

FORTHCOMING FUNCTIONS AT THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE

SPEAKERS WANG DAN (Internationally renowned Chinese human rights activist)
TOPIC *After Tiananmen - Human Rights and China*
DATE Wednesday 24 January 2001 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00 pm
VENUE Museum of Sydney Theatre, Cnr Phillip & Bridge Streets, Sydney

SPEAKERS ANTONY GREEN (Election Analyst, ABC), GARY GRAY (Exec Director, WA Institute for Medical Research, former ALP National President), DR. MARIAN SIMMS (Politics School, Arts Faculty - ANU) & DAVID BARNETT (Author, *John Howard Prime Minister* [Penguin])
TOPIC *Election 2001*
DATE Tuesday 30 January 2001 **TIME** 5.00 for 5.30 pm
VENUE BT Training Room (Room 401) Level 4, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney

AUSTRALIA CHOOSES

SPEAKERS PHILLIP KNIGHTLEY (Author of *Australia - A Biography of a Nation* [Jonathan Cape]) & VIRGINIA GINNANE (Author of *Polly Borland Australians* [National Portrait Gallery UK])
TOPIC *Egalitarian Australia - Then and Now*
DATE Tuesday 6 February 2001 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00 pm
VENUE Museum of Sydney Theatre, Cnr Phillip & Bridge Streets, Sydney

SPEAKER LINDSAY TANNER MP (Shadow Minister for Finance),
TOPIC *To be advised*
DATE Monday 12 February 2001 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00 pm
VENUE BT Training Room (Room 401) Level 4, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney

SPEAKERS DANNA VALE MP (Member for Hughes), JUDIE STEPHENS & JANE FERGUSON (Law reform advocates)
TOPIC *Protecting People - Tax Reform and the Impact of Structured Settlements*
DATE Wednesday 14 February 2001 **TIME** 5.00 for 5.30 pm
VENUE 41 Phillip Street, Sydney **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**

SPEAKER PENELOPE NELSON (writer and author *Penny Dreadful* and *Beyond Berlin*)
TOPIC *National Vision - John Flynn and The Blind Spots of Leadership*
DATE Tuesday 20 February 2001 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00pm
VENUE 41 Phillip Street, Sydney 2000 **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**

AUSTRALIA CHOOSES

SPEAKER ANNE BURNS (Associate Director, National Centre for English Language & Research and author, *Analysing English in a Global Context* - Macmillan)
TOPIC *English in the World - Opportunity or Threat?*
DATE Wednesday 7 March 2001 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00pm
VENUE 41 Phillip Street, Sydney 2000 **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**

SPEAKER THE HON. TONY ABBOTT (Minister for Industrial Relations)
DATE Tuesday 20 March 2001 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00pm
VENUE Mallesons Conference Room, Governor Phillip Tower (Lvl 60)

AUSTRALIA CHOOSES

SPEAKERS DR ROBIN BATTERHAM (Chief Scientist, Commonwealth of Australia), PROF RON JOHNSTON (Centre for Innovation and International Competitiveness, Faculty of Engineering, Uni of Sydney), PROF. ANN HENDERSON-SELLERS (Director, Environment Department, ANSTO) & CATHERINE LIVINGSTONE (Company Director) in conversation with ROBYN WILLIAMS (ABC RadioScience Program)
TOPIC *Australia, Science Policy and the Commercialisation of Ideas*
DATE Wednesday 28 March 2001 **TIME** 5.00 for 5.30 pm
VENUE BT Training Room (Room 401) Level 4, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney

SPEAKER ALICE SPIGELMAN (Author of *Almost Full Circle - The Life of Harry Seidler* [Brandl Schlesinger])
TOPIC *Harry Seidler - a Life with Sydney*
DATE Tuesday 10 April 2001 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00pm
VENUE Clayton Utz Seminar Room (Level 34), 1 O'Connell Street, Sydney

SPEAKER PROF. ALLAN FELS (Chairman - Australian Competition and Consumer Commission)
DATE Monday 23 April 2001 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00pm
VENUE BT Training Room (Room 401) Level 4, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney

SPEAKER THE HON. PHILIP RUDDOCK (Minister for Immigration & Multicultural Affairs)
DATE Wednesday 16 May 2001 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00pm
VENUE Mallesons Conference Room, Governor Phillip Tower (Lvl60), 1 Farrer Place, Sydney

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THE

Sydney Institute

QUARTERLY

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IAN HENDERSON
on Howard's
Human Rights

GEORGINA GOLD
on Welfare Reform

STEPHEN MATCHETT
on Richard Butler et al

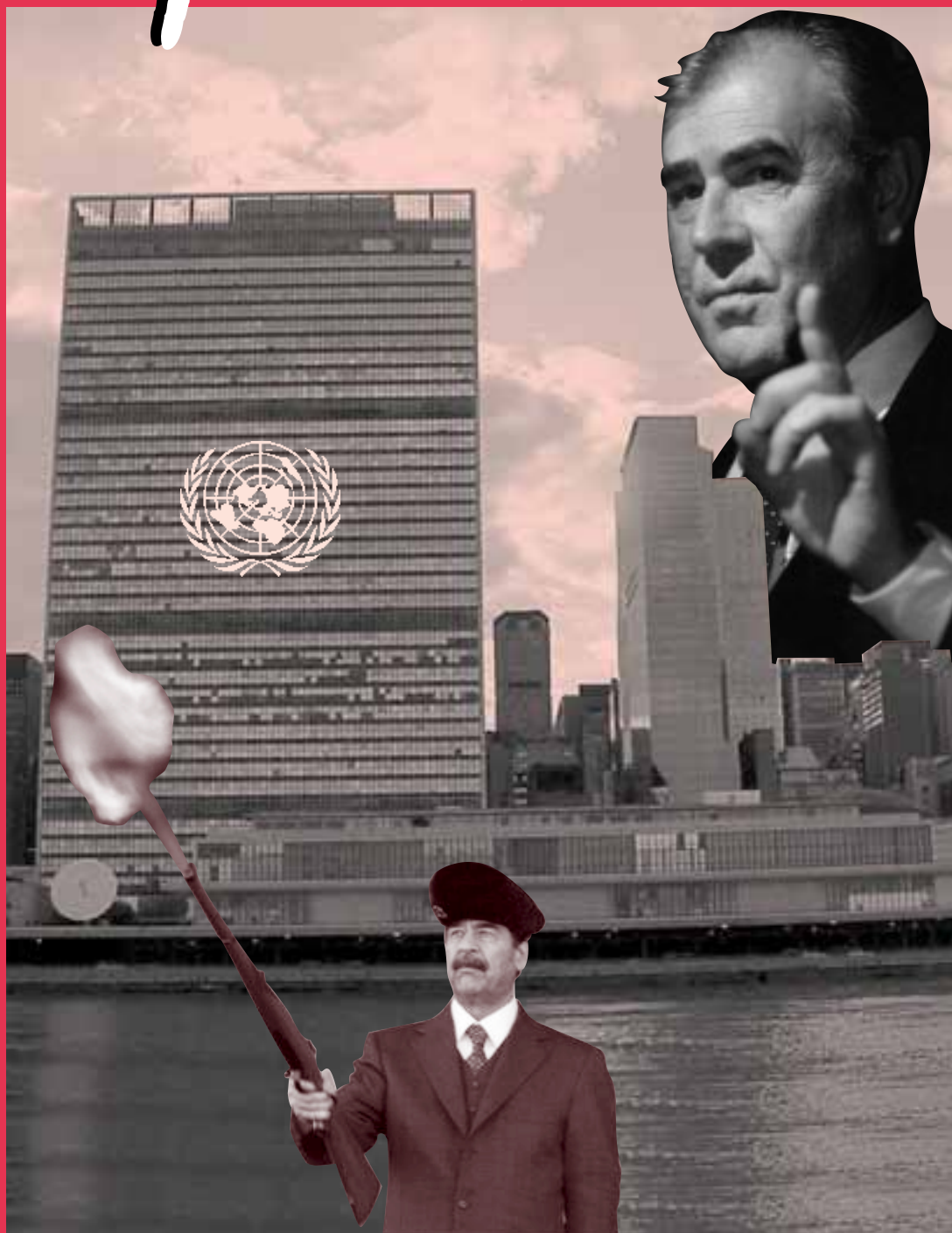
History -
What History?

Australia -
Big Economy,
Small Market

MEDIA WATCH
takes on Les Murray,
Christopher Pearson
and Alienated Expats

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with Gerard Henderson's

MEDIA WATCH

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MR DEMPSTER'S AUNTY

*D*ingo, in its slang usage, is a very Australian term of abuse. It's a word for the workplace, the sports field and the pub. So what is it doing in the ABC TV personality Quentin Dempster's most recent book *Death Struggle* (Allen & Unwin, 2000)? Well, according to the very latest tome by an ABC employee/contract worker on the ABC, "Brian Johns was a dingo". That is, when he was ABC managing director, as such, Dempster's employer. Now, *Death Struggle* is no quickie polemic. Rather it is a 392 page treatise designed to demonstrate "how political malice and boardroom powerplays are killing the ABC". So, clearly, Quentin Dempster feels very strongly about Brian Johns. And his predecessor David Hill. And, it seems, his successor Jonathan Shier.

