

never been prepared to lay cultural activity on the Procrustes bed of 'social levelling'; his commitment to culture became politically transparent by 1945, by which time his political activism had been fully replaced by *cultural* activism by way of a theorisation of pessimism.

Subsequently, in the period Weblin defines as Anderson's 'conservative' phase, his open criticism of 'democratic illusions' had become as much an attack upon *politics* as the resolution of ethical imbalances as upon democracy itself.

[T]hinking is an active process, and . . . if we do not continually wrestle with problems and examine conceptions, we are reduced to saying things from which all or most of the meaning has ebbed away. And it is, perhaps, in political and social matters that the passage from inspiring discovery to pious platitude and thence to injurious humbug is most rapid. (p.249)

Or, as he wrote in *Honi Soit* in October 1954: 'The life of thinking is only one way of living, but it is one way.' For Anderson the life of thinking effectively displaced 'politics' as not only the most fulfilling way of living, but also as the only form of activism that could give 'progress' genuine meaning.

Mark Weblin and Pluto Press are to be commended for presenting us with Anderson's political thought over the whole period of his residence in Australia. Weblin's succinct commentary in his Introduction and 'Concluding Scientific Postscript' not only provides the reader with sufficient context to make Anderson understandable in an age that apparently has lost all intellectual connection with Croce, Hegel, Vico, Sorel, Heraclitus and the other political thinkers

in the dark background of our own 'postmodern' period, but also provides the most comprehensive account of Anderson's political thinking since Jim Baker's *Anderson's Social Philosophy* of 1979.

Andersonian scholarship has moved a long way in the 40 years since his death. Perhaps we are coming into a period when the various aspects of Anderson's thought can be taken for granted rather than being celebrated as a cult. Certainly there are cult aspects in treating Anderson's politics in isolation from the rest of his thought, but Weblin is comprehensive enough in this particular anthology to remind us that the greatness of a thinker lies not in the command they have of their thinking at any particular time, but in its overall unity, its consistency despite, rather than because of, the thinker's social needs.

Reviewed by Jim Packer

Act of Creation: The Founding of The United Nations
by **Stephen C. Schlesinger**
New York: Westview Press
2003, 352pp, US\$27.50
ISBN 08133 3324 5

A world without the United Nations is unknown to most of us. The organisation has been around, for good and not-so-good, for almost 60 years now. Yet few know much about its creation. Historians to date have ignored this pocket of our recent past, but Stephen C. Schlesinger, a foreign affairs historian and Director of the World Policy Institute at the New School University in New York, has changed that. His new book, *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United*

Nations, tells the story of the nine weeks of the Fall of 1945 when the world's foreign ministers, statesmen and press came to San Francisco to hammer out the UN's charter. Schlesinger's historical narrative is succinct, lucid, and well-researched. Indeed, there are passages that make the hairs on the back of one's neck stand on end, so well does he capture the essence of these times. But this book really makes its mark in three key messages, not explicitly stated but aimed squarely at those dealing with contemporary affairs.

The first is that the United Nations was never intended to be a talking shop with no clout. As Schlesinger's account makes clear, its main proponents—Franklin D. Roosevelt and, following his untimely death, Harry Truman—were clear-eyed, hard-headed realists determined to ensure that the UN did not meet the same fate as the League of Nations a generation before. Their men on the ground—Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, the chair of the founding conference, and Leo Pasvolosky, the State Department bureaucrat who nurtured the UN since it was first conceived in 1939—battled a sceptical Churchill, a recalcitrant Molotov and many reluctant smaller states during their nine weeks in San Francisco to create an organisation aimed not at governing the world but at preventing another major war.

