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Book Review: Clear, Mike (Ed) (2000) *Promises  
Promises: Disability and Terms of Inclusion*,  
Sydney, Australia: Federation Press  
<[http://www.federationpress.com.au  
/Books/Clear.html](http://www.federationpress.com.au/Books/Clear.html)>.

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*Promises Promises* documents the social justice struggle of people with disabilities in Australia and particularly New South Wales (NSW) over the last 25 years. It is based on people with disabilities telling their stories, involves a broad spectrum of the disability community, and presents an informed critique of the policy and legislative changes. The book developed from a Disability Council of NSW funded project "Telling Stories" which actively sought to present the lives of people with disabilities and the impact that government policy has had on their lives. As such, *Promises Promises* presents an openly social perspective on disability. This approach views the impaired person not as a tragic problem of the individual, but as a product of a disabling social environment and hostile social attitudes. This social perspective draws attention to the disabling economic, political, social and cultural systems that produce disabled people<sup>1</sup> in Australia.

The book is divided into three sections, has four appendices, extensive endnotes to each section and provides an excellent selected bibliography. The sections and appendices are: Part I: Dialogues on Disability; Part II: Promises Forstalled; Part III: Social Forces in Personal Lives; Appendix 1: Information, Research and Rights-based Contacts; Appendix 2: Definitions and Accommodation Figures; Appendix 3: Employment Statistics for NSW and Australia; Appendix 4: Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission figures relating to the DDA.

Part I, Dialogues on Disability, presents the stories of five people with disabilities presented as conversations with an interviewer. They include: Diana Qian, a physically disabled woman from a non-English speaking background whose story presents an emerging political activism; Alice, a woman with a psychiatric disability in an ongoing dialogue with institutional practices and professional power; the photographic reflections of Trevor Whiddon, a man with a developmental disability; Tony Murphy, a man with Down Syndrome and his life at Sunnyfield Association and subsequent community integration; and Sondra Wibberley's experience as a blind woman negotiating work. These chapters introduce the reader to the practicalities of emancipatory research through the intensely personal stories of disabled people. However, it is

this section of the book that does not have the same impact as the other two parts of the book. Greater thought needed to be given to when and in what format these conversations were to be used.

Part II, *Promises Forstalled*, is written by the editor of the book, Mike Clear, and provides the substantive critical analysis of the book. Chapters 6 and 7 review the disability related ideological, legislative and policy change in Australia and NSW over the last 25 years. Chapter 8 engages the title of the book by analysing the "promises" of government disability policy during this period and how this has been reflected in the lives of disabled people (positive, negative or uncertain). This is followed in Chapter 9 by a presentation and analysis of a variety of data that examines the persistence of alienation in the lives of disabled people and how this serves to marginalise disabled people's community involvement. Chapter 10 again personalises the analysis by providing a number of case studies (education, work, NSW Taxi Subsidy Scheme, the Disability Discrimination Act, and the market) highlighting a flawed reform process.

Part III, *Social Forces in Personal Lives*, returns to the involvement of disabled people by gathering five noted Australian authors with disabilities to write on four key social issues. These issues include social and political dimensions of access (Mark Sherry), representation and disability (Lynne Davis), telecommunications (Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell), and models of care and perceptions of disability (Jo Harrison). In reading these sections one was struck by the unique Australian context that provides further insights into the social construction of disability rather than just the United Kingdom or United States perspectives that dominate disability studies. This section is only disappointing in that the editor could have included many other issues and disabled authors.

*Promises Promises* identifies that there have been some important changes to social and cultural practices that affect the lives of disabled people in Australia. These changes have been heavily influenced by disabled people. However, their involvement has come about not always through an inclusive approach, but required a persistent determination to challenge the status quo of the day. The book shows the importance of and connection between: reflection on personal experience; understanding the political context of this experience; and the development of a movement for social change. *Promises Promises* does not claim to provide an anthology of the disability movement in Australia or NSW, but this book represents the first in a series of critical reviews on the Australian disability experience by the Federation Press and other publishers.

*Promises Promises* is an essential book for students, academics, policy makers, politicians, people with disabilities and anyone wishing to truly understand what a social and an emancipatory approach to disability involves. As such, *Promises Promises* is an important contribution to documenting the social justice struggle of people with disabilities in Australia, but particularly NSW over the last 25 years. However, it is more than this because it is based on people with disabilities telling their stories, involves a broad spectrum of the disability community, and presents an informed critique of the policy and legislative changes. *Promises Promises* is a significant contribution to disability studies in Australia. Nothing stands testament to the quality of this book from a disability perspective more than the fact that the NSW Minister for Ageing and Disability, the Hon. Faye Lo Po', refused to launch the book on the grounds that it was too controversial in content and critical in its analysis of the government.

## Note

1. While "people with disabilities" is the generally accepted terminology in Australia, *Promises Promises* adopts the British nomenclature of using "disabled people" as a political signifier that they cannot become people "first" until society stops "disabling" impaired people as set forth in Mike Oliver, (1990), *The Politics of Disablement*, Macmillan, London.