Death Struggle is an informative and, at times, entertaining read. It's just that the author's mindset is one of endless conflict. This is evident in the title. Sure, the ABC has been squeezed financially by successive governments. However, with an annual budget of around \$500 million, it is hardly at death's door. Unfortunately, Quentin Dempster is heavily into battleground terminology. Early in his book he refers to his "personal war with the managing director". This was in 1993, during David Hill's time. Then later we learn that, circa 1997, "war was declared" by ABC staffers. This in Brian John's time. Later, still, the author volunteers that he put out a statement criticising the managing director of the day entitled "War at the ABC!". Then there is *Death Struggle*. And so on. According to Quentin Dempster, it will be all quiet on the ABC front only when Canberra – per courtesy of the taxpayer – comes good with the funds: "The answer to the ABC's problem is, as always, adequate public funding". With the emphasis on public. He reiterates a "call to arms to defend the ABC from commercialisation". And cites the "over-riding prohibition on advertising on the ABC as specifically contained in the ABC Act".

There are, however, some exceptions. Such as Quentin Dempster's 1992 book *Honest Cops* which was widely advertised on ABC TV. Few, if any, Australian authors have received such free publicity. Sure, *Honest Cops* was published by ABC Books. But it's still advertising, even if called by another name to satisfy the requirements of the ABC Act. Then there is the Andrew Olle Memorial Lecture held annually in Sydney. The guest speaker in 2000 was publisher Eric Beecher. Metropolitan ABC Radio in Sydney carried no fewer than 170 advertisements for the 2000 Lecture, along with numerous on-air plugs by presenters. The public spruiking for the 2000 Andrew Olle Memorial Lecture was clearly advertising. It's just that the ABC chooses to categorise it in the "community service announcement" category. In other words, the "that's different" defence to an evident inconsistency. But one form of spruiking is not different to another. They are the same.

In interviews at the time of the publication of *Death Struggle*, Quentin Dempster let it be known that he is committed to defending the ABC from commercialisation of any kind. The list includes the various modest proposals of David Hill, Brian Johns and Jonathan Shier to establish a separate ABC funding stream consistent with the organisation's charter. According to Quentin Dempster, the Commonwealth Government is under an "obligation" to fully fund the ABC. He fails to appreciate that successive governments – Coalition and Labor – seem to hold the view that the ABC should reform itself before receiving additional public funding. To this extent, *Death Struggle* may be counter-productive. It paints a portrait of an organisation in which the employees do not support the right of management to manage. In Quentin Dempster's preferred terminology, a real dingo.

POPULATE OR PERISH - MARK II

Anne Henderson

Australia may be a big economy. But, increasingly, reality is dawning on our leaders. In the intensely focused global network, we are a small market.

There's a new message from the Prime Minister. Immigration is good for us. Commenting on Seven Network's *Sunday Sunrise* (10 Dec), the PM told viewers, "We have to be as attractive as possible to bright people from around the world. And one of the things we ought to do is have, I think, a more open view perhaps in relation to our immigration policy ... we want the brightest and the best."

It was just over three years ago that the Prime Minister, addressing a meeting at Falconbridge, sent out a message that immigration was the cause of unemployment and levels should be cut. Countering the view that Pauline Hanson had originated discussion on unhealthy levels of immigration, Howard pointed out that "my belief that there is a causal link between certain levels of immigration and high unemployment goes back to 1991 ... long before anybody had heard of the current occupant of the seat of Oxley."

How times have changed.

Now, instead of culling our intake of would-be citizens, the problem is attracting sufficient of them to want to come. At Sydney Law School's International Symposium in November, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock admitted that "Australia has to be much cleverer in our approach to attracting them".

There's been a sea change in attitudes to immigration that has been quickening over the last year. Research published in Monash University's *People and Place* (Oct 2000) indicates that Australians have lessened their opposition to immigration since the post recession years of the mid 1990s. Those who feel immigration levels have gone "too far" are down from 66 per cent to 42 per cent in the survey. Commenting on the figures, Professor Murray Goot of Macquarie University said this could be because immigration intakes had declined in recent years and there had been a new emphasis on skilled migration with a decline in the numbers of family reunions.

The change in popular feeling has quickly been reflected in a number of statements from Philip

Ruddock. He told the Sydney Law School Symposium that "there is increasing global competition for skilled migrants and migrants who create positive social and economic benefits for their country of residence."

The government has no doubt taken account of community attitudes on immigration, but that is not why the message about immigration is sounding more positive. The fact is Australia has missed important opportunities and the government is into a catch up phase. There are new global attitudes afoot. Countries world wide are looking to ways of increasing investment in skilled workers. For many of these countries, declining birth rates and increasingly ageing populations are two important pressures influencing governments.

"In an information high tech age of rapid advance, some countries can't get enough of the migrants they want."

Australia's fertility rate, at a replacement level of 1.75, is now lower than New Zealand's at 1.9 and the US at 2.0 and hovers just above Japan, Canada and European countries like Germany and Italy, many of which are aggressively targeting skilled migrants. The only reason Australia's fertility rate isn't as low as Italy's at 1.2 is that more Australian women have three children, a trend not likely to continue.

Globally, the migrant market is hotting up. In an information high tech age of rapid advance, some countries can't get enough of the migrants they want. And Australia may have knocked back a unique opportunity to get in first - by turning its back on many thousands who might have made Australia home over nearly a decade while governments, both Labor and Coalition, wound back the healthy immigrant intakes of the 1980s.

Philip Ruddock's justification, for slowing immigration inflows after 1996, is that the composition of earlier intakes was out of touch with contemporary Australia's needs. A new assessment of the type of immigrant allowed in was long overdue. No problem there. But, by seriously reducing numbers, rather than maintaining intake levels and changing the criteria to a greater emphasis on skills, Australia has missed out doubly.

In a speech to the Australian Population Association Biennial Conference, 1 December, Minister Ruddock was more open about the case for Australia having a sustained interest in immigration. He was also somewhat frank about Australia needing to do more to attract immigrants of a skilled background in what is now a competitive market:

Countries not traditionally viewed as migration nations are now joining the race

to lure [migrants] to their shores. ... Canada has proposed a new points test with greater emphasis on university education; New Zealand has lowered their pass mark; the United States recently passed legislation to double the quota of skilled temporary entry workers under their H-1B visa class, particularly because of the pressure for more IT workers; the United Kingdom has also introduced new measures to make them more attractive. Other countries not viewed as traditional or core migration countries are also stepping up their efforts, with just some examples being Singapore, Iceland, Italy, Finland, Germany and Ireland.

We are now hearing somewhat invigorated arguments from the Minister for Immigration and the Prime Minister, that Australia could be seriously challenged in attracting the sort of immigrants we appear to need. This has happened as Australia seeks to make 50 per cent of its immigration inflow, based on a rigorous points test, what Ruddock calls "better-educated, younger, more job-ready migrants with the language skills to operate successfully in the Australian workplace". The phrase "language skills" of course is code for "speaking English" and "job-ready" indicates an immigrant that will cost the Australian taxpayer nothing by way of education.

But herein lies our problem. We can perhaps discount the education factor as a potential limitation on our future supply of immigrants. Increasingly, over-populated countries have improved educational standards along with their improving economies. But the insistence on English language skills, as well as university education, does limit the pool considerably. It is true that English is now the international language, especially in IT and with the surging pull of the USA in e-commerce.

However, it is also true that countries where English is a first language are no longer countries where university educated classes want to migrate in significant numbers. And when they do, Canada, the UK and the USA are well ahead of Australia as a destination. Even English speaking graduates from Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia, populations which are experiencing a noticeable brain drain, are not seeking admittance to Australia over the northern hemisphere.

But go to Latin America, China, Vietnam, the Middle East and the story is different. Here you will find the sort of immigrants John Howard would call "the brightest and the best", except they don't always speak English. Perhaps it's time to cast our minds back to those immigrants we occasionally boast of - from the 1960s and 1970s. Immigrants who have not only made good citizens, but also enriched monolingual Australia with the language skills

Premiers Bob Carr and Steve Bracks hail when taking up Australia as a great place to do business.

The fact is that, due to Australia's isolation and small population, it has never been able to be too choosy about who might settle here. We have no land borders and our continental nature protects us more than most from illegal immigration. Those illegal immigrants who do reach our shores are very small in number compared to any other developed nation - whether in Europe or North America. But our distance from northern hemisphere and European hubs makes it doubly difficult to outpace older, wealthier and more diverse societies.

As Treasurer Peter Costello has claimed, we are small by world standards. He told ABC Radio's *AM* on 16 November that "In world terms, Australia is a pretty small country - 20 million people. And we just have to run faster to keep up. We have to be the best at everything we do." Commenting on Australia's low dollar on Nine Network's *Business Sunday*, in October, consultant economist to Suisse Asset Management, Al Wojnilower, put his overseas perspective plainly: "Unfortunately it is a beautiful country but very small."

"Who will replace the unskilled who are ageing - the taxi drivers, the cleaners, the mowing round-odd job person? Local older graduates?"

But small in population and distant as we are from most of the first world, the fact remains that, with our developed Western society, we now face similar problems to those of other, much larger, developed Western nations - the associated problems of a population that is in danger of stagnating. We are no longer replacing ourselves. In three decades, deaths will begin to outnumber births. For those dependent on social security and services such as aged care, it is sobering to note that in 1991 there were six wage earners for every aged person and in 2031 there will be only three wage earners for each aged person - at our current population growth.