The UN was designed to respect the sovereignty of the nation-state so long as threats to the peace, breaches of the peace or acts of aggression were not committed. But if they were, the Security Council, comprising the permanent five (the United States, the U.S.S.R., China, France and Britain) and a further rotating ten countries, was to take any necessary actions, including the application of force, to restore security. Such was the power its founding states delegated to the

UN. But acting on this obligation required cooperation amongst the permanent five. The semblance of any such unity, as Schlesinger lucidly tells us, began to fray even in the early months of 1945. It disappeared altogether during the Cold War as the United States and U.S.S.R. vetoed one another's resolutions. In this respect, the UN was stillborn. It never truly had the chance to exercise the powers it was delegated.

The second message highlights the achievements possible when American diplomacy is clear-eyed, accommodating of the legitimate interests of others, and patient. These were the characteristics of the diplomacy of the Truman era—a time when the United States was, relatively, at its most powerful but also, perhaps, still hesitant about its mantle as global leader. Nonetheless, it led the world in establishing the alliance against communism, the UN, the Marshall Plan, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and NATO, as well as supporting the European Coal and Steel Community (the harbinger to the European Union). This architecture which, arguably, has so positively dominated international politics since then, took time and energy to create. Moreover, as the political horse-trading, scheming and backroom deals described by Schlesinger make clear, none of it was easy and it certainly did not all go America's way. But despite such difficulties, this approach legitimised American objectives. It made other states a part of, and therefore more willing to accept and actively work toward, the policies determined and outcomes desired. It is difficult to imagine the United States similarly persevering today, particularly in the post-September 11 world.

Finally, the regenerative qualities of the human spirit are evident in Schlesinger's account.

To be so vividly reminded of the determination applied by the statesmen of San Francisco to insure against a repeat of the most devastating war in history, even as the Asian sphere of that war still raged, is to appreciate our ability to learn from and correct for past mistakes. But history also reminds us of our ability to eventually forget these lessons. With many now questioning the very *raison d'être* of the UN, Schlesinger's book is a timely reminder of the reason it was founded. It was not formed to eradicate poverty, cure disease, improve human rights or advance the human race. These are laudable goals, but the UN was formed to prevent major wars. This was its primary purpose in 1945 and should be its primary purpose now.

The UN, of course, is not without its flaws. But like democracy and capitalism, neither of which is perfect, it is the best system of international collaboration we have for the moment. Nonetheless, reform is desperately required. The Security Council is a relic of the geopolitics of 1945. To be legitimate today it must reflect contemporary realities. It needs to accommodate today's powers currently excluded—Japan and Germany—and contemplate the accommodation of tomorrow's big states—India and Brazil. It must also address the extraordinary powers inherent in the veto, for legitimacy is not to be found in this uneven distribution of such clout. However, as the many failed attempts at reform instruct us, positive change is not easy. And whilst Schlesinger's book does not attempt to answer these questions, he certainly shows us where they might be found. Perhaps it is time for the United States to again lead the world in another act of creation.

Reviewed by Scott Featherston

Orwell's Australia: From Cold War to Culture War

by Dennis Glover

Melbourne: Carlton North, Scribe Publications, 2003, 138pp, \$19.95, ISBN 0908 011 563

George Orwell continues to be one of the most talked about and debated political commentators of the last century. Once claimed by the right as a champion of the anti-communist cause in books such as *Animal Farm* and *1984*, in recent years Orwell has been the subject of intense interest and reassessment from the left.

In his recent book, *Orwell's Australia: From Cold War to Culture War*, Dennis Glover, speech writer to former Labor leader Simon Crean and a prominent Labor intellectual, claims Orwell as the inspiration for his own brand of social democratic politics. Glover's book also looks at Orwell's influence

on Australian intellectuals, and the diverging interpretations of Orwell's politics across the political spectrum.

As a discussion of Orwell's leftist political views, and his influence on Australian intellectuals, Glover's book raises many important issues of continuing relevance to Australian democracy. The place of 'truth' in political discourse; the egalitarian spirit in Australia political culture and society; the future of the democratic left and the Australian Labor Party; and the importance of civility and rationality in political life are discussed through the prism of Orwell's political writings.

It is a pity that discussion of these issues quickly becomes bogged down in a polemic against the Coalition government, and against

