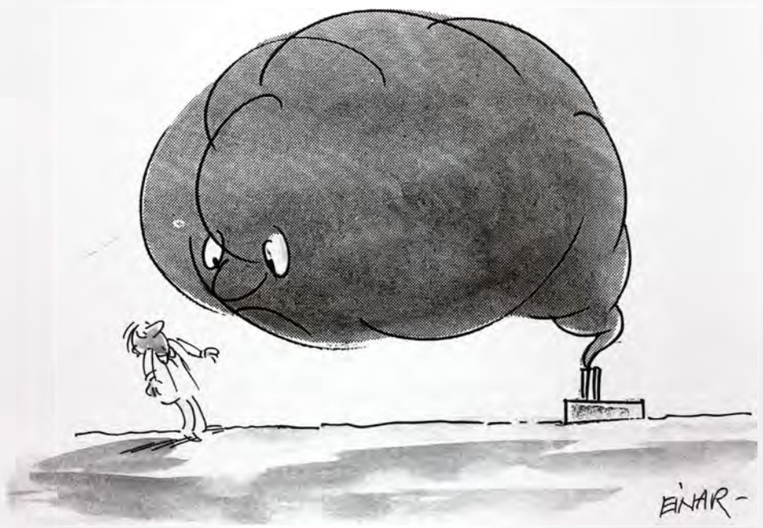
'Then please just write down 78.'

'Oh,' exclaimed the astonished young lady. 'That's quicker than email!'

Editor's note

This article arrived by post, with a covering letter headed 'rediscover the joys of handwritten letters'—and the following verse:

Email rushes to and fro,
Since paper letters seem too slow.
But we prefer the status quo,
This note was sent by escargot.



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Getting down to reality

OK, I draw the line at *Big Brother* – and I'm ashamed of my sneaking weakness for *I'm a Celebrity, get me out of here!*, in which a group of celebs eat creepy crawlies and brave snakes in the Australian jungle.

But I have to admit to having been hooked on two recent – and very different – strands of reality TV.

The Apprentice pitted 14 would-be tycoons against each other in a series of challenges designed to test their suitability for a job with the British multimillionaire businessman Sir Alan Sugar. At the end of each programme one contestant was 'fired'. The participants displayed considerable enterprise, creativity and ingenuity in their attempts to avoid this fate – and, at times, jaw-dropping degrees of nastiness.

A huge contrast then to *The Monastery*, which followed five men as they spent 40 days with the Benedictine monks of Worth Abbey, joining in their routine of prayer, work and silence. 'They were asked to listen continuously and deeply to themselves, to other people and to God,' writes the Abbot, Christopher Jamison. 'Forty days later, this profound listening had reshaped their hearts and minds.'

And, as discovered by a follow-up programme, the effects lasted. One of the men had returned to an earlier aspiration to become a priest; another, an ex-offender from Northern Ireland, was visiting prisons; while a third had given up his job making trailers for sex chatlines. His new beliefs, he said, had created problems for him: 'I know when I'm doing wrong whereas before I was oblivious. So I have to forgive myself and accept myself, which I do by asking for forgiveness and acceptance from God.'

The monks were astonished and reaffirmed by the response. Forty thousand people visited their website in the month following the first programme and hundreds of people signed up to come on retreat, testifying to the huge spiritual thirst of our age.

Now, as we go to press, it's the women's turn. *The Convent* follows a driven career woman, a recovering alcoholic, a free-living atheist and a mother of three as they spend 40 days with the Poor Clares, an enclosed order of nuns. For them too, the onion-layers of armour and pretence are beginning to peel away, as they discover the courage to be their true selves – giving 'Reality TV' a whole new level of meaning.

Mary Lean

MARY LEAN

email an article to a friend: visit www.forachange.co.uk

FOR A CHANGE

For A Change is about change, how to make it happen and how to live it. We believe that what happens inside people has an effect on the world around them. At the heart of global change lies change in the human heart.

We draw our material from a wide range of sources, including Initiatives of Change. We give a voice to people all over the world who are making a difference. We invite our readers to join them. Your stories are our stories.

Initiatives of Change

Initiatives of Change (formerly Moral Re-Armament) works for moral and spiritual renewal in all areas of life. It was initiated by Frank Buchman, an American who believed that change in the world must start in individuals.

Initiatives of Change is open to all. Its starting point is the readiness of each person to make what they know of God and eternal moral values central in their lives. This personal commitment to search for God's will forms the basis for creative initiative and common action: standards of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love help to focus the challenge of personal and global change.

These ideas have given rise to an international community in more than 70 countries, working in such areas as reconciliation; tackling the root causes of corruption, poverty and social exclusion; and strengthening the moral and spiritual foundations for democracy.

AUG/SEPT 2006

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FAC is closing at the end of 2006. The December/January issue will be our last.

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FOR A CHANGE

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Answering Dresden's call

Philip Boobbyer discovers how the rebuilding of an historic German church, destroyed by British bombers during World War II, is healing old wounds.

THE DESTRUCTION of Dresden by Allied bombers in 1945 has become a worldwide symbol of the horrors of 'carpet bombing'. But could Dresden now become known as a focal point of reconciliation? The answer is 'yes', according to Alan Russell, co-founder and Chairman of the Dresden Trust. This remarkable initiative, run from an office in Russell's back garden, has helped to pioneer new attitudes and understanding between Britain and Germany.

On the night of 13/14 February 1945, more than 4,500 tons of high explosives and incendiary devices were dropped on Dresden, capital of the German state of Saxony and known before the war as 'Florence on the Elbe'. A terrible firestorm resulted, creating temperatures of up to 1000°C in parts of the city. Current estimates suggest that 35,000–40,000 people were killed; and at least eight square miles of the city were totally devastated. The areas of strategic and military significance, like the transport system, were left relatively untouched.

The strategy of bombing German cities owed much to Arthur Harris, chief of Britain's Bomber Command. Harris believed that 'area bombing' would erode the morale of the German population and hasten the end of the war; the earlier strategy of attacking economic and industrial targets had not proved very successful. The public was generally supportive of the strategy, partly in reaction to the Blitz, the German air-raids of 1940/41 which killed 30,000 Londoners and destroyed the centre of Coventry. But there were doubters too (for example George Bell, then Bishop of Chichester), who felt such methods of waging war were morally indefensible. After the bombing, and in subsequent decades, many others became uneasy about the ethics of the raid.

In 1953, Russell was doing military service in Germany, a year before going up to Oxford University. (His subsequent career involved spells in the Colonial and Foreign Offices, and the European Commission.) He got to know a German student, Gunter, and asked him to explain the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Gunter acknowledged that the killing of the Jews had been a great wrong, but countered, 'And what about Dresden?'

The question resurfaced in Russell's mind in 1992, when a visit to Dresden by the Queen failed to satisfy the desire of some Germans for a statement of regret by Britain for the bombing. At the same time, a controversy arose over the decision to erect a statue to 'Bomber' Harris near Britain's Ministry of Defence in London.

Russell was not against acknowledging the lives of Britain's wartime pilots, roughly 55,000 of whom had been killed, but felt that the suffering inflicted by the aerial bombing campaign should also be remembered. In this context, Russell and some others felt 'morally obliged' to do something to 'atone' for the bombing of Dresden.

SOME KIND OF ATONEMENT WAS NEEDED

When Russell talks of 'atonement' he means that people on different sides should be willing to recognise that things were done in the names of their countries that should not have been done—even given the exigencies of war. 'Nations must be able to look critically at what has been done in their names in order to have the right to examine what other countries have done.' Reconciliation, too, is a central element in Russell's vision; he calls it a 'profound, reflective, long-term process, requiring justice, freedom, forgiveness and love'.

Russell rejects any suggestion that the Allied bombing campaign, with its aim of ending the war, was morally equivalent to the actions of the Nazi regime that led to the war in the first place; the bombing of Dresden was not the equivalent of Auschwitz. He also thinks that Harris and Churchill were sincere in their belief that mass bombing was a way of shortening the war.

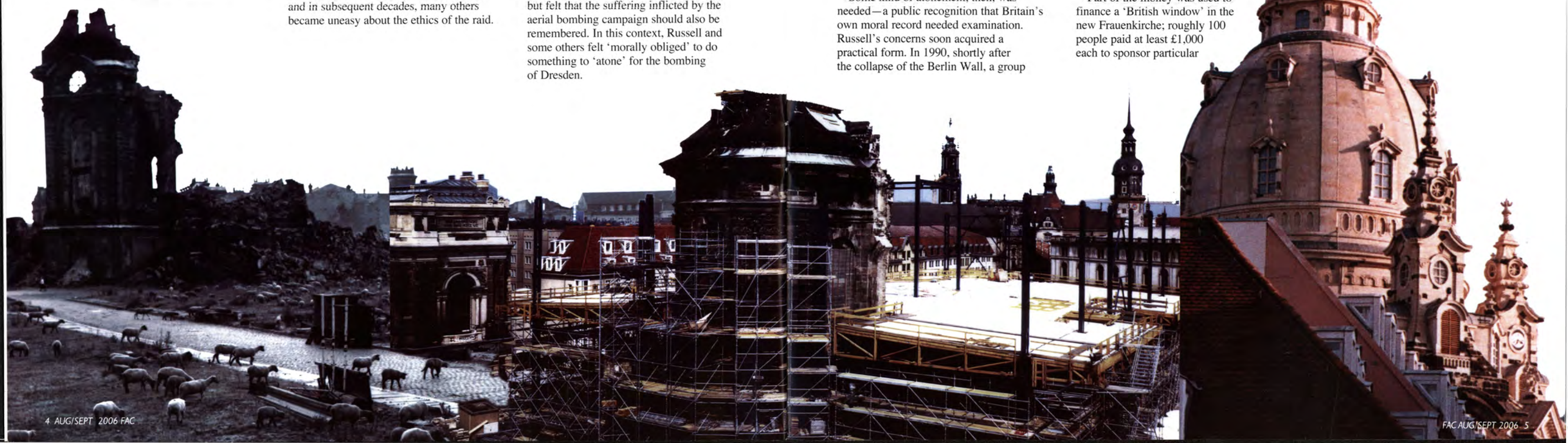
In spite of this, he believes that, according to the canons of war existing in 1939, the Dresden raid was morally wrong and had something criminal about it. Following Edinburgh historian Donald Bloxham, he distinguishes between 'war crimes' and 'crimes against humanity'; in his view the Dresden raid belonged in the first category rather than the second. 'It wasn't wrong to bomb Dresden, but it was wrong to bomb it in the manner in which we did. We deliberately bombed a historic city. I personally can't justify it.'