Population explosion theorist Professor Paul Ehrlich would approve. He believes Australia cannot sustain increased population because of environmental degradation. He wants Australia to slash its population to 10 million. But Ehrlich lives in California where the population is booming and real estate prices are rising rapidly in the aftermath of the success of Silicon Valley. Ehrlich will never have to have to pay the increased Australian taxes that will be required to service the imbalance between wage earners and government dependents that will surely come with an ageing population. Moreover, any real estate Ehrlich owns in California will not suffer the devaluation that a population of 10 million would deliver to Australian home owners.

Furthermore, as the CSIRO points out, the greatest environmental damage done to Australia's environment occurred in the 19th Century when our population was very much smaller and closer to Paul Ehrlich's ideal figure. For Philip Ruddock, "To cast the size of our population as a major environmental villain is simplistic, wrong and dangerously misleading. Worse, it diverts efforts and attention away from finding real solutions to our environmental problems."

If Australia is to keep pace with the numbers needed, it has two options: increase fertility or increase immigration. We may need to do both. At current levels of immigrant intake, some 75,000 per year, and with fertility levels evening out at 1.64, Philip Ruddock maintains that Australia's population will stabilise at around 25 million mid way through this century. The problem is that dropping fertility levels may well catch those of Italy faster than we imagine. As Philip Ruddock points out, "There are no examples anywhere in the world where a nation has been able to recover significantly its fertility rate once it has reached ... low levels."

If increased fertility is the preferred option though, it will be expensive. It will take what Shadow Health Minister Jenny Macklin describes as demonstrating "how the responsibility for children in the early years can be shared between parents, the community, governments and the private sector."

As we know, one of the great impediments to a woman's choice of becoming a parent is the interruption motherhood will bring to her career and the costs associated in rearing children. Women, like men, need and want the security of career opportunities. Babies can make a difference to women's prospects. Families need community support, and fertility will only increase when the workplace becomes effectively family friendly.

Governments have yet to be convinced on this. The expenditure alone would be substantial. But as Jenny Macklin argues:

At the national level the Treasurer and the Minister for Social Security developed the initiative for compulsory superannuation together. Requiring everyone to put aside a proportion of their income every week is a very tough ask – but it was achieved because the country understood why it was necessary. We can do the same with early childhood policies.

Such enlightened investment is, as yet, not even on a government drawing board. Childcare support in fact has lessened in the past four years. Parents are doing it tough.

So we really have little alternative but to listen to the Minister for Immigration when he says, "We should be prudent and minimise the prospect of eventual

ALLAN FELS

to address The Sydney Institute

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TIME : 5.30 for 6.00pm
VENUE : BT Training Room (Room 401)
Level 4, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney

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population decline and a decline in the size of the labour force." And we also need to consider, regularly, the way we judge our nation's needs. Skilled immigrants on their own are not the simple solution for the long term as they now appear to be – just as family reunions proved after a decade or so.

An immigration intake should reflect the levels of difference in the host country. Skilled immigrants can just as easily become scapegoats as unskilled immigrants. It could be argued that the better educated immigrant could threaten the jobs of local graduates if the job pool doesn't expand. Who will replace the unskilled who are ageing – the taxi drivers, the cleaners, the mowing round-odd job person? Local older graduates?

Our points test for immigrants could be in danger of becoming too rigid, too controlled by statistics. Mary Crock argued, at the Sydney Law School Symposium in November, that, "The current system provides less scope for selecting people on the basis of their potential, and has virtually removed the ability of the immigration officials to work outside the rules so as to 'take a punt' on applicants." This, Crock argues, means many good applicants are being denied entry. And she concluded:

Immigration laws that look to pigeon hole migrants – that select on the basis of proven performance; that cut no slack when people fail or present with imperfections cannot be in the national interest. ... We should take note that the most successful aspects of the skilled migration program are those in which the elements of discretion have been maintained, and where the selection process involves a genuine balancing of interests, however complex these might be.

And, while it may be said that the rhetoric on immigration is changing and becoming more positive, there are still prejudices aplenty in Australia's attitude to countries where English is not always the first language – take Brazil or China, or even India where so much English is spoken. As Opposition spokesperson on immigration Con Sciacca has pointed out, we need to review our "high risk" list. If some of the best and brightest in China and India can't get visas to visit Australia, how can we attract them as migrants?

Immigration is back as a positive, albeit with a new twist. As an immigrant nation, we had better make the best of it while we can. But rhetoric is all very well. Solutions to ageing and the brain drain will take more.

Anne Henderson is editor of The Sydney Papers



JOHN HOWARD'S CAMPAIGN FOR UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Ian Henderson

John Howard has begun a commendable but risky campaign in favour of democracy and human rights worldwide. The campaign, discrete in style but expressed unambiguously and in public, is Howard's calculated rebuttal of the view that "Asian values" can substitute for the "universal values" that underpins Western democracies.

It is also the Australian Prime Minister's way of dealing with the high profile attacks on himself by Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed.

In the cricketing parlance often favoured by Howard, it's better to gently deflect those attacks to fine leg for a safe single than to attempt the more dangerous shot of sloggng them out of the park for a more spectacular six. Hence, his muted responses to Mahathir's recent verbal assaults.

But even a slight nudge does not go unnoticed in diplomatic circles, any more than it does on the cricket field.

When Mahathir's diplomats reported back to Kuala Lumpur on Howard's mid-2000 visit to South Korea, they would doubtless have highlighted the evidence of Howard's campaign. It's on the public record.

Howard wanted to thank his host, South Korean president Kim Dae-jong, for his country's contribution to the Australia-led Interfet force in East Timor: "Our association in that mission was an expression of our joint commitment to the values of political freedom and human rights," Howard declared, at the formal dinner given in his honour by Kim.

On the face of it, an uncontroversial statement. But Howard went further, using words that must have rung throughout the Asian region: "And you, Mr President, are right to frequently stress that those values are universal and they are not confined to one particular group of countries," the Prime Minister added, pointedly.

Howard repeated those words in front of an audience of several hundred Australian and South Korean business and government representatives in his final public appearance on that trip. The statements were both deliberate and telling.

Howard was rejecting the view that it's acceptable to make compromises over human rights, as some who support the existence and legitimacy of "Asian values" argue. And he was enlisting, as an ally in that cause, a man who had survived jail terms and threats to his life to win the top elected office in his own country, an important middle-ranking Asian nation.

Howard is deeply impressed with Kim, commenting both publicly and privately on just how inspiring it was to meet a man who had retained his commitment to the values of democracy, human liberty and political freedom despite his own suffering.

Experiences differ. But around Asia, Howard finds only an uncomfortably few nations with those values entrenched in their political institutions or in the commitments of their leaders.

Japan and Thailand are two countries that do pass the Prime Minister's test, as does Taiwan; Indonesia's president Wahid is one new leader who meets the standard. In Howard's eyes, they share an allegiance to "universal" rather than to compromised "Asian" values, notwithstanding their geographic location.

That is, unlike some of their neighbours, they share an allegiance to democratic constitutions, to good governance, to democratic values, to human rights, to political freedom. And unlike some of their neighbours, they do not now resort to measures that restrict human rights in some phoney appeal to Asian rather than universal values; they now change governments by ballot and not at the point of a gun.

Among the countries that conspicuously fail Howard's test is Malaysia itself, and that's no wonder, given his antipathy towards the brutal treatment meted out to Mahathir's former deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, by that country's public institutions. Howard's campaign in defence of human rights will doubtless get under Mahathir's thin skin. And thereby probably eventually give rise to another of the Malaysian leader's truculent attacks on Westerners in general and on Australians in particular.

But Howard is right to stand firm against that threat and for human rights.

However, Mahathir's likely verbal revenge is only one of the difficulties that Howard's stance poses for himself and for Australia. Much more important, Howard's campaign thrusts Australia's own domestic human rights record into the global spotlight. It's a record that will stand comparison

with most of Australia's near neighbours. But it's also a flawed record, as the too often dire conditions in which many Aborigines live reveals most starkly.

Not to mention the Prime Minister's own stubborn refusal to clear the air over an official apology to the "stolen generation" of Australians with an indigenous background.

Howard deserves praise for his stand for universal human rights. But he can hardly complain if indigenous leaders brook no excuses for the government's – and the nation's – flawed record and cite the Prime Minister's backing of universal rights overseas in support of their own position.

Ian Henderson, political correspondent, The Australian.



A STOCKBROKER'S LIFE

Jim Bain has recently retired after 40 years service in the finance sector in Sydney.

A prominent businessman, he has been influential in the history of Australian finance.

The Remarkable Roller Coaster is an autobiographical account of some of the major events in Jim Bain's working life, including insights into Alan Bond and the Santos affair, Lloyd's activities in Australia, the Poseidon boom and the author's involvement in post-war financial services in Australia.

***The Remarkable Roller Coaster will be launched
at the State Library of New South Wales***

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DOWN AND OUT IN MELBOURNE AND SYDNEY

Georgina Gold

Welfare-to-work reform is all the rage – in Britain, the United States and, now, Australia. Fair enough. However, as Georgina Gold demonstrates, the life of the welfare recipient is not easy. Payments are small, administrative requirements rigorous and the "dole bludger" rhetoric still lives on.

The issue of welfare reform has once again hit front page in Australia with Senator Jocelyn Newman's new package having been unveiled. Mass restructuring of welfare systems has been popular on the international scene over the last few years with the Clinton administration's "The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996" and the Blair government's "Welfare to Work" program. There exists a similar policy thread that runs through these three packages - advanced by Bill Clinton, Tony Blair and, now, John Howard. That is, to get as many people off the welfare system as possible and back into the workforce.

