

## The Bar Book Club

By Simon Kalfas SC

2010 is the inaugural year of the Bar Book Club. The Book Club meets every four to five weeks in the Bar Library at 6:00 pm. The date of each meeting and the book to be discussed are advertised in advance in *In Brief*. All members of the bar are welcome to attend.

Despite the fertile intellectual soil that the NSW Bar represents and the well developed reading skills required of practising barristers, the Book Club is not autochthonic. It is the initiative of the Health Sport and Recreation Committee whose touch falls lightly on proceedings; the large, lush and no doubt nutritious plate of fruit left unravaged amongst the debris of wine, cheese and biscuits at the first meeting, has not reappeared.

There have been six meetings so far this year. On average, a group of around ten to fifteen people assemble. In total, something over thirty members have attended at some time. Whilst some members have attended every meeting, the attendance of others depends upon their degree of interest in a particular book. Those attending range from senior silk to barristers in their first few years of practice. Some attending are published or yet to be published authors themselves. All have engaged equally in a robust but relaxed and

convivial discussion of the book then under consideration.

It is desirable but not necessary to have completed or even begun to read the chosen book in advance of each meeting. Inevitably conversation turns from a consideration of the author and the text or context of the book itself, to matters more tangential.

Apart from the all too obvious choice for the first meeting of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, all books have been selected in a reasonably democratic manner by those in attendance at the preceding meeting. A list of suggested books is regularly circulated amongst members and updated. Thanks in this, as in many other respects, are due to the librarian, Lisa Allen.

Books range from the classic to the contemporary. Authors selected so far include David Malouf, Philip Pullman, F Scott Fitzgerald, Annabel Crabb, Blanche d'Alpuget, George Orwell and Judith Keene.

Given the broad range of works compiled in the list of books for future consideration, the already discernable trend over the short life of the Book Club from fiction towards non-fiction will likely be reversed at some stage.

Another clear trend, as the year



has progressed, is that the number of pages involved has become an increasingly significant criterion for the selection of the next book. Perhaps members become distracted by the more prosaic demands of practice. It might be that a longer book could be selected at the end of the year by way of holiday reading for discussion at the first meeting next year.

It is anticipated that future meetings will involve consideration of various modes of writing beyond the novel including biography, history, drama, literary criticism and the art of translation, perhaps even poetry. Any suggestions from members of the Bar are welcome.

For those members of the New South Wales Bar looking for an opportunity to relax and engage with their colleagues beyond the bar table, the Book Club is one option worth considering.

### Verbatim

Sir Anthony Mason, launching *From Moree to Mabo: The Mary Gaudron Story*

There is the foreword to the book by Michael Kirby. We live in an age when no book is publishable unless it boasts either a foreword, a launch or a review by Michael Kirby. Perhaps some bestsellers boast all three.