Some kind of atonement, then, was needed—a public recognition that Britain's own moral record needed examination. Russell's concerns soon acquired a practical form. In 1990, shortly after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, a group of distinguished Dresdeners issued an international appeal now known as the 'Call from Dresden'. They called for financial aid for the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady), which had been destroyed in the bombing. The Frauenkirche was a famously beautiful baroque church built between 1726 and 1743, with a bell-shaped dome that rivalled those of St Peter's in Rome and the Duomo in Florence. In response to the call, groups were formed inside Germany to raise funds for the reconstruction project; foreign support groups were also established, of which the Dresden Trust, set up in August 1993, was one.

The Frauenkirche project gave the Trust a material focus for its attempts to foster British-German reconciliation. Through an exhibition that toured Britain from 1995 to 1998, concerts in various cities, and high-profile dinners (in such venues as St James's Palace and the Palace of Westminster), Russell and his fellow trustees brought the history of Dresden and the needs of the Frauenkirche to the attention of the British public. They soon discovered that there were many people in the UK who had a love of German culture and wanted to contribute to a project that could enhance British-German relations. Almost £600,000 was raised in the next few years. In all, more than 2,000 people and nearly 100 companies and charitable trusts contributed, and many more anonymously.

Part of the money was used to finance a 'British window' in the new Frauenkirche; roughly 100 people paid at least £1,000 each to sponsor particular stones around the reconstructed window. Sometimes there were profound personal stories behind these gifts. For example, Richard Murray from Horsham in the south of England had been much angered by German wartime bombing. In 1957 he had found freedom from his hatred and had 'apologised in tears' to some Germans for his bitterness. Now, in 1997, he gave half of a legacy he had inherited.

The money was also used to pay for the making of a new orb and cross for the dome of the Frauenkirche. A technical committee studied a report on the old cross that had been recovered in the ruins of the destroyed church, and commissioned a company of silversmiths in Blackfriars, London, to create a new one. It was erected in 2004 as part of the final phase of the reconstruction project. The Frauenkirche was formally re-consecrated in Ocober 2005 in a service reported all over the world.



IT IS IMPORTANT THAT PEOPLE NOT ONLY LEARN ABOUT HISTORY, BUT THAT THEY LEARN FROM IT AND ALLOW IT TO TOUCH THEIR PERSONAL LIVES

From 1999 onwards, the Trust—prompted by Dresdeners themselves—began to focus increasingly on cultural work. Books were published, including *Dresden, a city reborn* (Berg Publishers, 2001), which introduced readers to the city's history. The Trust gave scholarships to young people from Dresden and Saxony to attend schools in the UK and young Britons to visit Saxony. Five German journalists were funded to base for a few months at the Reuters Centre in Oxford. In December 2005 the London Bach Choir gave two concerts—to great acclaim—in the Frauenkirche. Aided by support groups from all over Germany, the Trust is planting a British-German Friendship Garden in the UK's National Arboretum in Staffordshire.

The Dresden Trust has helped to change attitudes and create understanding at a deep level. It has affected people's professional lives; young British stonemasons worked with colleagues from Germany, France and Spain in fashioning stones for the church. New friendships have been created. Russell stated in 2006: 'The hand of friendship which the Trust sought to extend was immediately, warmly and firmly grasped and the feelings of deep sorrow and remorse to which the Trust has sought to give voice have been reciprocated in more than full measure.'

People have been challenged to think more deeply about their histories. Robert Lee, a British prisoner of war in Dresden who was required to help clean up the city after the raid, stated: 'Seeing Dresden before it was destroyed was one of those precious experiences that changes one's life. The fact that the old Dresden enlightened me is inseparable from the tragedy that I had to witness. It is important that people not only learn about history, but that they learn from it and allow it to touch their personal lives.'

The Patron of the Trust and of the British-German Association, the Duke of Kent, writes: 'To be able to share in the pain of others and—in a small way—work with them in building reconciliation into friendship and cooperation is at once healing and fulfilling.'

Germans too have been impressed and moved by the work of the Trust. For example, Rolf-Alexander Thieke, a pastor from Berlin and enthusiast about Britain, believes that it reflects a clear will to create the kind of permanent reconciliation that has been missing since 1945. He also believes that it is challenging stereotypes and dismantling distorted images, such as caricatures of Germans as World War I soldiers (complete with spiked helmets) which tend to appear in the British press.

Russell's own love of German culture comes across in his speeches, touching hearts as well as minds. Speaking in the new Frauenkirche in 2000, Russell stated that 'in human—and in state—relationships, unless we can understand and empathise with the other person's/people's point of view, nothing works'. Growing up in North London in the 'Anglo-Catholic' Christian tradition, he said, he was able to 'absorb a little of two other great traditions—the German and the Jewish—and learn to love them both'.

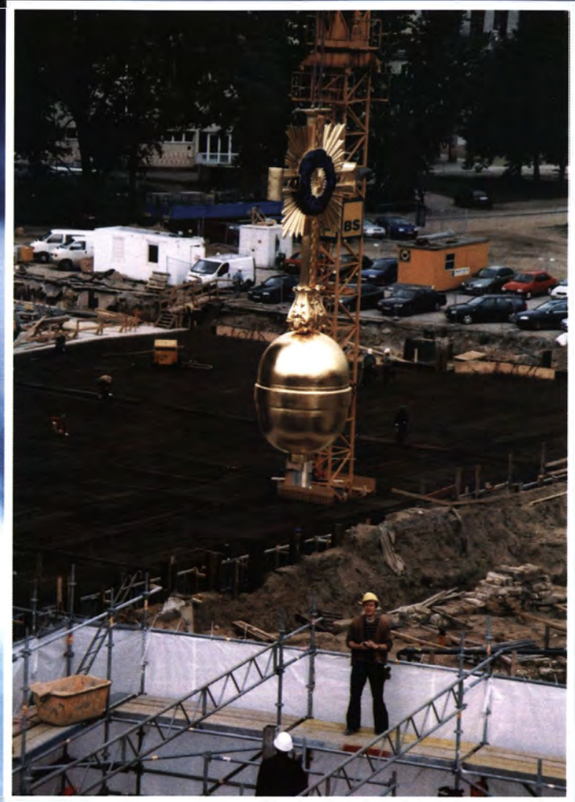
Many of his speeches are in German. From the first, Russell and his fellow trustees were determined to conduct their correspondence with Dresden in German; this was 'part of the gesture' they wished to make. Consequently, in his late 60s, Russell went to a technical school in Chichester to learn the language. In March 2006, in recognition of his contribution to British-German relations, Russell was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Medal of Honour of the city of Dresden. Speaking to a Dresden audience after receiving the latter, Russell declared that Dresden, Saxony and Germany had a vital role to play in building a peaceful Europe, and that Dresden itself, with its unique history, could give a lead in the reconciliation of peoples and the strengthening of faith.

Russell believes that Germany coped with its history surprisingly well after the war. He notes that in 1945 it had the task of rebuilding a sense of national cohesion against the background of a catastrophic national failure; and it largely succeeded. It is so easy to see German history in terms of the militarism that seized hold of the country between 1870 and 1945. By looking further back into Germany's past, and looking forward to what could lie ahead, Russell offers a different perspective, one that provides a bold and exciting vision of what Germany could contribute to the world in the 21st century.

There is a religious motivation behind Russell's work—as indeed there is in many of those in Dresden who have worked on the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche. He senses that he has been called by God to do what he is doing, indeed that his work for the Trust is the most important thing he has done with his life. He comments: 'Every individual is called to make his contribution in a particular setting.' He says that the work of the Trust has been a great 'satisfaction' to him personally; it has given him a sense of purpose; an initiative that he thought would last for two to three years has now lasted for nearly 15 and will clearly continue to engage his energies for some time to come.

The Dresden Trust has not been the only example of a British link with Dresden; the city of Coventry formed a twinning arrangement with Dresden in 1959, and Coventry Cathedral's Ministry of Reconciliation has fostered lasting links between the two cities. Russell describes the Trust's work as 'just a small drop in the bucket'. Even if true, it is still a remarkable example of what a creative personal initiative can achieve. The Trust has been able to contribute to the rebuilding of a great church, while at the same time encouraging a renewal of British-German relations; the material and the spiritual have gone hand in hand. Sometimes, it seems, something good and important for humanity can be created from the destruction of the past—if the imagination and conviction are there.