Senator Newman's welfare package, released on 14 December 2000, states that the social security system "needs to change from a passive and rigid structure, that does not encourage participation, to one based on engaging people in social and economic participation".

The Howard Government has formally considered the Final Report on the Reference Group on Welfare Reform (the McClure Report, chaired by Mission Australia chief executive Patrick McClure). The Family and Community Service Minister's response, entitled *Welfare Reform: A Stronger, Fairer Australia*, found that the existing social security system is "failing many Australians" because the system only offers aid when things go wrong. Instead, the government argues, the system should be structured so that it is predominantly preventative. The high rate of dependence on social security payouts (one in seven people of working age is dependent on social security payments) is due to not only the inherent reactive nature of the system but also its complexity and a lack of incentive for participation.

The new proposals brought in by Senator Jocelyn Newman are reminiscent of those introduced by Bill Clinton and Tony Blair in the latter half of the 1990s - improved financial incentives to return to the workforce, increased obligations on jobseekers and expanded services to aid jobseekers.

However, some non-government organisations have criticised the welfare blueprint - with concern being expressed at the lack of policy detail and firm funding commitments. There are fears that the new welfare policy will end in expenditure reductions, even though the government has promised that this is not a cost cutting exercise.

In addition, Labor shadow minister, Chris Evans, has expressed fears that with the plan to extend the concept of "mutual obligation" - to unemployed people over 60, single parents with a child over six, and people with a disability - will only further "demoralise those who feel they have been thrown on the scrap heap". Meg Lees, leader of the Australian Democrats, announced that although the Australian Democrats support the commitment to ensuring that Australia's social security system is based on engagement and participation in social and economic activity, the system should be based upon "assistance and incentives, not compulsion and financial penalties".

The fear regarding the punitive nature of the current social welfare system has not been allayed by the release of the welfare package. Notably, there has been no mention by the government of any lessening of financial penalties incurred by breaching the system.

A joint research paper by the National Welfare Rights Network and ACOSS *Doling out Punishment - the Rise and Rise of Social Security Penalties* (9 November, 2000) has found that "the number of harsh social security penalties being imposed on people receiving unemployment benefits has dramatically increased". It has estimated that almost "200,000 unemployed people and students were penalised" in the last year with many being penalised more than once. The report has suggested that the financial penalties are disproportionately high in comparison with the seriousness of the offence. For example - "a penalty of between \$280 and \$340 is imposed for failing to reply to a letter" and up to \$1300 applies for failing to attend an interview.

The people that are most likely to suffer from these penalties are those that are already struggling. Because the penalties relate to breaches regarding administrative tasks, homeless people (who do not have a fixed mailing address and sometimes fail to receive and therefore react to letters on time), people with low literacy skills, people with drug or alcohol problems, people with disabilities, psychiatric

conditions and Indigenous Australians face more chance of breaching the rules as stipulated by Centrelink. The complexity of the administrative tasks, and the demand by Centrelink of rigorous adherence to them, more often than not leads to errors being made - these mistakes are penalised.

Case studies released by ACOSS regarding individuals breaching rules, but providing Centrelink with valid excuses, are eye opening. One case study tells of Centrelink refusing to excuse a young man who missed an interview because he was attending a funeral - the young man was financially penalised. The number of penalties doled out by Centrelink has increased by 250 per cent over the last three years. This has meant a subsequent increase in government revenue of \$170 million. Fifty-three per cent of these breaches have been incurred by young people. According to ACOSS calculations, the government has simultaneously cut \$1.8 billion in funding to employment programs.

The recent Smith Family/NATSAM report defined the relative poverty line at "50 per cent of the family income of the average person in Australia". The report stated that "for a single employed person (the poverty line) is \$224.97 a week".

A single unemployed person on the dole receives \$163 per week. That means that people receiving unemployment benefits are struggling to survive at \$62 dollars a week below the poverty line. Not an easy task. Especially if you are living in the Olympic city where rent is almost double that of other cities in Australia and up to triple that in rural Australia.

Recently, welfare agencies have reported a dramatic increase in demand for their services. Many agencies maintain that the rise in social security breaches and subsequent income-related penalties have added to the demand by low income people for emergency financial relief and material aid. (*Doling Out Punishment*).

Although there has been a rapid increase in punitive measures, welfare rorting is reasonably uncommon. In the 1999 Menzies Lecture, Petro Georgiou (the Federal Liberal member for Kooyong) maintained that "the evidence is that the incidence of fraud by welfare recipients is extremely low". He also suggested that "we need to guard against characterising the incidence of fraud in a way that becomes a sweeping attack on the integrity and social responsibility of the overwhelming majority of social-security recipients seeking to rise above difficult circumstances".

Merle Mitchell, former ACOSS president, claims that there are less than 2500 cases annually where people are actually prosecuted for welfare rorting. This constitutes "less than half of one per cent of all social

security recipients". Merle Mitchell also maintains that "those who work within the system know that it is very easy for people to be accused of rorting the system when in fact there have been very genuine mistakes".

The new welfare package aspires to calm the negative rhetoric that surrounds welfare - i.e. the "dole bludger" allegation. The package talks of incentives, participation, obligation and encouragement. It still, however, speaks of breaches, force and punitive measures. There seems to exist a prevailing attitude, both within sections of the government and the broader society, that people who are receiving unemployment benefits are bludgers. And they are too fussy about work - scared of hard yakka. This was most clearly highlighted in former Employment Services Minister Tony Abbott's comments describing some unemployed people as "job snobs" and as being "work shy". These comments, although refuted by Senator Newman, reinforced a prevailing negative attitude that the dole encourages welfare dependence and there is a lack of incentive to find work.

The politics of welfare has always been contentious. Australia prides itself on having a wide-ranging social safety net. But the welfare issue has always been

CASE STUDY 1

Isa is 19 years of age and receiving Youth Allowance. Isa did not have stable accommodation and therefore used a youth agency as his postal address. The fact that Isa was homeless was coded on his computer records, but he was not exempted from the Youth Allowance Activity Test requirements. Accordingly, he was sent letters to attend Job Network provider interviews.

The large youth agency processed mail several times a week, on behalf of all its clients. The result was that it took about three to four days from the time the mail was received at the agency to the time that the young person was given the mail.

Isa incurred two Activity Test breaches* for failure to attend a Job Network interview. In both cases the reason Isa did not comply with his requirements was because he had not receive the mail in time for him to attend the interviews.

***(note by author: this approximates to a 24 per cent reduction of Isa's allowance - about \$1081)**

2001 THE YEAR OF THE ELECTION

In 2001, there will be a federal election and two state elections to keep journalists busy and politicians on the run. Before it all gets underway, The Sydney Institute will hold an important seminar to discuss the issues, the swings that might be on, what seats to watch and which party might take government after the votes are counted. Join The Sydney Institute for this important discussion

SPEAKER : ANTONY GREEN (Election Analyst, ABC),
GARY GRAY (Executive Director, WA Institute for Medical Research & former ALP National President)
DR. MARIAN SIMMS (Politics School, Arts Faculty - ANU)
DAVID BARNETT (Author, *John Howard Prime Minister*)

TOPIC : Election 2001
DATE : Tuesday 30 January 2001
TIME : 5.00 for 5.30pm
VENUE : BT Training Room (Room 401) Level 4, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney

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STUDENTS \$5/OTHERS \$10

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imbued with emotion - with accusations of dole bludging, job snobbery, underpayment, welfare rorting, payment cutbacks and the need for safeguard mechanisms resonating from all sides of the politics. Senator Newman, in listening to the outcome of the McClure report, has made a start. Yet, in the outcry over the policy's lack of detail, and the apprehension it now brings to many who are genuinely already penalised by social disadvantage, there clearly is much more work to do. So let's scrap the rhetoric of resentment in favour of a realistic evaluation of welfare and obligation.

Georgina Gold is a freelance journalist and is currently completing her Masters of Public Policy at Macquarie University.

CASE STUDY 2

Lyn was aged about 49 years and suffered from a slight mental disorder which resulted in her being quite vague and suffering bouts of memory loss (similar to the early onset of dementia). Lyn did not like to disclose her condition and by its nature she does not recognise that she has a problem.

Lyn is still quite motivated and keen to seek employment. She was sent to a Job Network provider who sent letters asking her to attend an interview. Lyn kept forgetting to go and lost the letters. Lyn was eventually breached. She asked her social worker to help after she tried unsuccessfully to clear the matter up herself. The social worker rang the Job Network provider and explained the situation.

Lyn then arrived at the Job Network provider's office at 7 am, an hour and a half earlier than the appointment time. Lyn arrived so early because she was worried about missing the appointment.

Lyn was required to sign a letter to say she did not have to meet the Activity Test Agreement, as the Job Network provider realised that she was not able to do so. However, the breach was maintained and the client eventually appealed after she obtained assistance from a welfare rights worker. It took two months before the ARO considered the matter and reversed the decision to apply a breach. The result was that Lyn had to survive on a reduced income for nearly four months.

