
THOSE who read this book expecting to find the life story of Wilfred Burchett are in for a disappointment. At least I was. Much of the South East Asia material has been dealt with before in Burchett's other books; the only substantially new material is the account of his early life in Australia which has not been written up before.

In his preface Burchett recognises that Passport is not an autobiography, for it is confined to focus on his early life in Australia, and his experiences in South East Asia and adjacent areas. But his life span has taken in more than Australia and South East Asia. It has encompassed the world. The canvas, he writes, is too broad and he has other things to do. So he has written this book instead of writing his memoirs.

Passport is divided into three parts, dealing with the early Australian years, the South East Asia experiences, and the experience of exile as a result of the refusal of the Australian Government to grant him a passport following the mysterious disappearance of his original.

The first section deals with Burchett as a youth in the Depression. One reviewer (Robert Duffield, The Australian 13/12/69), has written that Burchett "began adult life as a bricklayer (and) still writes like one". If this is meant to imply that Burchett is a lousy writer then it is groundless and surely based on personal jealousy. For Burchett must be the envy of thousands of journalists and commentators across the world; he is the best known journalistic commentator on events in South East Asia. A fine effort on the part of a man who, as a journalist is entirely self taught having received no formal journalistic training.

Going back to his ability as a writer, the first section of Passport contains some fine testimonies to his skill. Some of his description of the Australian country-side in Chapter One reveal a fine sensitivity and acute observational powers.

However, he is to be faulted for his caricatures of people met during the Depression years. The first Communist he meets is referred to simply as "Greyhead"; other people receive tags like "The Gay Young Couple", two exploiters of Depression farm labour are referred to as the "Cow Cocky" and "the Boss". This shorthand method enables Burchett to deal with these characters in an impersonal way. It does not require effort on his part to understand these characters as human beings and thus put them down on paper in a way that will make them live for the reader. Rather what we are getting is a straight narrative with a few symbolic characters here and there. The style is that of a pamphlet and not a serious autobiography. Though this monotone is broken when Burchett deals with the unemployed riding the rails, heading for the fruit growing Irrigation Area. This episode does come to life and for a while the spirit of the men is captured.

What Burchett is trying to do with his symbolic characters is to describe the process by which he became a Communist. But he doesn't succeed. He tries to locate it in his personal sense of injustice and the fact that
he experienced "exploitation" during the thirties. However, he shows that it goes deeper than this, that behind his evolution to Communism was a whole new world of ideas, books, journals, and discussions in small town intellectual circles with guest addresses now and then from visiting lecturers. Much of this is only hinted at. Indeed it might be a mistake to refer to Burchett as a Communist for as Duffield has pointed out, nowhere in the book does he say when, or even if, he became a Communist. I make these comments because it is these sorts of details and experiences that one seeks and expects in an attempt at autobiography.

As I noted earlier much of the South East Asian material has appeared before and Burchett here and there slips into quoting or drawing from his other publications. Autoplagiarism is his term for this. However, the chapters on brainwashing, germ warfare, and Vietnam contain new and vital material gathered in very recent times. He successfully counters the allegations against him that he helped the north Koreans brainwash their United Nations prisoners (on the basis of these allegations the Australian Government is withholding his passport). His account of the United States employing germ warfare during the Korean conflict is forceful and the integrity of Burchett as a man and journalist built up through the book comes to the fore so that we believe him in spite (and perhaps because of) official U.S. denials to the contrary. Burchett’s insights into the Vietnam War and his comments on Nixon’s strategy of “steering the war into a new phase” marked by the refusal to pull out all U.S. troops and the creation of a “protracted war”, are of paramount importance to us in Australia. So too is his faith in the revolutionary peoples of Vietnam to fight, against their aggressors, until they have won a final and total victory.

The final section deals with the question of Burchett’s passport. There are only 16 pages devoted to this. On this issue the Australian Government is shown to be foolish, incompetent and extremely reactionary, mainly through the words of the late Harold Holt who was the Minister for Immigration initially responsible for withholding the document. In Australia Burchett’s case has been taken up since 1955 by the Australian Council for Civil Liberties, and the Australian Journalists Association whilst across the world a host of prominent people have petitioned the Australian Government to restore his passport (this petition together with a sample of signatories forms the book’s Appendix). Quoting a Melbourne Age editorial on the passport issue Burchett concludes; “It is this country’s reputation, not Mr. Burchett’s, which is now at stake”.

Burchett is a journalist of a rare breed. He does not owe allegiance to any newspaper, contract, nor editor. His first duty is to humanity. He illustrates this by asking us to envisage “a child being beaten to pulp by a bully. A reporter who rushes to record the scene with camera and tape-recorder might succeed as a journalist, but he fails as a human being. His first responsibility is to rescue the child”. Further, Burchett’s concept of his role as a reporter “is not just to record history but to help shape it in the right direction”. It is these attitudes that have led Wilfred Burchett to carve a niche for himself in contemporary history. He will be remembered, referred to, and talked about long after he is dead, long after many of the petty men who have hounded and reviled him are forgotten. And with such a man it will be a nit: if he does not leave us with something more than Passport.

R. J. Cahill

AUSTRALIANS TEND to regard themselves as committed to education despite the rather insignificant amount of money the authorities spend on it. And this is supposed to be a prosperous country. They also see education as the palliative for most collective and individual ills in the community, and look to it as the source of prestige and respect. In the recent Federal elections education again became a vital issue. Therefore an examination of Australia's commitment to education is both timely and valuable. Society, Schools and Progress in Australia is one of a series published by Pergamon Press. It is an attempt to make this examination. But it is only partially successful because one short book cannot be all things to all men. Professor Partridge has tried to satisfy not only the educationist but also the student of sociology, of government and politics, and even the lay reader just interested in the educational fate of his children.

