

John Spoehr (ed.)

State of South Australia: from Crisis to Prosperity?

Wakefield Press, Kent Town, SA, 2009, 304 pp., \$34.95.

John Spoehr, who is the Executive Director of the Australian Institute for Social Research at the University of Adelaide, has committed to publishing a fully revised version of *State of South Australia* every three years. This major undertaking is important for a state which, second only to Tasmania, has often been regarded as the ‘Cinderella’ state in the Australian economy. Spoehr’s editorial introduction, written as the SA state was emerging from the impact of the recent global financial crisis, talks of buoyant export prospects for educational, services, water resources technologies, wine and grain. Investments in defence products are also expected to stimulate an otherwise sluggish manufacturing industry sector.

However, it is the proposed expansion of mining that is probably the most contentious aspect of the SA state’s political economy. At Olympic Dam, particularly gargantuan economic and environment impacts are anticipated – revenues projected to total around \$56 billion over thirty years from the copper, uranium, gold and silver that will be mined from a pit over four kilometres long, three and a half kilometres wide and deeper than Mt Everest in high (p. ix). This is the ‘dig it up, ship it out’ economic strategy at its most basic and, if this is to be the *national* emphasis, who could reasonably deny South Australia its share? Yet, on the same page of the book, the editor notes that the key to South Australia’s future prosperity and sustainability, as elsewhere, is how rapidly the state is able to make the transition to a low carbon economy.

The nineteen chapters in this book go far beyond an economic stocktaking. They include consideration of aboriginal policy issues, health, education, environment, housing, infrastructure, urban development, industrial relations, gender, demography, media and the arts. All accentuate the state’s strengths while acknowledging the weaknesses and emphasising the challenges ahead.