Philip Boobbyer is Senior Lecturer in Modern European History at the University of Kent.



PHOTOS SUPPLIED BY THE DRESDEN TRUST

Top: Alan Russell (centre) with hosts in Dresden
Bottom: The dome of the rebuilt Frauenkirche

Above: The new orb is hoisted into position

DAVID CHANNER

MARGARET JACKSON

Margaret's secret war

Margaret Jackson** was in on the birth of European unity. She talks to **Michael Smith.

FOR OVER 50 YEARS Margaret Jackson lived with a secret. Only recently, since the lifting of a Foreign Office ban, has she been free to talk about her wartime service in the Special Operations Executive (SOE), the clandestine force set up in 1940 to wage guerrilla warfare in all the Nazi-occupied countries. She is one of the last surviving members of its headquarters staff in London, where she was secretary to its mainspring, Brigadier (later Major-General) Colin Gubbins.

This experience, and her work after the war with the organisation which administered US economic aid to Europe's devastated nations, left Jackson with a passion for European unity which still fires her in her 80s. She is distressed by the scepticism with which many in Britain view the European Commission, believing that they underestimate the miracle of reconciliation on which it was founded.

In 1940, three years after Margaret graduated in Modern Languages from London University, her elder sister, Anne, who worked in the War Office, heard that Gubbins was looking for a French-speaking secretary. Margaret got the job and that March joined Gubbins in Paris where he headed the mission set up to liaise with the resistance movements run by the Polish and Czech authorities in exile. When he was transferred to Norway, she remained in Paris, working for the acting head of the mission.

On 9 May, German armoured divisions broke through at Sedan and advanced rapidly across northern France. Paris was declared an 'open city' and the French government withdrew to Poitiers. Jackson and another secretary, Margaret Clayton, escaped back to London on a hospital ship which sailed from St Malo on 17 June carrying wounded British soldiers. The next day, an unknown Major, Charles de Gaulle, appealed to all French men and women to rally to him in London; and on 22 June the French government agreed to an armistice with Germany and surrendered.

Hope of freedom

Gubbins was now posted to train secret units of the Home Guard, in anticipation of a German invasion of Britain. Margaret Jackson continued as his secretary. They set up headquarters in a country house in Wiltshire, in whose stables recruits were trained in the use of Molotov Cocktails and other weapons against invading tanks, as the Battle of Britain raged in the skies over southern England.

The Special Operations Executive was charged by Churchill to 'set Europe ablaze' through sabotage and subversion. 'Gubbins saw SOE's role as part of the military strategy that would essentially give people in the occupied countries the hope of freedom,' says Jackson. Resistance, as patriots fighting on the Allied side, would 'restore their honour'.

> SOE AGENTS HAD TO MAKE A RESOUNDING BANG AND EITHER GET AWAY OR BE CAPTURED AND KILLED

The Secret Intelligence Service (better known as MI6) regarded SOE as amateurs. 'An action service was not seen as compatible with an intelligence service,' says Jackson. 'Whenever they had a disaster they could lie low. But SOE agents had to make a resounding bang and expect either to get away or be captured and killed. The war for priorities within Whitehall was almost as fierce as the war against the Germans.'

Most SOE agents were refugees from the occupied countries, recruited by their own governments in exile. They were trained in Scotland, in such skills as parachute jumps, wireless telegraphy, the use of guns and explosives, unarmed combat and 'silent' killing. One of SOE's best-known sabotage operations was in Norway, where the destruction of the entire stock of heavy water at the Vemork hydroelectric plant led Germany to abandon research on the atom bomb.

SOE operated in Asia as well as Europe, and the risks faced by its agents—and by the resistance networks they supported—were huge. Of the 470 agents sent into France, for instance, around 200 were killed, most of them executed on Hitler's orders.

Jackson's role was to coordinate the secretaries' work. Security was paramount: papers had to be locked up or shredded every night. Gubbins was an inspiring boss, 'a man of integrity and energy, a born leader. Faces would brighten when he came in.'

Marshall Plan

Jackson's internationalism stemmed in part from her childhood in Argentina, where her father was Manager of the British Atlas Light and Power Company in Santa Fe. Her parents were members of the Church of Scotland and taught their four daughters 'to live their faith'. At the age of 12, Margaret was sent to school in England.

Her first job after university and secretarial college was in the typing pool of BBC radio news. The work was excruciating—'If you made a mistake you had to correct five carbon copies'. She moved on to the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House and followed its library to Oxford when it was evacuated at the outbreak of war. Then in March 1940, she joined Gubbins in Paris.

When SOE was disbanded in 1946, Jackson, aged 28, was awarded the MBE. She joined the Allied Commission for Austria in Vienna, as PA to Jack Nichols, the head of the British Political Division. The job involved taking minutes of the quadripartite meetings. It was the beginning of the Cold War and her experience there, and then at the Organisation of European Economic Co-operation (OEEC, now OECD) in Paris, gave her a keen sense of the ideological forces at work.

The OEEC, where Jackson was a deputy secretary of the council for nearly four years, implemented the Marshall Plan–'a most satisfying and thrilling sequel to the war'. Ministerial meetings were attended by such delegates as the British politician Hugh Gaitskell, the future UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and the French Foreign Minister Robert Schumann. She remembers those years as 'unforgettable'.

Returning to Britain in 1952, she spent a term at a Christian college. But she found the emphasis there too narrow and when Jack Nichols asked her if she wanted to do anything about the Cold War, she leapt at the idea. She joined Information Research, a new Foreign Office department, and four years later was posted to Melbourne, Australia, as an information officer.

There she met a family involved with Moral Re-Armament (MRA), the forerunner of Initiatives of Change. It was a period of industrial strife and class war among the dockside workers on whom Australia's international trade depended. She was intrigued to hear of diehard communists whose motives had been changed by contact with MRA. And she found herself rethinking her own values.

'I had centred my life on ambition, being admired, captivating people and doing my best to attract glamorous young men,' she says. She felt compelled to write a confessional letter home to her mother saying that she wasn't 'God's woman that she expected me to be'. Her honesty led to 'a wonderful sense of God's presence'.

Full of enthusiasm, she invited the wife of a visiting British politician to see an MRA film. He complained to the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, that the British Information Service in Melbourne had a 'political member of staff'. The UK High Commissioner in Canberra duly summoned Jackson and told her to break with MRA. She refused, on the grounds that her involvement was in her own time and at her own expense. The matter was dropped. However, later she resigned to return to Europe.

Anchor

Back in London, she took a succession of secretarial jobs, including nine years as PA to the Secretary of the Malaysian Natural Rubber Producers Research Association, before retiring in 1978, aged 62.

It was just before the 'Winter of Discontent', when public sector workers went on strike and garbage stacked up in the streets. Inflation ran at around 20 per cent. Jackson plunged into local politics in Southwark, South London. She served as a Conservative councillor for eight years, building friendships and respect across the political divide, and became a member of the executive committee of the Southwark Race and Equality Council (SREC). In 2004, at a public ceremony in Southwark, the Mayor of London presented her with a certificate from the SREC 'in recognition of her life-long services to the Black and Ethnic Minority community in the London Borough of Southwark'.

Jackson now lives in a Methodist home in Croydon—her able mind as active as ever. She is glad her wartime recollections have found a home at London's Imperial War Museum. 'God has been my anchor through good times and bad ever since those days in Melbourne,' she says. 'Now my age and weaknesses bring home the power of prayer, and what it is to keep handing over the day to God.' ■

people making a difference

Left: Jair Hernández Barona talks at Vauxhall Gardens Community Centre, London
Centre: The House of Youth parades through Cali
Right: Training session on human rights

PHOTO E_BERON@HOTMAIL.COM

Standing up for the ghetto

JAIR HERNÁNDEZ BARONA looks around the office in London where he is going to talk about his work as a human rights activist, then he points to his bag and observes: 'This is my office, it's all I take on the streets'.

He was born in Cali, one of the biggest cities in Colombia, and has lived in Comuna 16 for many years. Life expectancy in the ghettos in this district of Cali is around 22 years.

Hernández's own childhood was marked by poverty and, despite the fact that he does not smoke or drink, he had to sell marijuana in order to pay for his studies. When he joined the Grutela theatre group as an Afro-Caribbean dancer, his life took a different course. The group shaped him socially and politically and it was with them that he visited Comuna 16 for the first time. As a result, he founded La Casa de la Juventud de la Comuna 16 (The House of Youth of Comuna 16), which runs projects for children, women, indigenous communities and 'high risk' youngsters.

Drug trafficking permeates every area of society. Most of the homicides committed are directly linked to disputes and vendettas between drug gangs fighting for control of the cocaine market and the trade routes.

Hernández's main passion is working with teenagers and young adults, who are routinely exposed to drugs, delinquency, street violence and police corruption. Alternatives are limited. The government does not offer accessible educational programmes where they can develop artistic or other skills. Public activities such as improvised street concerts and break-dance gatherings are repressed.

> THE HUMAN RIGHT THAT IS MORE ABUSED IN COLOMBIA THAN ANY OTHER IS THE RIGHT TO LIVE

The common name for the youths who live in ghettos is *desechables* or 'disposable people': the police can kill, torture or beat them because their lives do not have any value. 'Many human rights are abused in Colombia,' says Hernández, 'but the one that is more abused than any other is the right to live.'