The book attempts too much and therefore only skims the surface. The writer looks at historical influences, organisation, schools and society, higher education, technical and adult education, teachers and growth. The approach follows a pattern set by comparativists. It is readable, very interesting and also challenging. Every reader should gain something from Partridge's explanation although it may only serve as an introduction to his area of interest; the overseas reader would get an understanding of the broad characteristics of Australia's educational arrangements and policies, and have suggested for him the major disagreements in Australian education. The local educationist would get a clear summary of an expert's opinions on the matter, and the lay reader could see his children in the educational perspective.

The book is a good regional study even if it is restricted to set topics so that comparisons with other systems are possible, but it needs to present more of the assumptions underlying the Australian system. But then, even if the publishers had made 200 more pages available, it may be difficult to include any philosophical basis which is unique to Australia. We rely so much on the imported variations. or alternatively on a pragmatic approach, Education should reflect the society out of which it grows and, as Partridge suggests, the new and developing Australian society may force a unique educational philosophy to appear as a guide for future policies, and make our present haphazard approach even more unacceptable than it is now. Up to the present such a philosophy is not apparent, and if the Victorian Teachers' Tribunal is a typical example, it will be missing for some time. Many Victorian teachers believe the Tribunal has taken the role of educational policy making out of the hands of the professionals. The community trains and pays experts like Professor Partridge to apply their knowledge and skills to the problem but governments too often ignore their advice and choose the more convenient course.

The book's greatest strength is related to its greatest weakness. The weakness of course is almost inevitable. We are living in times of incredible and rapid change in education and such a book is unfortunately out of date even before it is published. The amazing growth of the Colleges of Advanced Education at the expense of the universities is examined but the events of the past few months, the time in which trends have crystallized, could not be dis-
cussed. This comment may be made about many books in the field but it does support the view that the publishers should produce a second and revised edition soon. But the book's greatest strength compensates for this weakness. Professor Partridge explores the controversies which always rage in education, and while doing this he gives some indication of the lines of future development. His perception and understanding are in evidence here. The centralist tendencies of the federal government are criticised, not because they are centralist but because the government's actions are frequently capricious, unpredictable and overbearing. These circumstances undoubtedly frustrate the professional educational planner. State primary schools may only get a national flag or teachers colleges in 6 states a mere 60 million dollars over 6 years, but almost at a whim the flood of money may be theirs next. The money is needed but inconsistent changes in policy are not.

It is odd that this book has been placed between covers which are garish and similar to a child's textbook. The material between the covers makes a valuable contribution to education generally and Australian educational writing specifically. This is despite the problems Professor Partridge had in identifying his readers, and in trying to find an Australian philosophy of education.

R. & J.B.


THIS is the final volume in the first complete edition of Lawson's verse. It contains all the verse he wrote during the last thirteen years of his life. As in the two previous volumes, Professor Roderick provides alternative readings, showing the various revisions Lawson made, as well as a section of notes on relevant background material.

The verse of the last period of Lawson's life has generally been regarded as very much the work of a man in his decline. Lawson himself perhaps felt this, too, for of the verse in the 1918 edition of his Selected Poems, some seventy per cent belonged originally to the pre-1900 period. Angus and Robertson's, who had been Lawson's publishers from the time of his second book (In the Days When the World Was Wide, 1896), realised the greatly inferior nature of most of Lawson's later work also, for they declined to publish some of the later volumes, though George Robertson was an unfailingly generous benefactor to the increasingly destitute and down-at-heel Lawson.

Professor Roderick goes to some pains in his Introduction to develop a new argument concerning the achievement of some of this later Lawson. “Lawson was saved from poetic death,” he says, “by the outbreak of war against the Central Powers. This event, accompanied as it was by an intense propaganda campaign on both sides, aroused him from his torpor. It awakened echoes of his youthful enthusiasm for the purging fires of war. Lawson had always praised war as the maker of nations, peace as the canker that rotted the national frame, and he welcomed the holocaust of 1914-18 as the fulfilment of his prophecies.”

He goes on to suggest that, though much of Lawson's verse at this time was undeniably jingoistic, he was also a force for humanitarianism and sanity, pointing out “that the death of decent men on either side brought sorrow to people somewhere.” “For a while,” Roderick concludes, “he felt he was once more the folk voice of Australia.”
Though this argument does throw some light on the extent to which Lawson needed some strong external stimulus to keep his poetic fires burning, it does little to redeem those fires themselves. Roderick supports his argument by quoting this couplet, as evidence of Lawson's seeing "the devastation of European society with the eye of a poet."

Take an old Bulgarian widow who has lost her little store,
Who has lost her sons in battle, paint her face, and call it "War".

But surely the opposite point applies. The lines are little more than a rhythmical formula, filled out with sentiment and an easy pathos. Put them up against any one of Wilfred Owen's poems and their essentially maudlin character is the most immediately obvious thing.

Of course, Owen experienced World War I and Lawson did not, despite his attempts to enlist. Lawson's war poems were only his imaginative concept of what the war was like, a concept largely influenced by official propaganda. And at this stage of his life Lawson was almost incapable of the sustained effort and concentration needed if his imagination was to produce anything more than sentimental or jingoistic doggerel.

This volume, while completing what will undoubtedly be the standard edition of Lawson's verse for many years to come, is nonetheless a sad memorial. Lawson, like his contemporary, Steele Rudd, lived too long, and the values and attitudes of his earliest work, for which he is most justly remembered, degenerated into the postures and easy conventions of the decade before his death.

Leon Cantrell