

please; he made his new action thriller a *pacifist* movie. Like World War I was the war to end all wars, presumably.

What, then, is the consensus on this undeniably powerful man? He seems unhappy, insecure and not a little scared. Leigh's book alone should have given him a few sleepless nights, unless he is firmly convinced (as I sup-

pose most of us are) that nothing succeeds like success, which is something he has more than enough of. He claims his life is testament to the American dream; he is the archetypal conservative immigrant, eager to fit in. He's also committed 100% to getting ahead, and only occasionally allows himself the luxury of looking back to see who he's trampled on along the

way. That's America, that's Arnold, and that's why the world loves him.

(P.S. If you read this, Arnold, what are the chances of an interview?)

**DAVID NICHOLS** is a Sydney journalist who likes to think of himself as Australia's greatest expert on the life and times of Patrick Swayze.

## Norman is an Island

*Inside the BLF* by Brian Boyd (Ocean Press, 1991). Reviewed by Jeff Shaw.

**The tragic, labyrinthine rise and fall of the Builders Labourers Federation in the 1970s and 1980s has never been properly chronicled. Yet it is a tale full of drama, irony, human foibles and worse which had a substantial impact upon Australian industrial and political life of the era.**

This book has been produced by a former full-time official of the BLF who has become a strong critic of the role of the federation's general secretary, Norm Gallagher, in leading the union to virtual destruction.

Brian Boyd argues that the 1986 deregistration of the BLF—facilitated by unique, radical legislation of the federal Labor government—was both avoidable and unnecessary. He maintains that the 'united front' forged by Gallagher with the Master Builders Association in the mid-1970s to remove Jack Munday's leadership of the NSW BLF—and to eliminate its trail-blazing environmental campaigns—was the genesis of the eventual lethal coalition against the national leadership, leading to the recruitment of the BLF membership by other unions in NSW, Victoria and the ACT in the late 1980s.

As Boyd shows, Gallagher's misuse of militant industrial tactics was a whol-

ly misguided attempt to thwart criminal proceedings brought against him alleging corruption. This self-interest displayed itself in the otherwise inexplicable somersaults between calls for industrial peace, and declarations of guerrilla warfare.

Gallagher's strategy may have stemmed from some form of primitive maoism: a view that militant workers could, by their pressure on employers, sway the Crown (the capitalist state) to drop criminal charges against a union leader. This was naive and futile. The Victorian government of John Cain had established an independent prosecuting authority, the DPP. It took the view that it would have been absolutely wrong for politicians to intervene in an 'arms-length' process. In any event, it would have been politically suicidal for the Labor government to have done so. The charges—based upon Gallagher's construction of a beach house using employers' resources, allegedly extracted by threat—had a momentum which was unstoppable. For the BLF leadership to jeopardise the union's existence in some quixotic endeavour to keep Norm out of jail was both unfair to the membership and folly for the organisation.

In other ways, too, the BLF leadership emerges discredited from this account: the naked alliance with employers to destroy Munday's position and to keep him unemployed for years; the disastrous theory of glorious defeat (in 1986, Gallagher was arguing that "if they hang us" it would serve a historical purpose in

'educating' the progressive union movement); the bizarre sectarianism of seeing John Halfpenny's defeat for the Senate in 1987 as a victory, marred only (in Gallagher's worldview) by the return of the Hawke government.

Yet, while it serves a useful purpose, I regret to say that this is not a very good book. It is basically a patchy diary of events which are mostly on the public record. In fairness, it is worth noting that it does incorporate some BLF minutes and internal memoranda of interest. But it provides no real insight into the psychology of Gallagher and his supporters. To what extent was some genuine ideology important? What was the role of the maoists—and, in particular, Melbourne barrister Ted Hill—in determining tactics? What were the internal conflicts in strategic decision-making? How did the BLF secretary's supporters view his undoubted receipt of significant employer largesse? These questions are not satisfactorily dealt with. Indeed, in relation to some of them, greater insight is obtainable from Munday's 1981 book, *Green Bans and Beyond*.

The full story is yet to be told. Perhaps one close observer, Dr Meredith Burgmann, who has forsaken the tranquility of academic life for Labor politics, may yet find the time to produce a deeper analysis.

**JEFF SHAW** is a NSW shadow minister, and editor of the journal *Labor Forum*.