He works not only with gang members informing them about their rights, but also with police officers. 'The police are ignorant of what they can and can't do in their profession; they ask me: "Why do you defend delinquents and not us?"' They assume youngsters are delinquents just by the way they dress; and they feel they can bully them. Sometimes they take young guys to the police station and produce false documents saying that they found them with drugs. Later, they ask their families to pay for them to be released,' says Hernández.

La Casa de la Juventud offers spaces where young boys and girls can create a community life and show off their talents as rappers, hip-hoppers and graffiti artists. Zona Marginal, now a popular band in the underground Latin American music scene, was born in La Casa de la Juventud.

Because of his work, Hernández has been threatened by paramilitary forces and some years ago he was forced to flee to Switzerland. But he did not stay away from Cali for long.

Hernández does not have a salary because working in a normal place would not allow him to be available 24 hours a day. Instead, he is supported by his wife, who is a nurse, and from time to time he gets some remuneration from international NGOs. One can hardly imagine that such a man has to be accompanied by three bodyguards when he works.

When he visits Switzerland he enjoys hiking. 'Sometimes I go out on my own and I cry and cry. In Colombia I'm like a cup into which people pour all their problems. Here I can take distance and give myself some time to reflect.'

But as he says: 'I'm not interested in staying in Switzerland eating chocolate.'

Andrea Cabrera Luna

Left: India I Care at a school in Allahabad

> INDIA I CARE IS LIKE A WATCHDOG INSIDE ME, IT MAKES ME REFLECT ON WHAT CONTRIBUTION I CAN MAKE TOWARDS A BETTER INDIA

India I Care

IF ONLY WE LIVED IN A WORLD where people didn't drop litter, tell lies, cheat... but we do. In India, however, a group of people involved with Initiatives of Change (IofC) have launched a national campaign to turn the tide against corruption, injustice, poverty and disregard for the environment.

India I Care (IIC) seeks to replenish what one might call the 'Character Bank of India'. The campaign aims to encourage every individual to make an honest deposit (a pledge in the form of a decision or action) in the larger interest of the country.

People are encouraged to listen to their inner voice (or conscience) while making their decision, for example, 'I will not give or accept bribes,' or 'I will not cheat in exams,' or 'I will keep my surroundings clean'. The idea is that slowly and surely, each deposit will add to this unique bank and shape India's future.

The campaign aims to reach out to different sections of society but particularly political leaders, business people, media and youth. Some of the questions IIC wishes to raise are: What kind of India do we want? If I am not part of the solution, am I not part of the problem? The following examples illustrate the personal steps some have already taken:

Sarla sold her apartment in a plush Mumbai locality and insisted on collecting her payment by cheque. Had she accepted part payment in cash there would have been a difference between the property's value on paper and the actual payment received. People do this to evade tax.

Neha, a student from Jamshedpur, refused to accept chits of answers given to each student during exams so that the school maintained its pass record.

Pilu, a Jharkhand-based villager who brewed country liquor realised he was supplying poison to his fellow people. He announced at a village meeting that he would stop. A small-scale industrialist present offered him employment so that he could provide for his family.

These stories show how some are silently making their contribution to India's moral capital through selfless acts of courage and integrity. Many believe these streams of goodness will dry out unless each person pitches in.

Unlike a monetary bank, no withdrawals are allowed from the Character Bank of India. Rhea from Mumbai drives home the point: 'Be like a stamp, stick till you deliver!' Mayur from Baramati remarks: 'India I Care is like a watchdog inside me, which alerts me every time I am about to go wrong. It shuts my mouth when I am about to blame others. It makes me reflect on what contribution I can make towards a better India.'

So far the campaign has had some encouraging outcomes. At a school in Allahabad, students adopted the IIC theme for their Republic Day celebrations and shared their decisions.

The IofC leadership training group, Action for Life 3, carried the IIC message across different parts of India. After a presentation at a college in Coimbatore, they helped students clean up the litter from a music show the previous night.

A session on IIC featuring songs, skits and sharing of deposits is now part of every programme held at India's IofC centre in Panchgani. And a website for online deposits and other initiatives are on the anvil.

Twenty-one spirited men and women participated in the Mumbai Marathon Dream Run, raising funds for the IIC campaign. As someone once said, 'When people change, nations change.' The marathon has just begun! Any runners? And that's a question for people outside India too.

Harish Rao

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Harnessing the power of Boaz and Ruth

***Karen Elliott Greisdorf** discovers a programme which is revitalising old furniture, broken lives and a whole neighbourhood.*

Top left: Boaz & Ruth graduate Kelvin Coley (far right) leads a tour of the programme's projects
Above: Executive Director Martha Rollins and graduate Veronica Kerns

KELVIN COLEY MEANS BUSINESS. Not a customer comes in nor an item goes out of the showroom he manages without his notice. The 4,500 square foot storefront in Richmond, Virginia, USA, showcases the revenue-driven business initiatives of an innovative non-profit, Boaz & Ruth. 'A good day for me at Boaz & Ruth is giving a tour of everything and having everyone on the tour decide they want to stay and shop,' says Coley.

Boaz & Ruth is based in Highland Park, an area of Richmond, Virginia, which has a history of crime and urban decay. Its vision has three parts: to provide job training for ex-offenders and people in recovery from substance abuse; to revitalise retail businesses in a depressed neighbourhood; and to nurture cross-cultural connectedness in a city well known for its role in the history of the slave trade.

Eric Hunter, President of the three-year-old Highland Park Merchants Association, has lived in Highland Park for close to 40 years. He remembers when it was home to a thriving business corridor with grocery stores, banks and entertainment venues.

'Highland Park was really the first true suburb within the City of Richmond,' says Hunter. 'But with white flight (the voluntary relocation of white residents to avoid integration) further out to the counties, a good part of the revenue left.' With less capital being earned and spent in the neighborhood, it became known more for crime and boarded-up homes than as a commercial destination.

From the late 1980s, the Highland Park Community Development Corporation (HPCDC) worked to reverse this trend, helping over 400 families to buy their own homes and assisting hundreds more with home repairs. The CDC's Founding Executive Director, Ellen Robertson, saw house values double. But she knew more was needed; establishing a strong economic base was 'absolutely critical'.

She approached an acquaintance, Martha Rollins, the owner of an antique store in an upscale neighbourhood less than five miles—and a world—away from Highland Park. For over 20 years, Rollins had carried what she calls a 'God-given thought' to start a furniture refinishing shop that would offer training to people in recovery from substance abuse or imprisonment. As its trainees, or apprentices as they came to be known, gave new life to well-worn furniture, they would develop the life skills needed to get and keep a job and the spiritual growth to sustain a purpose-driven life.

Robertson held a lease on an old firehouse in Highland Park and suggested that Rollins launch her idea there. Rollins turned her down because she felt that the neighbourhood wasn't prosperous or safe enough to establish a profitable foothold. But when her antique store received a donation of a house-full of furniture, she needed somewhere to put it. She accepted Robertson's offer. Almost a year later, in November 2002, when an abandoned retail space became available, Boaz & Ruth was born.

Boaz & Ruth's first year budget totalled $150,000. Today it is about $600,000, reflecting an increase in the number of apprentices, staff and programmes. The income from Boaz & Ruth's businesses, all run by apprentices, has grown as well, consistently contributing a third of the budget. The initiative is faith-based, as suggested by the names of its projects. In addition to Parable Restoration, which refinishes furniture, and the Harvest Store, which sells antiques and gently-used household items, other enterprises include Diamond Café & Catering and Mountain Movers, a furniture moving and removal service. Apprentices also learn construction skills by renovating abandoned houses, which are then sold for a profit. In the coming year, the firehouse will be converted to hold a restaurant and individual commercial spaces for small businesses started by graduating apprentices and Highland Park residents.

Veronica Kerns was one of the first four ex-offenders to become an apprentice. In between working with Rollins on the writing of policy and the rehabilitation of the building, Kerns and the other apprentices took on-site classes in everything from anger management and core beliefs to computers and healthy families. Weekly family meetings were led by volunteer Bonnie Dowdy. 'We learned we had put ourselves in boxes and limited ourselves,' says Kerns. 'Now I know that I am only restricted by my own mind.' She now works for Boaz & Ruth, with responsibility for tracking grant funding from federal sources and for selling items through the online auction site eBay.

Pat Asch, Executive Director of the Jackson Foundation went on an early tour of Boaz & Ruth. 'I know what's good, creative and well managed, and I saw that in Boaz & Ruth,' she says. Her foundation gave a number of seed grants, which Rollins used to raise funding from other organisations.

Former corporate executive Don Cowles sees Boaz & Ruth as unique because it 'recruits talented associates whom other businesses ignore' (because they are ex-offenders) and gives priority to their development.

'Sometimes prison is a tool to get people to notice,' says Rollins. 'We encourage the apprentices to claim their past, embrace it and not be embarrassed by it. They've been released from prison, but the future is really about releasing their gifts.'

Kelvin Coley describes his profession prior to prison and discovering Boaz & Ruth as 'jack of all trades and a master of none'. While his background was in building, he really wanted to try his hand at sales. Boaz & Ruth gave him that opportunity.

