

Public holiday the best cure for Monday blues



Phillip O'Neill

APPARENTLY Monday is the most likely day to call in sick at work.

The Boomtown Rats didn't like Mondays. Mondays had the Moody Blues cryin'. The Bangles said Mondays were manic.

But today is Monday and for most of us there is no boss to call, no reason to cry, and no reason to get off the couch. Oh bliss.

The last time Boxing Day fell on a Monday – 2005 – Ricky Ponting strode to the crease at the MCG and plundered 117 runs from a South African attack, Kerry Packer died, and the NSW Rural Fire Service was on alert as the hottest-ever December on record entered its last week.

None of these is likely to recur this year, although don't give up hope on one of them.

Aside, can you believe that people will have queued this morning to get into shopping malls in search of bargains?

Don't laugh. These people also vote.

I visited a shopping mall last week. I felt nauseous, and I didn't even go near the food court. I had a broad idea of what I wanted to buy. But I soon realised that my desires are no longer matched by the contents of the 3.5 million containers that were unloaded on Australian wharves this year. 'What we make, you take,' is the only choice now on offer in Australian stores.

I left after a couple of hours, having spent just \$10 on a 1938 reprinted paperback, Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop*, the comic story of an aspiring young journalist, and I shall enjoy its humour between cricket overs today, mindful of the sterling efforts of *Newcastle Herald* journos this afternoon putting together tomorrow's paper.

So my visit to the mall did nothing to relieve the ailing balance sheets of Australian retailers, though I must say I did try to buy something from a leading department store, but I couldn't find the most basic of department-store fare, nor anyone remotely interested in helping me. No wonder the store was empty.

Elsewhere, the shopping mall was packed, its passages and escalators clogged with eager consumers, its centre court housing a giant conifer dusted with snow and gold flakes, with St Nicholas and his reindeer and a sleigh full of bounty circling its base.

Looking at it, my bah-humbug mood and my cynical sense of humour conjured images which made me smile. Imagine, instead of this medieval northern European scene, an image of Europe in 2011, of street protesters angry at austerity cuts and growing poverty, and queues of youth at airports leaving their home countries in search of work.

Or imagine a scene of the baby Jesus in today's Middle East or northern Africa, of citizens frustrated and bloodied after a year of fighting for democracy and human rights. Imagine the Christ Child waking on Boxing Day in Bethlehem in 2011, to a mix of desperate Palestinian locals and refugees, and aggressive West Bank Israeli settlers, shepherds without land let alone a flock to tend, and the three wise men barred entry.

Or imagine if this shopping mall's centre stage showed a 2011 Somali village in the midst of famine. Would this inspire us to rush back to the stores to buy more, more, more?

Still, I was able to poke a \$5 note into the tin of a fresh-faced volunteer in a Santa hat, representing a charity approved by the mall's managers, and I felt much better.

Until I returned home and opened my superannuation advice for 2011 and saw my balance had fallen once again.

Would Santa Claus share my resignation – a few years ago it was anger – that capitalism has invented a device where my earnings, one day's pay out of every fortnight, are steered into a fund which buys shares and exotic investment products that fall in value; so I end up worse off?

On the back of an envelope I calculate that I am now unlikely to live long enough to accumulate the savings I need to retire. Where is this drain where my savings flow? Can I go there so at least I can hear the gurgling sound?

Yet a Boxing Day on a Monday must surely have me in good spirits.



FIGHTING SPIRIT: Ricky Ponting celebrates a century in the Boxing Day Test in 2005 against South Africa. Can he repeat it again today?

A friend once told me that all is well if he has milk in the fridge and someone who loves him.

But there are extras which might be nice. Like fried leftovers. A cold one lying in the icy slurry of an unemptied Christmas-day esky. Unfilled summer days stretching out ahead. An out-of-office email setting saying, "Away for some time

yet." A Ponting ton. But, yes, milk in the fridge, surrounded by those you love, on this Monday, are indeed enough.

Professor Phillip O'Neill is the director of the Urban Research Centre, University of Western Sydney.

Box on, angels, you glue our lives together

We are the biggest gift we can give our community, writes Brian Farran.

TODAY is known as Boxing Day.

There are various suggested origins for this interesting name. The most likely is that boxes of money collected at Christmas Day services were given out to the poor on this day.

Boxing Day has long been associated with gifts. In contemporary Australia it is the day after the long lunch, when we give a public airing to the gifts we have received. Our streets are filled with young children riding new bikes, or learning to balance on newly received skateboards.

This year Boxing Day falls on a Monday. Each Monday *The Newcastle Herald* features a story of an unsung

hero – someone who is a gift to our community because of their commitment to others. I am amazed when I read the accounts of the unsung heroes and of the variety of their service and the length of their dedication.

I learned recently of a group of volunteers known as "angels". These folk deliver gifts bought by prisoners to the prisoners' children in their homes on Christmas Day, when most of us just want to be with our families.

At Christmas, every child wants to receive a present from its mother and father. Through these angels, the children of prisoners can experience this delight too.

I am stunned by the ingenuity of the service given by volunteers. Very careful thought has been given to meeting human needs so that those especially vulnerable do not have to be further deprived in any way. And

this service does come at personal cost, even if the personal cost is shrugged off.

There is a nice coming together today, Boxing Day, of the significance of gifts and the value of self-giving as a gift.

In fact, the quality of society depends upon the willingness of its members to be self-giving. This self-giving develops what has become known as social capital – that is, the glue that keeps a society humane and generous.

This Boxing Day the eagerly awaited film about Maggie Thatcher, *The Iron Lady*, is released.

When prime minister of Great Britain, Mrs Thatcher dismissively stated: "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families."

Her prime ministership saw the loss of much social capital in Britain and great social suffering for those

who were least able to endure it.

Whenever the invisible interconnections that bond us together are ignored or thwarted then there is very real social pain.

So this Boxing Day prompts us to consider the importance of the gifts that we can be to one another and to our community.

I value *The Newcastle Herald* celebrating on Mondays the unsung heroes of our community. It is good to acknowledge them and even better to be inspired by their self-giving.

They continue the tradition that gave its name to this day by ensuring that those in need are served.

Dr Brian Farran is the Anglican Bishop of Newcastle. Article submitted by the Churches Media Association.



Wind farm fans

A survey of 30,000 Upper Hunter residents found more than half expressed concern about potential noise, environmental and visual impacts resulting from wind farms. The *Newcastle Herald's* readers shared their thoughts online.

Bird choppers. If a mining company accidentally killed a couple of birds the authorities would be all over them and the fines would be big. But these wretched wind turbines can massacre thousands of birds and not a thing happens, and not a peep is made by the Greens. Hypocritical as always.

Bruce of Newcastle

And open cut coal mining does not have any visual impact, noise pollution or impact on the surrounding environment????

Chookman

And when there is NO wind, eat baked beans, may as well get coal seam gas without the odour. Give me coal any day and give people employment.

jimbob

Give me a wind turbine over a dusty mine any day! This is crazy law making, pandering to the mining lobby groups who continue to spread lies about wind power generation.

Lee

The NSW Coalition wants to allow residents within 2 km of a wind farm the power of veto to stop the wind farm. I suppose now the government would act the same way about coal seam gas extraction, coal mines, both underground and open cut? This veto power seems like a massive over reaction, as well as an attempt to restrict renewable energy.

Barry of Nambucca

Wind farms are a negative sum game. They cost more to construct run and maintain than they produce and must be heavily subsidised by government to be even partially worthwhile.

French Fries

ONLINE poll



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