

## Introduction

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During the last several months the popular media has reported on moves to investigate and reorganise both the New South Wales and the Federal police. In particular much attention has been devoted to news emanating from the inquiry into police corruption in New South Wales. Among the information derived from the inquiry were two new slang phrases: certain police were allegedly “in the laugh” or “in the know”, and both stood to benefit from corruption rife in King’s Cross. To those outside this magic circle there is nothing laughable about the grim reality of police corruption and the endeavour is to make the knowledge public in order to achieve reform.

Police practices are the focus of several of the articles and one of the comments that appear in this issue of the journal. Thus our authors and our editorial staff join in the attempt to spread knowledge and hopefully to achieve reform. The contributions by Dixon and Sturgess were initially prepared for a Seminar organised by the Institute of Criminology in September.

The article by David Dixon asks the question of whether reform can be achieved by revising the regulations governing the police force. He finds encouragement for Australian efforts in this direction from an examination of the implementation of the *Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)* in Britain and therefore argues against “reforms” that are drafted merely to reflect current police practices.

Rob White and Tim Prenzler look at two aspects of police recruitment practices. At the end of 1995 figures were released showing that the number of Aboriginal and female applicants for entry to the police force had dropped significantly. This was blamed on the attention being given to police practices as a result of the inquiry. This information postdates the writing of these articles, however anything that reduces the representative nature of the police force threatens to exacerbate problems that occur between the police force and the community. White explores the relation between the police and policing practices and ethnic youth gangs, an area where racism is a recurrent worry in all jurisdictions, as emphasised recently by the OJ Simpson trial in the United States. Prenzler focuses on the impact of police pre-entry physical ability tests. The effect of these tests is to exclude many female applicants from the police force. Prenzler suggests that it is unnecessary to test physical abilities before training and that these tests should therefore be abolished. The three articles on policing are complemented by an incisive comment from Gary Sturgess who urges truth in policing and in reporting on policing practices as an absolute essential in any democratic community.

Despite the strong emphasis on aspects of police reform and practice, this is not a thematic issue and we have four articles, two comments and two book reviews that have a more general focus. Two questions of continuing interest in Australia in this decade are the topics of articles by Biles and Halstead who have new contributions to make to the continuing discussions. The article by David Biles on custody, crime and the community contributes to the discussion of “law and order” themes that is still a live political issue. The article by Boronia Halstead is a case study exploring the implementation of Coroner’s Death in Custody Recommendations which urges that the process must be made still more transparent, that authorities should be accountable for acting on these recommendations. Jason Munstermann traces the developments in the law of evidence which impact on the compellability of the victim of domestic violence from the common law basis up to the provisions in the 1995 Evidence Acts (Cth & NSW). Our final article is written by Mark

Findlay who, as our readers will know, is currently Professor of Law at the University of the South Pacific, on leave from the position of Director of the Institute of Criminology. Mark's article attacks policies of secrecy and denial which continue to act as barriers to the reform of the jury process. Although the focus is different there are common themes uniting this article with those of Dixon and Sturgess.

The process of editing an issue of this journal is a lengthy one. When I accepted the task I was on staff at the University of Sydney. I complete the task after having taken up the position of Professor of Law at the University of New England. This was made possible by the marvels of modern technology and by the extreme efficiency of Sandra Fox and the Publications Unit within the Faculty of Law at the University of Sydney. To all of these people I record my thanks. I think that together we have produced an issue of the journal which is of outstanding quality and which you, the reader, will find of great interest.

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