'When Kelvin came here he was withdrawn and in a shell,' says Rosa Jiggetts, a longtime activist and something of a godmother to the Boaz & Ruth operation. 'Then he grabbed onto Martha's skirt tails and learned what it would take to run this showroom.'

The venture's name is drawn from the Old Testament story, where Boaz, the wealthy landowner who has more than he needs, enables Ruth, a new arrival in his country who has less than she needs, to survive by gleaning the grain dropped by harvesters in his fields. 'Boaz' is the 'wealth sharer,' represented both by the customer base and future employers of the apprentices; 'Ruth' represents those who need training and assistance as they move towards self-sufficiency.

A variety of social programmes connect the Boazes and Ruths of Richmond, diverse in terms of both race and class. The roles often shift as visitors are inspired by the energy, spirituality and courage shown by the apprentices.

The initiative breaks down barriers by encouraging people from the richer parts of the city to shop in small businesses in the poorest areas and to draw together at social events. John Moeser, Visiting Fellow at the Center for Civic Engagement at the University of Richmond (VA), sees this as a model. 'It is easily replicable,' he says. 'The fear that grips so many inner-city neighbourhoods in Richmond can be overcome by people of faith locking arms, celebrating life and courageously building new communities in the midst of crime and decline.'

Ellen Robertson, now a Richmond City Councilwoman, welcomes the renewed interest in Highland Park's economic potential, which Boaz & Ruth has stimulated, and is pressing in the Council for the structural improvements that will nurture this. 'This is about growing a social fabric rather than strictly the exchange of the dollar,' she says.

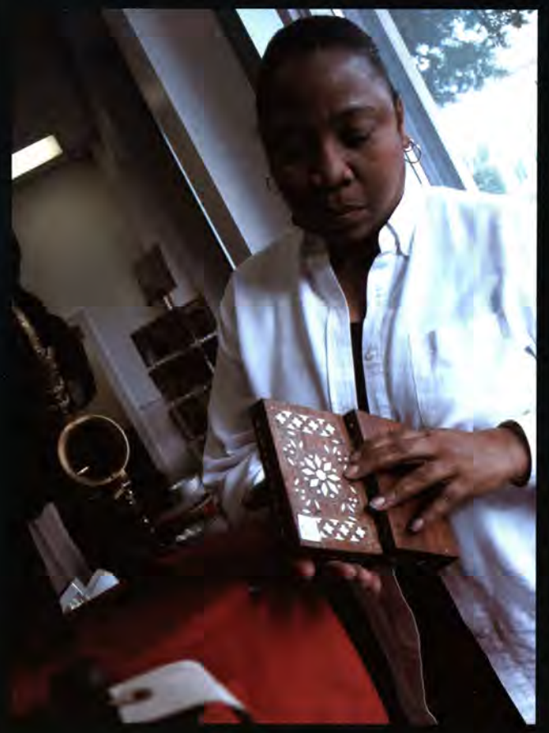
Boaz & Ruth calls the local Highland Park community and Richmond citywide to a new level of relationship. When Rollins first started filling the firehouse with furniture, Rosa Jiggetts remembers, 'I told her I'd help her get the business started, but we've come to understand each other and she's part of healing me. It started out about the business, but it became about friendship.'

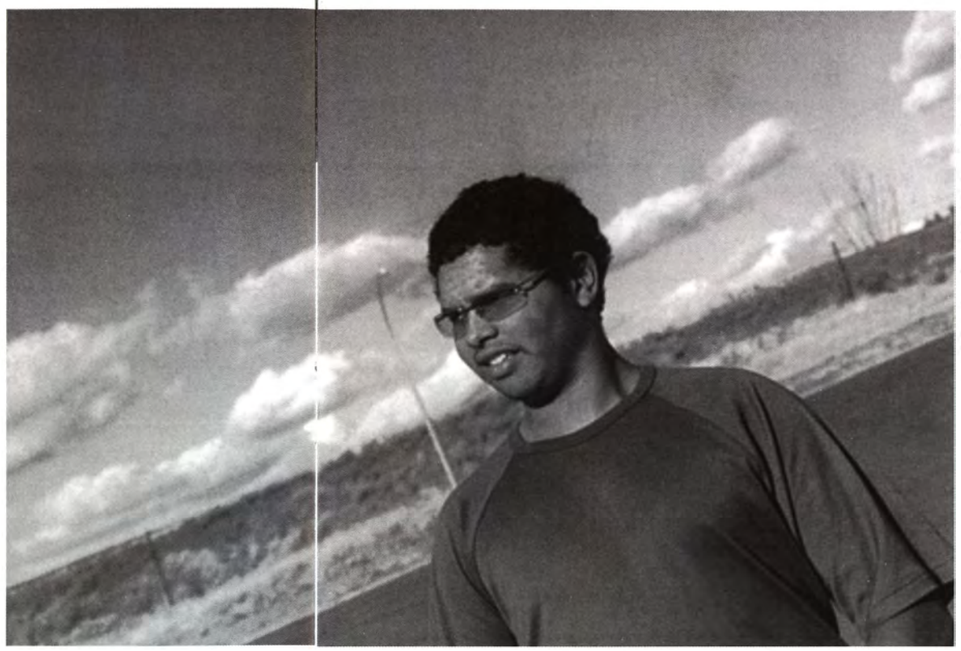
There is a bench in the middle of the showroom Kelvin Coley manages . At first glance it's hard to tell that Bill McCallister, Master Craftsman and Manager of Parable Restoration, fashioned it out of the headboard and footboard of a discarded bed. In much the same way, the men and women McCallister is training were once overlooked. Now the restored lives and the refinished furniture on one corner are an invitation to revitalisation for a whole neighbourhood and, perhaps one day, an entire city.

PHOTOS © KAREN ELLIOTT GREISDORF PHOTOGRAPHY, 2006

Above: Apprentice Chris Jones at work at Parable Restoration

Below: Boaz & Ruth graduate Cosby at a second showroom in downtown Richmond which she manages





JOY CORNISH (4)

Top left: Black Suns (l to r back row) Steve Lawrence, Darryl Gardiner, Dane Simpson, (middle) Mike Higgins, Mel Evans, (front row) Mark Atkinson, Eddie Whyman, Luke Penrith, Jayden Penrith

Bottom left: Participant Brendan Morgan

Centre: Black Suns kids engaging in indoor activities. Sarah Williams (at rear) is the newest female recruit to Black Suns

Right: Participant Farren Williams

Black sunshine in Wagga Wagga

***Ron Lawler** meets a group of young Aboriginal people who are changing their town.*

THE FRONT COVER of the local phone book is a certain way to get your face recognised by all in your community. Luke Penrith (24) and his mates in the Black Suns have found this in the past 12 months.

Three years ago, Penrith and a group of eight young Aboriginal men decided to make an impact on their communities. Together they formed the Black Suns. One of them is a butcher, another works for a phone company, while the others work in a variety of community and government agencies. Recently two young women have joined them too.

The origin of the name, Black Suns, expresses their aspirations imaginatively. They aim to be like the sun bringing warmth and hope to their communities. The majority of those communities live in the most disadvantaged suburbs of the regional centre of Wagga Wagga—population 58,000—the largest inland city of New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Wagga Wagga's indigenous population is around 3,000. Historically a rural centre, the town's population is becoming increasingly mixed through expanding defence force facilities, a regional university and recent arrivals of refugees from Africa.

In the 1970s the state government introduced resettlement which brought indigenous people from all over the west of NSW from diverse Aboriginal nations. Resettled to welfare housing estates, often without employment or prospects, many of these people experienced disadvantage and discrimination.

The results of those policies a generation back have helped create division and sometimes despair, as indigenous people still confront significant challenges in the areas of health, education, employment, criminal justice and housing. In NSW, 51 per cent of youth in detention are indigenous while indigenous Australians constitute only 2 per cent of the population as a whole. Statistically, 85 per cent of juveniles in detention move on to jail, completing a picture of a social disaster, costly to the individuals, their families and the state.

'There was a cry from the community for something to be done,' says Penrith, who also works with the Aboriginal Legal Service. Quietly spoken and strongly committed to the work, he is father of three-year-old Jayden, and deeply conscious of his responsibility to future generations. 'We started the Black Suns and its programmes so that Aboriginal kids could say, "Look they are Aboriginal people and there is something to aspire to." Us boys have always been proud of who we are, while the new generation seemed to look overseas to all the "rappers", possibly because all they had were [negative] stereotypes of Aboriginal people.'

Shane Atkinson (26), another member of Black Suns, says that there are also positive role models for Aboriginal people, mainly athletes—usually footballers—or artists. 'That is great,' he says, 'but the reality is that only a select few make it to the top levels. We are trying to be realistic role models in the Wagga Wagga community to give them avenues to succeed at other things.'

Penrith and Atkinson, the articulate Aboriginal Liaison Officer of the Wagga Wagga City Council, are careful to stress that the choice of name did not reflect inflated egos. Their name caused a stir among some who feared that this was a black radical group forming in their community. 'We do want Aboriginal people to be proud of who they are,' Penrith reflected. In acknowledgement of the Black Suns' intention and scope of activity, Wagga Wagga Shire Council has backed their programmes with the provision of a former tennis club shed and grounds, and support to help with its renovations.

The Black Suns' first initiatives were arranging discos. With the acquisition of a base of operations in the heart of the area they service, the Black Suns Youth Centre now offers drop-in programmes after school for young people ranging from six to 22, and some afternoons may see up to 40 in attendance. There are programmes planned for older people and children in the mornings and a strong focus on literacy, arts and cultural activities as well as sport and a space to do homework.