*Case studies from ACOSS report **Doling Out Punishment - the Rise and Rise of Social Security Penalties** (9 November 2000)*



BOOK REVIEWS

John McConnell

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA:
PEOPLE, POLITICS AND HISTORY
SINCE 1975**

By Sean Dorney
ABC Books, pb 2000, rrp \$29.95
ISBN 0 7333 0945 3

Sean Dorney's rewrite of his 1990 book on Papua New Guinea is timely. PNG recently celebrated 25 years of independence from Australia. The occasion of the silver jubilee provides an opportunity to reflect on PNG's progress and problems to date.

Sean Dorney left Australia in 1974 to work in PNG. He is married to Pauline, who comes from Manus Island. To Dorney, PNG is an "an endlessly fascinating place", even though he was deported at one stage when the government decided to demonstrate its displeasure with the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

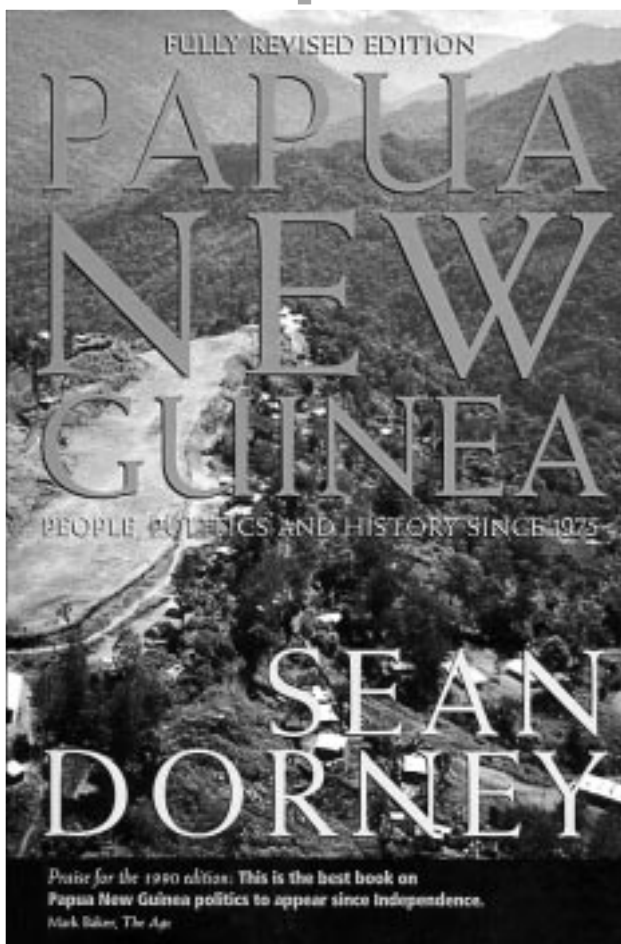
Papua New Guinea: People, Politics and History Since 1975 is a companion piece to the ABC TV documentary, *Paradise Imperfect*. There are reasons to celebrate following 25 years of independence. Parliamentary democracy in Papua New Guinea appears to be firmly established. There exists a free and forthright media. Besides, PNG is rich in minerals.

There are significant concerns, however. Social indicators provide little basis for optimism. Economic growth is disappointing. Crime is a serious matter. Infrastructure is deteriorating. The terrain imposes special difficulties. There is a complex land tenure system. There is a large public sector with no shortage of ineptitude. Unemployment is a major problem.

Meanwhile, the political system produces politicians intent on rewarding supporters rather than serving the national good. There is a very high turnover of politicians from one election to another. Political success may hinge on receiving only a very small percentage of votes. The political party system is fluid and feeble.

In a party system where ideology counts for little, numbers gather for relatively short time periods around dominant personalities. Parliament is unusually powerful - more powerful than the government. The Prime Minister's ability to discipline ministers is limited. Prime Ministers risk being overthrown, in-between elections. Since independence, five prime ministerial changes have occurred mid-term compared with three at general elections.

Sean Dorney surveys PNG across eleven chapters. He discusses parliamentary democracy, relationships with Irian Jaya, the economy, Bougainville, Sandline, the chances of a coup, provincial government, corruption, crime and punishment.



The author points out that the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya represents one-fifth of Indonesia's land mass. PNG and Indonesia review their border agreement every five years. This is an important and sensitive issue. Equivalent to the NSW-Victorian border in length. The border dividing west and east is impossible to seal. Thick jungle encompasses the line drawn on a map by European colonial administrators in the northern section; concrete survey posts mark the border at 35 kilometre intervals. "The ruler used to draw colonial borders in nineteenth-century Europe," the author notes, "was not sensitised to the concept of Melanesian land boundaries."

Sean Dorney believes that PNG needs to accept that Irian Jaya is being Indonesianised. Groups of Indonesians are transferring to Irian Jaya with its low population density. He sees trained agricultural

extension officers, research and better infrastructure as key needs for the PNG economy, and stresses the importance of many Papuans possessing the ability to shift out of the cash economy in order to grow their own food from time to time.

He also refers to the writings of Margaret Mead on PNG. You may recall the reception given to Derek Freeman's questioning of Margaret Mead's writings on Samoa. There are Papuans, Sean Dorney writes, intent on having their say about Mead's material on PNG.

An Australian AusAID paper observed that PNG provides a paradox. A rich level of natural resources and substantial foreign aid coexist with disappointing growth and poor social indicators. Sean Dorney concludes that PNG will continue to perplex.

**NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE:
THE JOHN SAUNDERS STORY**
By Gabriel Kun
Scribe Publications, pb 1999, rrp \$32.95
ISBN 0 908011 41 5

**FRANK LOWY:
PUSHING THE
LIMITS**
By Jill Margo
HarperCollins
Publishers, pb,
rrp \$39.95
ISBN 0 7322 6756 0

What pops into your mind when you think of Westfield? Images of large and successful shopping centres no doubt. Perhaps the names of particular individuals may register – for example those of Westfield's founders – John Saunders and Frank Lowy.

Frank Lowy is placed second (to Kerry Packer) on Australia's rich list, and his three sons – David, Peter and Steven – are part of the business now. John Saunders withdrew from the company some years ago. He died in 1997.

John Saunders and Frank Lowy migrated to Australia in 1950 and 1952 respectively. Their partnership began with a Blacktown delicatessen. From there, they

moved into land subdivisions and property development. They then started Westfield – choosing a name signifying (subdividing) land or fields in Sydney's western suburbs.

The Westfield story is a remarkable account of two migrants seeking new opportunities far from war-torn Europe and encountering material success on a lavish scale. Two books now chart the lives of Westfield's founders.

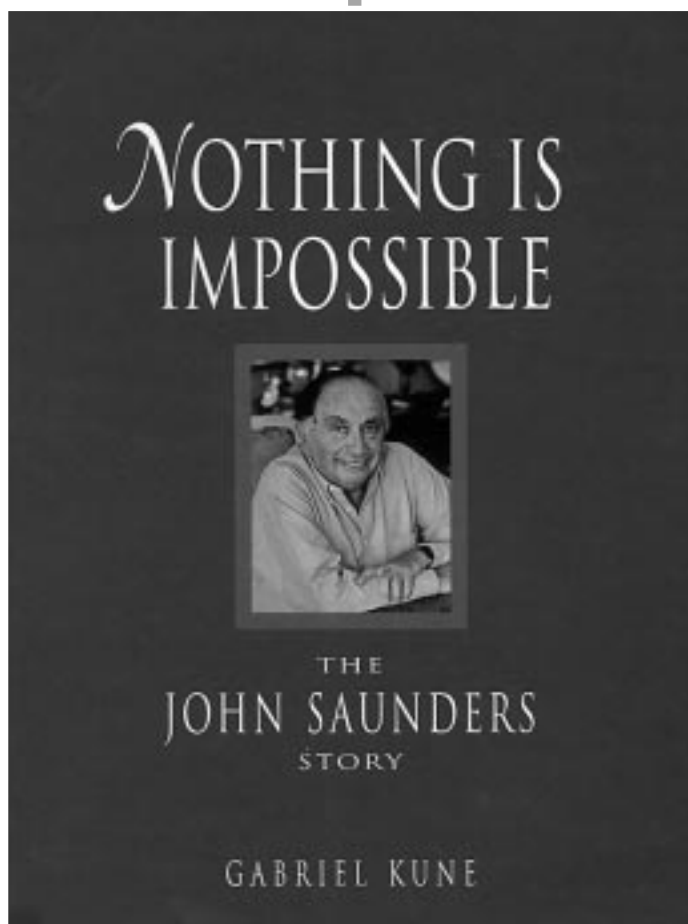
Gabriel Kune has written the story of John Saunders while Jill Margo is the author of Frank Lowy's biography. The books provide fascinating insights into the lives of Westfield's founders. Both men were born to Jewish families in the Slovakia-Hungary area of Europe. Both survived the Holocaust.

Gabriel Kune recounts how John Saunders decided on the day of his Bar Mitzvah to leave school in order to help his widowed mother in the family's leather shop. During the Second World War, John Saunders was interned in a concentration camp. When he arrived in Australia following the end of the War, he carried in his possession an Hungarian-English dictionary with the word "impossible"

crossed out - a symbol of the determination and drive he was to bring to his adopted country.

John Saunders possessed a mischievous sense of humour. A keen observer and listener, he blended entrepreneurial ability with a liking for mixing with people. But the balance between work and family was askew. John Saunders' total commitment to work meant that family members were to suffer. Gabriel Kune recounts Saunders' business successes and personal blemishes. John Saunders, he argues, was a man of paradox. He illustrates this in a number of ways. Kune's book is interesting also because it positions the

life of John Saunders in the context of what it means to be a Jew. *Nothing is Impossible* is a moving account of a person the author deeply respected.



