

Dear Arn,

22 July 88

My heart bleeds for you at the news that Augusta has become the Acapulco of the Sou' West. Your investment must have doubled in twelve months. A couple of more moves like that and you and Bett will be able to retire to a pent- house in Scarborough. In any case you will get a lot more civilized facilities in Augusta, and I doubt that your new citizens are going to be very outgoing or into noisy parties.

From what Bernie wrote to me you seem to have gotten a really fertile patch of soil. He was on about the size of your tomatoes and onions (and the fact that in a couple of hours you caught a week's supply of fish). Half your luck. Every time I want to start a new garden bed I have to plan where the new rockery will be. What is left is largely clay but the trees seem to get through to some decent stuff underneath. We had a heck of a problem with the birds and the fruit trees but last year got onto the 'humming wire'. That is a West German product - a very strong plastic tape that vibrates in the wind and creates ultra-sonic, and some high frequency noises that the birds obviously find unpleasant. It was developed to keep sea-gulls from perching and cacking on yachts. Using this stuff last year we got, for the first time, the major share of our apricots, nectarines, cherries and apples. We are still eating out of the frozen stock. Merrelyn reckons that tomatoes also do well in the deep freeze but I have never grown enough for that experiment.

This is beginning to sound like a discussion between peasants. Who cares ! The big public debates that are now going on are not enthralling.

Because of Merrelyn's tie-ups we are flooded with loads of arguments about the 'new' educational deal. The level of debate is pathetic. No real political alternative exists between Hawke and the Libs so we find the academics in the uni's, CAE's etc engaged in a mad scramble of 'grab stakes and run'. The new vice-chancellor of ANU is circulating his analysis of the situation and takes for granted that the higher educational institutions are all into a 'snakes and ladders' game. It never even seems to occur to the short-sighted little twit that he should be shouting from the roof-tops that the universities are not into that sort of game, and to hell with the politicians that want to make it so. Hell, I have been black-balled by Australian universities for abusing them over the last twenty years for being factories in their teaching role and bloody irrelevant in their research role. I have never said that we do not need universities. I have held, strongly and publicly, that job training e.g. for teaching, medicine, theology, engineering, dentistry , should be done in bodies like the CAE's and the tech's. It is bullshit to pretend that that sort of professional training requires time out for reflection, the absorption of cultural values and the like. That sort of professional training has always been based on cramming in facts and the ruling dogmas, and on- the- job exposure. At all universities it has always been notorious that the med and engineering students, for instance, were , as a body, a pack of illiterate adolescent swots, and remained that way till graduation day. Any culture these coots had came from their family upbringing, not university.

It would not be enough to just shift this sort of professional training over to where it belongs. I think it would also be necessary to stop anyone going straight on to university until they were about 23 years of age. In mathematics and music we would have to make exceptions because in those fields some brains are just keyed in and ready to go from the earliest ages.(e.g. that young Chinese maths whiz in South Australia). Of course that would put the matriculation certificate, and its various equivalents, straight down the drain. Bloody marvellous - the secondary schools could get about their business without having to produce fodder for the uni's because it would no longer be any of their business whether their graduates went to uni.

Over the past ten years the uni's have had a lot of experience with the so-called mature age matriculates. These have been people who did not have High School Leaving Certificates or the like but were intelligent and could demonstrate an interest in further learning. These mature age matriculants have done remarkably well and been a real pressure on university staff to grow up. These are the sort of people that universities need. People who have worked for a living and want to come back to learn more so that they can better understand things - not people who want a skill or a certificate to practice a skill.

That is a real old rave.

I could almost want to go back to a uni like that; such a uni might even accept me.

That brings me to one thing where I have really lost out on. And ,I think ,lost for good.

For reasons that have to do with background, not brains, I have just about always managed to get to those little bits of social science that work and make sense. I think I have managed to prove that some of this social scientific knowledge is a damned side better than common sense, in fields as diverse as agricultural extension, prisons, mass media, education and industrial organization.

That is not just my opinion. I have done this over a couple of generations when the social sciences at large have proven themselves a waste of public money. A fat lot of good that has done me. It has created more enemies than friends in the academic world. That Mayo award thing was only possible because the committee was dominated by young people two generations after me.

My loss is simply stated.

There has been no-one, since I came home in '69, who would give me a chance to breed students in my own image. I have a better idea of what works and does not work in the social sciences than anyone I have met or read of in the social sciences.( And I have met and worked with people who are regarded as the tops, internationally). I have broken the 'sound-barrier', as it were, in how to statistically analyze the basic data of the social sciences i.e. multi-variate analysis. Merrelyn has a good grasp of these things and some of my ex-PhD students have a bit but for the rest I can forget it. That is a real buggar.