Recently, the Black Suns received funding from the Attorney General's National Community Crime Prevention Programme (NCCPP) to employ a full time coordinator, Joy Cornish. She summed up a key factor in the success of the operation: 'Their integrity level is extraordinary, really amazing. That is part of what the kids are responding to—the Black Suns' openness and honesty. It is also a good indication of Wagga's strengths that nine young men are so inspired to enrich their community.'

Penrith expresses a vision that motivates them, 'As young leaders we need to start doing business differently. This is not about money but outcomes; creating a safe space where we can be open to each other. We have robust debates. A couple of weeks ago we had a really heated meeting, but after that we were best friends'.

At the beginning some of the community wondered how long the Black Suns would last: they had seen people and organisations come and go. As time passes, Atkinson says there is a growing acceptance and expectation from the elders and the communities who get behind them: 'It is amazing how the community now wants the Black Suns involved in everything. They see us as a positive group and we must keep that in our minds when we decide what to be involved in. We need to keep the Black Suns' name associated with positive things.'

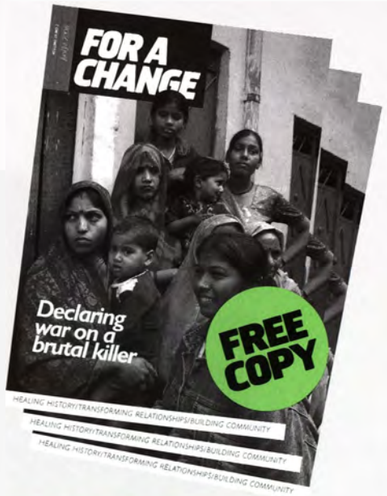
Being involved in the positive helps sort priorities. As Atkinson notes, 'We don't spread ourselves too thin. We would rather do a few things really, really well than try to do everything and have it fall apart.'

The Black Suns reach out to the non-Aboriginal community in the area as well. 'By including everyone we are giving the whole community a better understanding of where Aboriginal people are coming from,' says Atkinson.

The Black Suns aim to be social entrepreneurs; they've created considerable social capital through their networking, development of a grassroots support base and extensive community building, and in the local business and private sector there's significant support for their activities.

Reflecting their typically self-effacing and honest manner, Atkinson remarks, 'We just fumble our way through and don't always know where we are going. We don't pretend we know everything about everything but we find a way to make things happen.' As part of the funding from the NCCPP grant they will develop a strategic plan setting down their targets and actions for the future. It will not totally eliminate 'fumbling through'—nor should it—as working instinctively remains a key source of learning and inspiration.

The Black Suns have made some important discoveries of relevance to many places where Aboriginal disadvantage is leading to explosive community relations. Atkinson concludes, '[People] want us to go and talk in their communities because they are inspired by us. We draw inspiration from things in our own lives, from our families and from our role models. We also draw inspiration from not wanting Wagga Wagga to slip into that (bad) sort of thing that happens in some communities. There are a lot of good stories and we draw from them as well. We want to hand on something to the next generation that is successful, that stands alone, and that does not lose its focus, but empowers the community.' ■



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I give up!

***Jessica Fleischer** couldn't live without a cigarette. Or could she?*

UNTIL LAST NOVEMBER my life was built around cigarettes. They were my reason for getting out of bed—and for reading, walking, studying, eating, going out with friends, having friends.... I went to all the places where I was allowed to smoke and avoided all the non-smoking ones. Science says that cigarettes do not calm anxiety, they only make it worse. But I felt (and still do!) that they made me more relaxed.

I like smoking, I love the taste of cigarettes, I love everything that involves smoking. The one little but is, I also love my life.

I started smoking for all the usual reasons: I thought it made me cool, I wanted to feel older, my friends were smoking....

My grandmother was encouraged to start smoking by her mum. In those days, little was known about the unhealthy side of smoking and it was believed that cigarettes helped with digestive problems. Even today, people in my home country, Mexico, are less concerned about the health hazards than people in Europe and the US.

When I was little, I used to take my mother's and grandmother's cigarettes out of their handbags and pretend I was a grown-up sophisticated woman. I have a vague memory of the first time that my cousin and I, then aged six or seven, 'smoked'. We hid under a bed with a pack of cigarettes and a lighter, lit one cigarette between the two of us and inhaled. After a couple of breaths we both started coughing. This was followed by screams from our grandma and mothers: 'What were you thinking?' plus the 'You could have started a fire!' part.

When I turned 15, three schoolfriends and I made the conscious decision that we were going to become smokers. We waited until classes finished and then we went to the corner shop. We each decided which brand we were going to smoke, bought a pack, went to a park and started smoking. For the next 10 years I was Miss Marlboro Light and not just that but Miss Very Happy And Proud To Be Marlboro Light. I smoked an average of 20 cigarettes a day.

Until I was 18 I had to hide my smoking from my family. The fact that my mum smokes helped, because the smell of cigarettes was not something unfamiliar in my house. I got to know every hidden corner at school; I knew every policeman who could help me get out into the parking lot to have a cigarette; I knew the times when the bathroom was free from teachers and we could smoke there. I was never given a part in the school plays because I would rather be smoking on the roof while everyone else was rehearsing. I can't remember my graduation because I wasn't there—I was on the roof with a group of friends smoking cigarettes.

> *I CAN'T REMEMBER MY GRADUATION BECAUSE I WASN'T THERE—I WAS ON THE ROOF WITH A GROUP OF FRIENDS SMOKING CIGARETTES*

Everything in my life circled around cigarettes. When I looked for a flat it had to allow smoking; if I was travelling, I wouldn't stay in non-smoking hotels; I wouldn't go to non-smoking restaurants or coffee-shops. Studying in London, in a much less smoke-friendly environment than Mexico City, I used to beg my friends to meet up in pubs or coffee-shops with smoking areas to work on our projects. I barely went to the library and one-and-a-half hours in a classroom was almost unbearable to me. I used to hate going to friends' houses where I couldn't smoke and, if for some reason I had to, I always had an excuse to leave straight after lunch. If I couldn't smoke, I would be in a terrible mood and about to kill someone.

What I loved most about smoking was the time it gave me for myself; to be just me and my thoughts, staring at the sky for five to seven minutes each time I had to go outside.

I never got tired of cigarettes and I didn't really want to quit, but various things came together to make me stop, almost without thinking. (If I had thought I wouldn't have done it.)

One of my grandmothers, who smoked for 30 years and quit 20 years ago, can't walk and talk at the same time without losing her breath. It was a shock to me to see how she really wanted to go everywhere but couldn't.

I got tired of smoking outside in the cold and rain and wind, of having to leave the windows in my flat open and spend ridiculous sums on heating, of the smell of my clothes and my flat, of my money disappearing. The fact that Britain, unlike Mexico, limits where you can smoke also helped me decide to quit.

I had my last cigarette on Wednesday 8 November at 12pm and the next day I woke up to be a non-smoker. For the first two or three weeks I wasn't myself; I was sad, depressed and miserable. I found it hard to laugh and enjoy anything: I felt that nothing was ever going to be the same again. I thought that I would never be able to enjoy the things I used to do with a cigarette and, since that was almost everything, there wasn't much left. I used to love reading with a cigarette, walking, going to the park, to pubs, even cooking, but the worst part was eating. Sometimes I used to eat just so as to have a cigarette afterwards; a meal without a cigarette to follow it seemed pointless.

Quitting smoking is not easy and I needed support. It might have been easier if smoking were just a physical addiction, but there's the psychological side too. There were times when I was about to light up because I thought I really needed to, and it helped to have people to remind me about the downside of smoking. I had told everyone—my friends, my family, people at work—that I was stopping, so I felt I had to live up to my words.

After a couple of weeks my voice started to sound clearer, I wasn't coughing every 10 minutes and I started to be able to make it up to the fifth floor at university by the stairs. I started going to the gym, enjoying the cinema and long meals with non-smoking friends. My flat, clothes, hair and hands don't stink any more and I feel much healthier.

There hasn't been one day in the last months when I haven't wanted a cigarette. Most insurance companies only consider ex-smokers as non-smokers after they have not smoked for one to two years, which makes me still a smoker. But it gets easier with time and I feel better every day. If I keep going like this I will eventually become a non-smoker.

Now, when I see people smoking in the street, I want to approach them and tell them that it is possible to quit; that they are living a lie thinking that they need cigarettes; that they too can have a healthier and better life. ■

President Evo Morales and Vice-President Alvaro García Linera waving to supporters

A different light on Bolivian politics

Why is Bolivia's controversial new President so popular in his country? ***Andrea Cabrera Luna*** *explains.*

ON 18 DECEMBER 2005, Evo Morales made history by becoming Bolivia's first indigenous President.

Morales' victory, which captured 54 per cent of the vote, is a milestone in Bolivian and South American history. It brings hope to indigenous Bolivians, who have been marginalised and exploited over centuries, and to many outside Bolivia who are also struggling for a just and equal world.

Only 50 years ago, Bolivia's indigenous population could not vote or even walk on the sidewalks in the cities. Ninety years ago there were cases of indigenous people whose eyes were plucked out or fingers chopped off if they learned to read or write. Today, one can see deputies chewing coca leaves in the halls of Parliament.