In addition to discussion of Frank Lowy's personal life, Jill Margo's *Pushing the Limits* includes considerable coverage of the business deals that led to Westfield's expansion within Australia and later internationally.

The preparation of the biography appears to have induced significant reflection by Frank Lowy. He is quoted as saying: "The writing of this biography enriched me in ways I could not have imagined. My life was always so frantically busy, so crammed with activity, that it rushed by me. I never had time to reflect and in many ways this book restored that lost opportunity."

The evidence suggests that Frank Lowy was able to change the way he operated within Westfield and that a mellowing occurred in his family relationships.

Jill Margo links personal and commercial dimensions in writing the biography. She identifies in Frank Lowy a remarkable drive to succeed. Or is it, as the book discusses, more accurately expressed as a fear of failure? The origins of such a tremendous drive may be located in the circumstances prevailing during Lowy's childhood. Circumstances that conspired to rob him of his childhood. He was forced to grow up very rapidly indeed.

At an early age, Frank Lowy was forced to hone his survival skills. He developed an ability to locate food for the family. He assumed responsibility for his mother (Ilona) for a time. Later, Frank served in the Israeli army. He migrated to Australia where he was reunited with his family (much later Frank Lowy established that his father, Hugo, had died following a beating by an SS officer at Auschwitz).

Who knows how Frank Lowy's psyche was affected by those early days when a mistake could have been fatal? Ever since, he appears to have carried with him a sense of unease – a feeling that something is about to go awry. Does this help to explain a need to control one's environment? For years, he read the company's entire mail each day.

Both books paint a similar picture of the remarkable partnership that Saunders and Lowy established. Their trust in each other. How they complemented each other. Frank Lowy was the more cautious of the two. His inclination was in the direction of financial

planning and budgeting. He would carefully scrutinise and analyse the financial components of business deals. John Saunders was more the visionary who liked to mix with people. He was the entrepreneur with a talent for marketing and promotion.

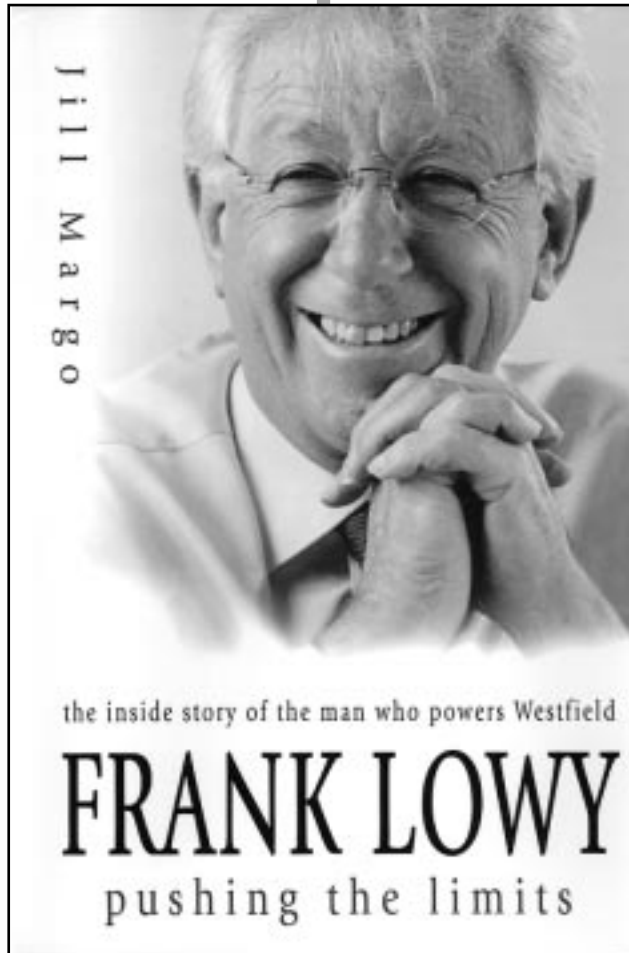
And yet, when Westfield expanded into the United States it was Frank Lowy who assumed the entrepreneurial mantle. This occurred at a time when the partnership finally ended after more than three decades. The dissolution of the partnership also coincided with the move of Frank's three sons into Westfield.

Given the successful Lowy – Saunders relationship, it is appropriate that these two books are available to complement each other.

They tell the story of the rewards and penalties that accompany absorption in business. They portray the difficulties involved in seeking a balance between highly competitive business activities and family responsibilities. They report generous donations and philanthropy amidst high-pressure business deals, conducted with little apparent sympathy for Westfield's small business tenants.

And, at a more general level, they document the struggle and suffering of Jewish people and the motivation to maintain allegiance with Jewish/Israeli causes.

John McConnell is the co-author of several senior textbooks



KEBABS, KIDS, COPS & CRIME

Alan Gold

Each successive wave of migrants into Australia presents sections of the daily media with a feast of opportunities for stereotyping.

Whether they're the Italians and Greeks of the 1950s and 1960s, the Lebanese and central Europeans of the 1970s and 1980s or the more recent Cambodians and Vietnamese, these NESB immigrants are the stuff of potential front-page headlines, as well as providing hour after numbing hour of hysterical talk-back radio for the far-right shock-jocks.

NESB? That's government-speak for migrants of non-English speaking background...one of the delicious acronyms created by governments of every level to categorise what they don't readily understand; because virtually all of these governments are in a state of confusion as to how to cope with, integrate, acculturate, and ultimately mould these migrants into the mainstream of our citizenry.

And for significant sections of the mainstream of our media, the moment one or two members of these new migrant communities step out of line, some headline writers reach for their lexicons of invective to create new expressions which the entire community will be forced to carry like stigmata for decades to come. Unlike the rest of the Australian community who do good and bad things as individuals, migrants have no status as people...rather they are categorised as members of a group or a community, however innocent the community might be of the crimes committed.

We read, for instance, of ... "Lebanese Crime Gangs" ... and "Vietnamese drug gangs" ... and ... "Ethnic Wars"...and ... "roving youths with Asian or Middle Eastern appearance"...

Of course, such attitudes runs far deeper than mere racial stereotyping. Listen to the people who phone the Alan Jones Breakfast program, or are inflamed by the comments of Howard Sattler and you'd wonder how multiculturalism ever managed to surface during Al Grassby's term as Minister for Immigration in the Whitlam Government, and to continue during Malcolm Frazer's prime ministership.

These millions of devotees to these shock-jocks are absolutely convinced that the migration to our shores of anybody outside the Anglo-Celtic mould is weakening the very essence of what makes Australia. Pauline Hanson nearly made a political career out of such characterisation.

And to some extent, the attitudes of these Australians are reflected in the rest of the media. Anglo-Celtic criminals, such as Lenny McPherson, Roger Rogerson and Neddy Smith are treated by the media as individuals... yet they themselves are never judged as a part of the community into which they were born. No headline ever says, "White Scottish-origin gang boss Lenny McPherson..."

Or read of reports of the hideous torture and murder of nurse Anita Cobby, and we're informed that the killers were brothers Gary, Michael and Leslie Murphy. These men were excoriated in the media, but I don't seem to remember the entire Anglo-Celtic community from which these men's families originally came, as being victimised with Anita's killing.

But read the newspaper reports of the shooting up of the Lakemba Police Station in November 1998, and we're told that it was done by youths of "Middle Eastern appearance"; that a "gang of Lebanese youths" were seen driving by...

Against this background of (unintentional?) prejudice, four academics have written a book which examines youth, ethnicity and crime in the Lebanese community, a template for the way in which society and the media judge individual criminals as representatives of the community from which they originate.

Jock Collins, Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Technology in Sydney, Greg Noble and Scott Poyntin of the University of Western Sydney, and Paul Tabar of both UTS and UWS have written *Kebabs, Kids, Cops & Crime* (Pluto Press, 2000) an attempt to understand the socio-economic factors, popular misconceptions and other assumptions which are made about ethnic criminality.

Of course, nobody is saying that a car-full of young men...who may have been members of the Lebanese community...weren't responsible for the shooting up of the Police Station in Lakemba. They may very well have been. But the attack was a symptom and a response of the sort of alienation which migrant communities often feel; and the response by the community is instructive.

Only a matter of two weeks earlier, on 17 October 1998, a 14-year old boy of Korean background, Edward Lee, was stabbed to death in Punchbowl, a tragic result of a brawl between him and his four mates, and a "gang of up to 20 men aged 18 to 24". The Sydney media described the assailants as being of "Middle Eastern" appearance and as "Lebanese".

The anti-Lebanese feeling which this horrible killing engendered in political circles, the police, as well as in the media, led to fury within the Lebanese community. All Lebanese young men were daubed with the brush of being participants in activities which were antipathetic to the Australian way of doing things, and, according to the book's authors:

Sydney's diverse Lebanese community, numbering some 111,000 people, was

criminalized in the process. The problems of youth crime in Sydney were racialised, with reports linking the events to the criminal Lebanese culture. Sometimes the brush was broader, with Sydney's even more diverse immigrant communities from the Middle East drawn into the events by repeated reportage of criminals of Middle Eastern appearance.