The coca issue is one of the reasons why Morales is so controversial. A coca-grower himself, he has insisted on the importance of rationalising its production. He makes the distinction between coca leaf, which is an ingredient in making cocaine, and cocaine itself. In its natural form coca is an important part of Andean culture. It is used to treat such ailments as altitude sickness (La Paz is at an altitude of 4,000m) and colds, and is also brewed as tea and chewed during the day. Morales has proposed an agreement with the US to fight cocaine trafficking, but defends the use of coca leaf. 'I'm saying no to zero coca, but yes to zero cocaine,' he says.

Morales has been accused of being a drug-trafficker, an assassin, a terrorist and a member of the coca mafia. 'The Americans say that I have received money from the Farc (paramilitaries who control cocaine production in Colombia), from Cuba and Venezuela. None of this is true,' he says.

In his first presidential address, Morales called for one minute's silence for Tupaj Katari, who fought for Bolivia's independence; Che Guevara; the citizens of El Alto, who were massacred in October 2003 by military forces under the orders of ex-President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada; and anonymous heroes who have sacrificed their lives in the name of freedom.

When he took power, Morales was wearing a leather jacket with colourful embroidery. As President he has been criticised not just for the way he dresses, but also for the way he speaks. Spanish is not his first language and he is scrutinised and criticised for any error, however minor. He is a *campesino* or man of the land. Hence, sections of the so-called educated elite have labelled him 'peasant', 'uncouth' and 'uncultivated'.

His reforms have also been a cause of criticism. Among his priorities are the nationalisation of gas and oil and the redistribution of land. He said: 'It is a challenge for all Bolivians to industrialise all our resources in order to overcome poverty.'

Some have said that his policies 'seem to be born more of a desire to pander to supporters, pay homage to Cuban leader Fidel Castro and anger the US than to give his country any serious chance of improved growth or of closing the wealth gap'.

It is an irony that the Latin American country with the second largest natural gas reserves is also the continent's poorest country. National resources such as water, coca and oil have played a key part in awakening political consciousness in Bolivia. In the last five years Bolivia dismissed the American transnational, Bechtel, blocked low-price exports of gas and oil to the US, and resisted the International Monetary Fund's recommendations on payroll taxes and other measures. All these changes made the powerful tremble. Morales insists the necessity now is to create local policies which benefit local people instead of importing them from foreign countries for the benefit of the rich.

Morales' alliance with Alvaro García Linera, who had once been tortured by the Bolivian army, played an important part in his election success. García Linera was Morales' unofficial representative to those social movements that were more sceptical about his party, Movement Towards Socialism.

When talking to an audience in August last year in Cochabamba, a town that strongly opposed the privatisation of water, García Linera said: 'We cannot win the two things we are demanding—a constituent assembly (to rewrite Bolivia's constitution) and the nationalisation of gas and oil—through resistance. Such demands can only be won by taking control of the Government.'

In 2003, the people of Bolivia took to the streets to protest against the proposal to export the nation's gas to the US through a Chilean port. As a result, President Sánchez de Lozada was forced to resign.

> *'THE LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRY WITH THE SECOND LARGEST GAS RESERVES IS ALSO THE POOREST'*

The next two years saw continued unrest, and two short-lived presidencies. Finally, in December 2005, Morales was elected, in spite of American threats to withdraw their financial support to the country.

The nationalisation of gas and oil has created uneasiness in such companies as British Gas, Repsol from Spain, Petrobras and Shell. However, Morales maintains that it is necessary to increase fiscal income and renegotiate the contracts that have favoured the interests of transnational companies and not those of the country. This negotiation, he stresses, will have to be a 'responsible' one. President of Mexico Vicente Fox has said that Bolivians will have to 'eat' their gas to survive if no one buys it.

The nationalisation of energy is also intended to distribute income from national resources more equitably. After achieving this, President Morales has plans for land redistribution. According to government officials, the dictatorships of the 1970s gave many properties to wealthy landowners without payment. Anyone who cannot prove the legality of their land will have to return it to the state. Twelve million acres of state-owned land will be redistributed to indigenous rural workers.

It will not be easy for Morales and García Linera to improve growth and development in Bolivia, particularly because of international pressure and scepticism. García Linera has said frankly: 'It's going to be very difficult to govern, to make lines of change; but everything in time.'

The reason why Morales has gained so much credibility inside and outside Bolivia is because up to now he has listened to his people's needs in his governing. Since the socio-economic structures of the nation have been created to serve the interests of elites and not the majority of the population, time will tell whether his reforms will succeed.

Bolivian indigenous groups have adopted the Wipala, a multi-coloured flag that represents equality in diversity. That translates into respect for difference. Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano explains: 'According to tradition, the flag was born of the encounter between the female and the male rainbow. And this rainbow of the earth, which in the native language means "woven of rippling blood", has more colours than the rainbow of the sky.' ■

A mural in La Paz declaring support for Evo Morales

Coca leaves for sale in a village market

DERMOT TATLOW, PANOS (3)

Time to take a new look at Islam

***Hennie de Pous** reads a controversial report on Islam, and concludes that its critics were missing the point.*

PANOS

EARLIER THIS YEAR the Scientific Council for Government Policy in the Netherlands (WRR) published a controversial report: *Dynamics in Islamic Activism*. It focused on Islam's points of contact with democracy and human rights, and recommended that the Dutch should be open to the diversity of opinion in Islam. It also said that it might be a good idea for our government to talk to the democratically elected Hamas Government of Palestine.

Some politicians and opinion-leaders reacted as if they'd been stung by a wasp. These people directed the report straight to the rubbish bin, condemning it as 'unworldly' and 'bungled'.

Reading the 334-page report convinces me that the superficial polemic that dominated the news for a few days did not do justice to it. *Dynamics in Islamic Activism* is a courageous attempt to find a way out of the dilemma that we all face concerning Islam. But the soft voice of nuance had difficulty making itself heard above the verbal violence.

There is possibly less of a divide between the Western and Islamic worlds than there is between those in both worlds who seek confrontation and those who keep on believing in dialogue. The authors of the report clearly belong to the second category. A phrase used throughout is 'points of contact'.

The Western world, concludes the WRR, does not have a monopoly on the interpretation of human rights, nor on the behaviour that goes with it. We need self-criticism. Not so long ago women in the Netherlands did not have the same rights as men (and there are still some areas of inequality). Can the foreign policy of Western countries always stand the test of human rights? We should look at our own, still recent, bloody history.

> ❝ CAN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF WESTERN COUNTRIES ALWAYS STAND THE TEST OF HUMAN RIGHTS? ❞

When we descend from the heights of our moral indignation, we can see points of contact. The Dutch report shows that there is in Islam a whole spectrum of convictions and of faith, just as there is in Christianity. And this has been true for centuries.

There were and are thinkers who take the Qur'an literally, and there were and are reformers who appeal more to its spirit. The WRR portrays some pioneers from the past who have resisted the 'degeneration' of Islam into a religion which is purely preoccupied with what one should and should not do. A whole set of current reformers in Europe and in the Islamic countries seek a connection between Islam and modernity. One is Egyptian Nasr Abu Zayd, professor at both Leiden University and the University of Humanistics in Utrecht. His study on *A reformation of Islamic thought*, on which the WRR study is partly based, came out at the same time.

If one reads Qur'anic texts in their historic context, one is freed to look at their meaning for our present time. What matters is their power for circumstances other than those in which they were written. In this way space is created for human innovations like democracy and human rights. At least in theory, Islam is not irreconcilable with these concepts. But they need to be universalised and internalised. They are still seen as something that comes from the West.

A groundswell in favour of greater human rights coming from within the Islamic countries has more chance of success than pressure from outside. In several Muslim countries there is, for example, an important civil society movement in favour of greater rights for women. In Morocco, a new family law in 2004 gave greater rights to women. Education for women is taking giant strides, as in Iran.

In Europe there are tensions and a danger of radicalisation among well-integrated and educated Muslim youth. The WRR suggests that we can help to release the tension and build a bridge by opening our eyes to the diversity within Islam.

When Nasr Abu Zayd came to the Netherlands some ten years ago, he hoped that in the free and tolerant climate of Europe a modern and liberal Islam would develop. He has less hope now. Fear of Islam has decreased tolerance and increased radicalisation. Emotions rule. And everyone, often not hindered by any thorough knowledge of the issue, puts in their oar.

The polarisation increases through what the Swiss Muslim academic Tariq Ramadan calls 'leaflet-Islam'. 'Cyber-imams' and violent films on the internet offer dogmatic truths to young Muslims, as if they were the only possible interpretation of Islam. Authors who stress a positive relation between Islam, democracy and human rights are much less known.

Confrontation can help to expose abuses. But when confrontation is followed by polarisation and we get stuck there, we don't get any further! The challenge for politicians, journalists, opinion leaders, all of us, is to look further, listen better and think deeper before we offer our opinions. Let us make the soft voice of nuance audible. ■

Wales-Lesotho twinning comes of age

CATHRIN DANIEL

Welsh Education Minister Jane Davidson visits a school in Lesotho

*Twenty-one years after it was launched, the world's first nation-to-nation twinning is moving up a gear, reports **Paul Williams.***

When Dolen Cymru (the Wales-Lesotho Link) was launched in 1985 (see FAC April 1988), Wales had no representative assembly of its own and no immediate prospect of one. Over the years the unique country-to-country link with the Kingdom of Lesotho in Southern Africa was sustained on the Welsh side by a voluntary national committee. This drew on the goodwill of individuals, organisations and institutions throughout Wales and did its best, when dealing with the Lesotho Government, to 'speak for Wales'.

In 1999, devolution came to Wales and the National Assembly opened its doors. Two years later, Dafydd Wigley, then Assembly Member for Carnarfon, paid tribute to the work of Dolen Cymru over the past 16 years. 'Your work has shown the way in the voluntary sector of what can be done to help Wales play its part in the wider world,' he said. 'You are much more than a movement. You have succeeded in creating connections with people in so many fields.' Now, he said, the National Assembly should take the lead.

His conviction is beginning to be realised. In 2002 the Education Department of the Assembly Government gave a three-year grant to enable Dolen Cymru to appoint a full-time Director and maintain an office in Cardiff. 'This funding will help build on the links already established between Wales and Lesotho,' said Education Minister Jane Davidson. 'I very much hope they will flourish further. It will benefit teaching and learning in both countries.'

Last year the grant was extended for a further three years and this time included a substantial sum to fund a teacher placement programme in Lesotho schools. The scheme enables Welsh teachers to spend six months in schools in Lesotho, doing classroom teaching and also passing on best teacher practice. It stands alongside regular shorter exchanges between teachers from the 100 schools in Wales and Lesotho which have established links with each other.

Last April Jane Davidson, accompanied by her private secretary and an official from the Practitioner Department of her Ministry, went to see how the first batch of six teachers was getting on. While in Lesotho she had two meetings with the Lesotho Minister of Education, whom she had entertained in Cardiff earlier in the year. Reflecting on the visit, she said she had been encouraged by 'the very positive response to the teacher programme from the Welsh teachers, their host schools and the district education authorities in which they were based. We learned that the three newly qualified teachers in particular found that their personal confidence had grown significantly. Some of the teachers expressed an interest in staying longer.' She added that she was 'keen to ensure that the Wales-Lesotho Link forms an important part of the Assembly Government's international agenda'.

> ❝ PERHAPS A TREND IS BEING SET FOR MORE SMALL NATION-TO-NATION LINKS ❞

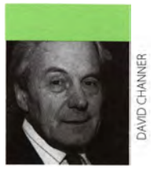
In 2002 the National Assembly invited a group of three Senators and one official from Lesotho's Upper House to visit Wales to study the workings of the Assembly. This was followed in 2003 by an invitation to two MPs, an official from the Lesotho Electoral Commission and a radio journalist to observe the Assembly elections. Wales and Lesotho have similar voting systems, including an element of proportional representation. 'The opportunity to see how other political parties campaign has been a valuable insight for us,' said Dominic Motikoe, one of the MPs. 'We were impressed by the way voluntary groups and trade unions were able to play an important part by questioning the policies of the political parties.'

Then last October two Welsh Assembly members and an official visited Lesotho and returned eager for the National Assembly to become more involved in the link and to do more for Lesotho. 'The Speaker and Clerk of the National Assembly of Lesotho made it clear that they would welcome a parliamentary dimension to the link between Wales and Lesotho,' they reported. 'We advocate that a cross-party group on Lesotho be established in the National Assembly and that the Welsh Assembly Government makes Lesotho a focus for its international development strategy.'

If this is done, the 21-year old link—the world's first-ever nation-to-nation twinning—will move into a new gear. With the Scottish Parliament having decided to focus its international development effort on Malawi because of historic links, perhaps a trend is being set for more small nation-to-nation links. Their great advantage is the considerably increased involvement of their people, institutions and communities in concern for the welfare of the global village. ■

Paul Williams was secretary of the Wales-Lesotho Link from 1985 to 2004.

Correction: the photograph of India on p2-3 of our June/July issue should have been credited to Panos. We apologise for this omission.


DAVID CHANNER

London's taboo-breaking tent

DWARFED BY HIGH-RISE buildings in the City of London is a structure that would not look out of place in the North African desert. 'The Tent', which has just been opened by the Prince of Wales, stands in the garden courtyard behind St. Ethelburga's Church, Bishopsgate, and offers 'a unique sacred space in the heart of London where people of all faiths, or none, can meet with others from different traditions and explore differences in a spirit of friendship and respect'.

Made in Saudi Arabia and with art works donated from Morocco and Turkey, it has eight stained glass windows which have been described as 'a superb exercise in religious and cultural tact'. The 16-sided structure, covered in woven goat's hair like a Bedouin tent, can comfortably seat 20 people.

In 1993, after having survived the Great Fire of London and the Blitz, St Ethelburga's, one of two remaining medieval churches in the City, was largely destroyed by an IRA bomb. It was rebuilt three years ago as a Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, using much of the original stonework. The building project was financed through a public appeal, with major contributions from institutions in the City, which is London's business district.

One of its initiators was the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres. The aim, he told me, was to develop a new role for the church, 'that will turn the damage into lasting good'. The Centre would explore the role of religion in international affairs, seeking to further the contribution of faith communities. It would also incorporate a memorial to those who have dedicated their lives to the pursuit of peace.

Since its rebuilding St Ethelburga's has hosted regular events in pursuit of this aim. From early on it was pursuing dialogue with Muslims, but meeting in a church posed certain hurdles, explains the Centre's Director, Simon Keyes. The fact that the Christians were always the hosts put limits on frank discussions with other faiths. No Orthodox rabbi, for instance, had ever spoken there. The Tent is a deliberate attempt to create a space where religious dialogue can be between equals, a space that recalls the desert from which many faiths have emerged.

Leaders of nine faith traditions came to its opening, all bringing copies of their respective holy books. The Prince of Wales unveiled a plaque to a former rector, John Medows Rodwell, who in 1861 published the first reliable version of the Qur'an in English.

The Centre will not shy away from contentious issues like conversion, proselytising, extremism and fundamentalism and will pursue honest conversation. A manifesto *Sharing the Space: promoting conversations between Christians and Muslims* was published for the occasion. It reports on discussions about violence against religious minorities in certain Muslim states, seeking to put the 'persecution' issue into a wider context which could be helpful in promoting the understanding and tolerance required of both sides. It also says that in the long run it is not enough just to condemn or disown extremist elements: 'They must eventually be engaged in the conversation.'

The manifesto states, 'Christian and Muslim scriptures endorse neither coercion nor violence in pursuit of their invitational missions. However, the reality round the world is that tension between Christianity and Islam is expressed in the form of violence and other forms of conflict and repression. No conversation that ignores the reality of these issues will be fully grounded in truth.'

Michael Binyon writes in *The Times* of London, 'In the Middle East, where, as the proverb says, no friendship lasts for ever but nor also does any enmity, the tent is the place where taboos can be broken and reconciliation replace warfare. So, St. Ethelburga's hopes, it will be in the heart of London.'

I have a particular interest in St. Ethelburga's. My parents were married there and I was christened at its centuries-old font.

***Michael Henderson** is the author of 'Forgiveness: breaking the chain of hate', Grosvenor Books, 2002, ISBN 1-85239-031-X*
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Kicking the self-blame habit

I HAVE ALWAYS WANTED MY FAITH to be relevant and longed to be an encourager to young people on their spiritual journeys. Even though I have given my life, as best I know, to what I understand of the Almighty's plan I have often felt that something was missing. Many of those nearest and dearest haven't caught the flame, or have been hurt by the fact that my work has often come before them.

For me, getting involved in a series of leadership training programmes in Asia for young people of different nationalities has been the best thing that could have happened. It thrust me out of my mental, physical and spiritual comfort zones. At the start of the first programme in 2001 in India, I realised that I didn't really know how to be a caring support member. I felt totally inadequate and wondered why on earth I was there. Through several workshops on the family (designed to help people identify childhood experiences which shape adult behaviour) I began to uncover my true feelings and started to find my real self.

Early in my life I had been won to the vision of a world remade through change in the individual, starting with myself. But being a personality type that depends on human approval, I let this dominate my relationships and became a typical loyal supporter, prepared to do the sacrificial thing, even before considering my family's needs, let alone my own. I tried to be positive and reliable all the time, but underneath I was dogged by persistent doubts and fears and a perception of being inadequate. I often found myself adopting others' ideas and convictions.

'Emotional addiction': these words jumped out at me from a book I was reading last November, whilst in India again helping with the latest training programme. For the first time I recognised my addiction, the constant habit of blaming myself because of my inadequacies. I suddenly understood the self-hate which had triggered the drinking of a family member with an alcohol addiction.

Later, during a church service I found tears running down my face. 'Why, God', I asked, 'am I so weak and inadequate? Why, when I have been giving my life to serve you all these years, trying to follow you?' I had an image in my mind of a clay pot useless and broken on the floor. 'How can I ask you to fill me with your love when I am like that?' I pleaded.

The next day I picked up a book called *Steps to Life* (ABC Books, 2004) by Joanna Thyer, about the Alcoholics Anonymous programme. The first step to overcoming an addiction, I read, is to recognise one is powerless to change it. I can only ask God to change what I cannot. I now understand the phrase, 'our weaknesses can be our greatest strengths'. I shared these discoveries with the young people on the training programme and was overwhelmed by the friendship, trust and warmth of heart this engendered. I will always treasure the farewell messages they wrote me and my husband when we returned to New Zealand after seven precious weeks.

Sitting in my local church back home the following Sunday, God gave me a wonderful gift. I saw my life as a beautifully crafted clay pot! Now I want to keep it as a vessel for his love.