These two incidents exemplify the growing problems of Australia being a migrant nation. Until at least a generation or more has passed (viz the Chinese, the Irish, the Jewish communities etc) and the identifiable group has been absorbed into the melting pot, the ghettoised communities are expected to act in a way which is more lawful, more exemplary, more Aussie than others. After the Lakemba Police Station shooting, *The Daily Telegraph* proclaimed in its editorial:

Ethnic leaders have a responsibility to cooperate with Mr Carr and Mr Ryan to provide information that will lead to the arrest of these criminals, not make claims of racial slurs.

Excuse me? When was a racial or religious community responsible for the criminal activities of a minority of its members, unless, of course, they were incited by community leaders to such criminal activity? So when a Lebanese or Vietnamese or Iraqi or some other member of a minority commits a crime, the community leaders have some over-arching responsibility – greater than that of other Australians – to identify, expose and hand over the criminal? Hmmm!

The authors painstakingly identify those issues which inflame the anger of migrants, lead them to feelings of deracination, and posit ways in which the painful experience of Lakemba can be used to fight future vilification against minorities. In effect, they set out to demythologise the social perceptions about the relationships between youth, ethnicity and crime. By examining the response of the media, the police, politicians, community leaders, parents and the youth themselves, they hope to create a template against which such a future eruption of racism can be contained and channelled.

This is a book which all politicians, police, journalists and workers labouring in the sphere of ethnic relationships should read; for it highlights the ghastly errors to which racial stereotyping can lead, and the way in which good sense can fall so easily prey to populist opinion.

Kebabs, Kids, Cops & Crime
By Jock Collins, Greg Noble, Scott Poynting and Paul Tabar
Published by Pluto Press

Alan Gold is a novelist and newspaper columnist



AUSTRALIA CHOOSES

AUSTRALIA, SCIENCE POLICY & THE COMMERCIALISATION OF IDEAS

For over 25 years Robyn Williams has presented the ABC's "Science Show". In this time he has reached some depressing conclusions about Australia's approach to science. The products of scientific research have become profitable and the stakes high, but Australians are happier to ignore this and debate their history, their economic security and their mortgages. In Williams' view, science has remained "someone else's property" when it should be everyone's. Science is seen as separate - either a scary monster or an unaffordable bright idea. Says Williams, "Without being partisan about funding for R&D, I nonetheless find it extraordinary that a country like Australia is prepared to spend \$105 billion per annum on gambling but cannot find money to study the long-term effects of bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef." (*Scary Monsters and Bright Ideas* (UNSW Press))

SPEAKERS : DR ROBIN BATTERHAM (Chief Scientist, Department of Industry, Science & Resources, Canberra)
CATHERINE LIVINGSTONE (Company Director)
PROF RON JOHNSTON (Centre for Innovation and International Competitiveness, Faculty of Engineering, Uni of Sydney)
PROF ANN HENDERSON-SELLERS (Director, Environment Department, ANSTO) *in conversation with* ROBYN WILLIAMS (ABC Radio, Presenter, Science Program)

DATE : Wednesday 28 March 2001

TIME : 5.00 for 5.30pm

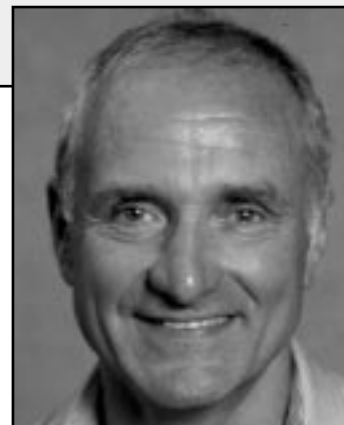
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REVIEW OF THE REVIEWERS

Stephen Matchett

A few episodes back, a Jane Austen character, transformed into a mistress of Manhattan in television's *Sex and the City*, found her Darcy of the day in a bookstore: "As Miranda picked up Jasper Ridley on Elizabeth the First, Jake picked up Miranda" was the breathless voice-over. For biographers toiling over new editions of their study of worthy union leaders, or wondering if their revolutionary life of Banjo Patterson's mum will ever sell, it was a great moment.

Biographers are hip, biographies are now; they are the literary flavour of many months to come.

Browse any bookstore, there are hundreds of heavily promoted new biographies published every year. There are biographies of singers, philosopher-boxers and other celebrities of this quarter hour.

There are biographies of racehorse trainers, business people, even journalists who mistake their own lives for copy. There are biographies of runners in their twenties and swimmers in their teens. And then of course there are the dozens of autobiographies of Irish persons who rose from great poverty only to expire from terminal whimsy.

There are the literary lives, great ponderous tomes for readers for whom too much information on the life and work of Henry James or George Orwell is barely enough.

For people without the time to actually read books there are www sites and magazines, like the originally named *Biography.com* and *Biography Magazine* to keep us up to date on the lives of the fast and the fabulous.

Everybody in the public eye is worth a biography, and why should a writer bother with a thousand word magazine profile when big margins and lots of pictures can transform an extended piece of occasional journalism into a real book - with an ISBN and everything! As American political biographer Ron Chernow puts it;

At any given moment, there are thousands of biographers scouring lists of prospective subjects, so that even the most marginal people are being memorialized with

books. ... As a result, the level of detail grows ever more minute as biographers try to justify the need for additional verbiage. (www.culturefront.org/culturefront/magazine/2K/summer)

The biography market has not descended completely into the realm of the fanzine and still prospers at the upper reaches of the middlebrow. Of course, given the years it takes to research a scholarly biography, a big market, or failing that a tenured professorship with built-in research assistants, is essential.

The sad truth is that the big biography market is very much the preserve of the Americans. Stephen Ambrose on Richard Nixon, Robert Caro on Lyndon Baines Johnson or Fred Kaplan on Gore Vidal can sell enough copies to make the investment worthwhile.

It's tougher for the locals where the sheer lack of demand means that serious biographies of serious Australians by Australians for Australians are never going to generate much of a return on investment. Biographers like David Day on Curtin, Alan Martin on Menzies or John Edwards on Keating can spend just as many years as their American peers but not sell enough copies to feed themselves, let alone a research assistant.

It is this sad reality of the market place that has kept the focus on the biography as flummery, easy to prepare, quick to digest and eminently forgettable. For every major exercise of scholarship like Day's and Martin's there are a dozen studies of lives which are simply not worth reporting.

Australian journalists are particularly prone to the biography of the life in progress. The last ten years have seen biographies of all sorts of men and women who are still going strong. And because journalists, unlike their readers, tend to care deeply about politics there are probably more biographies of politicians than any other occupational group in the country. It may strike some as odd that two of the least liked and less trusted professional groups in the country are so fascinated by each other that they happily conspire in the writing of books that very few people want to read.

For this we have to thank the Americans where the big memoir of a life in politics is a long established tradition and the biography of the practising politician is as old as the mass election.

The founding fathers were not above gilding the legislative lily in celebrating their own achievements but the campaign biography did not really take off until Andrew Jackson's life and achievements were explained to the electors in a work which just happened to come out in time for the 1828 election. But from then on the idea of producing hagiography on demand for the candidate of the hour was an idea

that his time had come, and kept on coming every four years.

The campaign biography owed more to Plutarch than it did to a faithful rendition of the subject's life. From "old Hickory" through "Boatman" Jim Garfield to that other legend of seamanship, PT skipper John F Kennedy, the campaign biography not only set out a subject's fitness for high office but, truth not being mandatory, their immaculate moral character.

Of course the biographies of practising Australian politicians and policy makers rise above this sort of thing but nevertheless there is something transitory in a book which may be rendered completely irrelevant by something as unexpected as a large phone bill or a harmless bit of branch stacking.

Still, for the politician lucky enough to excite the interest of a friendly-neutral biography it's great for the ego and the public profile. If the attention is hostile there is always the possibility of a new swimming pool paid out of the defamation win.

And it's not always about ego. There are many public figures who believe that the setting down of their thoughts and deeds in a book validates their achievements and might even help them at the polls, or generate favourable coverage on 2UE or Radio National, depending on their constituency.

The naivete is almost touching; in a world where the only truth that matters is communicated in a 30 second grab for the 6 pm news there are still plenty of media-savvy operators who think that books are significant and that ideas have a role in politics.

So while many biographies of public figures are about setting the record straight, sometimes mistaken for mean-spirited settling of old scores, some also have a policy dimension.

The biography of the public life in progress is also far more focused on demonstrating the subject's political prescience than with telling the tale of their life. Given that the demands of modern politics actually make it impossible to have a life away from work this is probably inevitable, but it makes for dull reading for all but the most determined aficionados of politics and policy.

But it does make the life in progress of the public figure very easy to write. While the idea might not have penetrated the media studies and creative writing faculties, the postgraduate course in biography writing is probably not far off.

It will not be a hard course to teach. The elements of the biography of the public figure are pretty much standard. First the subject's uniquely difficult personal circumstances but remarkable capacity to meet all challenges with grace and charm are established. This is followed by the career setting narrative that shows how the hero's passionate commitment set him or her out from their peers at an early age.

There is the obligatory discussion of the setback, generally public, the loss of seat or job but sometimes personal, the failure of a marriage, always in the latter case generously and sensitively handled with no criticism of the other party.

This is followed by the breathless pause on the edge of greatness or mellow reflection on what might have been, depending on the stage of the political cycle when the book is in the final stages of revision. The conclusion reflects on the vital importance of the issues and ideas that have shaped the hero's career.

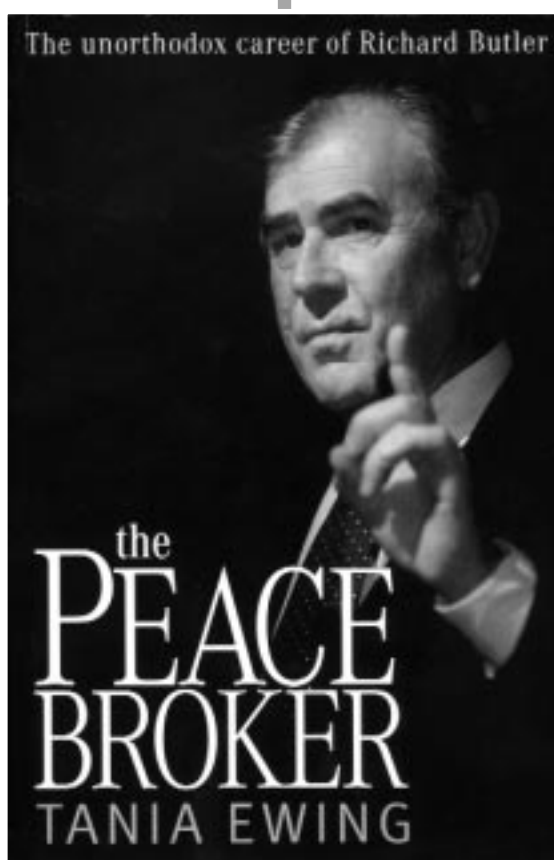
The trick is not so much in mixing the elements together but getting the mix right. Too much policy and the individual disappears, too much on the hero's personal

struggle and a book becomes hagiography.

Two recent books which demonstrate the problem and illuminate the endless fascination that people in public life think their work holds for others are a biography of Richard Butler by Tania Ewing, *The Peace Broker* (Macmillan) and Butler's own *Saddam Defiant: The Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the Crisis of Global Security*, (Weidenfeld and Nicholson).

Butler's book is an extraordinary exercise combining all the elements of the contemporary public life.

There is a jeremiad, which warns with great conviction of the threat of mass destruction from rogue states such as Iraq. This is supported by a policy analysis, setting out a cogent case for a global



commitment to disarmament. There is the element of personal memoir (who did Richard wrong?) and a treatise for the warrior diplomat (how to survive at the United Nations).

It is not a conventional biography but a justification of the bare eighteen months in which Butler had charge of the United Nations' effort to force Iraq to disarm. But while it is policy focused, the book still reveals a great deal about the man, if only because it is so exclusively focused on explaining why he was right and how everyone who opposed him was so willfully misguided, at best, or more frequently just plain evil.

Butler's is biography as tract. Supporters of Iraq and the leftists who believe that anything the United States and Great Britain support must be an exercise in neo-colonialism will undoubtedly find much to quibble with in Butler's book but there is an innate, almost naïve honesty in the way he makes his case.

Butler is a passionate man; one who does not tolerate fools, loathes hypocrisy and has no doubt of his innate ability to recognise both. He does not care who he annoys in pursuit of what he believes right.

Thus he makes the point of his exercise quite clear from the very start of the book where he argues that his commission was to enforce international law, but when the Iraqis tried to prevent him the UN folded. His purpose is to set the record straight on this but also to make it quite plain that he was up for the fight.

Butler has no doubt that this needs to be done and believes that in a world where, "criminality and insanity are a part of human life" (p8) it is only the global rule of law imposed by the UN which can protect the international peace from terrorist states which will use biological and chemical weapons against civilian targets. From the general Butler argues to the particular, to warn the world against the Iraqi regime:

Saddam Hussein's stance on weapons of mass destruction and the failure of the community of nations to deal with him means that he holds a lit match, and with each passing day, he brings it closer to the fuse. If we do not stop him before the fuse ignites, then the results will be truly cataclysmic. (10)

It's an irony Butler does not admit to but in the end a book is his only weapon against the regime that defied him while he was acting with the support of the UN and could deploy the implicit menace of the powers that won the Gulf War. The Iraqi Government, at least as described by Richard Butler, is not likely to be greatly fussed by a critical book.

But Butler cares about the written record and he has a lot of scores to settle and issues to explain in his chronicle of his work as head of the United Nation's Special Commission (UNSCOM) charged with stopping Iraq building its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction following its defeat in Desert Storm.

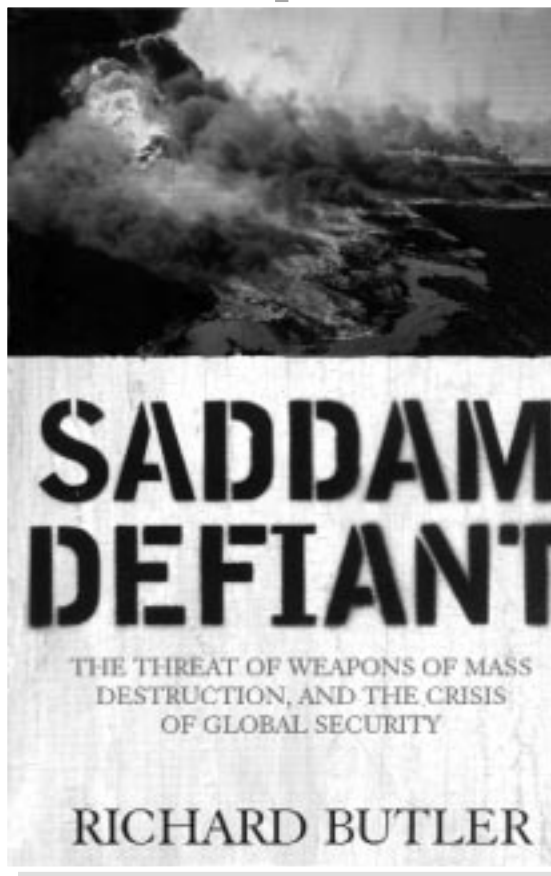
To read this book is to see Butler's life as a long preparation for his time as the UN's armament inspector in Iraq in 1997-98. He briefly describes his career in the Australian diplomatic service and his doomed foray into politics as Whitlam's chief of staff during the Leader's last unhappy years in the pursuit of public office. He explains his commitment to disarmament and belief in the rule of international law in controlling weapons of mass destruction - and his wife

actually rates a mention (on page 72).

But most of this is out of the way by page 44 and for the next 200 odd pages Butler focuses on his struggles to bring Iraq to account for its refusal to disarm. Butler clearly believes that disarming the Iraqi regime was a moral crusade:

No one is watching Saddam Hussein. You can be certain that he is not waiting idly for the UN to suddenly realise its failure. He is building – building weapons, as are other rogue states. If a single missile loaded with nerve gas were to hit Tel Aviv, the world will never be the same. If a single canister of VX was released onto the New York City subway the world will never the same. If a single nuclear explosion hollowed out central London, the world will never the same. (p257)

And Hussein is not only capable of such crimes but he is also smart enough to play on the weakness of the UN and defeat UNSCOM's attempts to disarm him.



If Saddam Hussein's regime has an argument to put over its behaviour throughout the 1990s Butler is not interested in it. He is equally scathing about individuals and governments who put short term self interest above forcing Iraq to disarm. For Butler, the Iraqis had to be compelled to obey international law, not just because of the damage they could do, but because the law must be upheld:

The laws that the international community developed during the past fifty years have been and will continue to be violated, and those countries with more power than their neighbors will always be tempted to seize advantage, even if it includes breaking the rules. But this only increases the need for an agreed system for resolving conflicts and for restraining those who would use force or violate the rights of others. (p252)

But after advocating the rule of law he immediately argues that there are issues where national sovereignty is secondary to the greater good of humanity:

Irrespective of what one might conclude about this ancient argument between power and principle, or with respect to the effectiveness of international law, I am persuaded that there are some concrete issues in international life of such gravity that they compel exceptional action and agreement. The need to control the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and to ultimately eliminate them is the outstanding exception (pp252-253)

The great majority of the book is taken up with descriptions of the work of Butler's teams of UNSCOM inspectors who worked to expose Iraq's weapons development and force its cessation. It is an extraordinary story and while Butler does not play it for heroics, his field staff and, it must be said, he himself, demonstrated real courage in facing down the intimidatory tactics the Iraqi government preferred.

The book's most compelling descriptions are those of Butler's negotiations with the Iraqi government, which were long and generally pointless. Butler has a diplomat's love of discussion as war by other means and he goes into great detail to describe how the Iraqis argued every point, at every meeting.

But while Butler has a professional interest in chat, time and again throughout the book he demonstrates that he will not tolerate diplomatic niceties if they impede what he knows to be right. It is unlikely that he will be on Alexander Downer's Christmas card list after portraying him as rude and mean spirited (pp 44, 75). UN Secretary General Kofi Anan will

probably not be too pleased to be described as lacking the backbone to take on the Iraqis: "an unwelcome reality, it appeared, might be overcome by pretending it did not exist." (p 168)

And as for his main adversary in the armament inspection negotiations, Iraqi deputy prime minister Tariq Aziz: "Basically Aziz is a vain, arrogant bully, about whom there appears to be nothing decent. On a physical level, Aziz's company is repulsive" (p78). But what does Butler really think?

This is an extraordinarily partisan book which reveals a great deal about a tough, passionate man whose commitment could be mistaken for arrogance and who is not afraid to speak his mind, whatever the circumstances and whoever the audience. Butler seems to need to prove that he was right to try to force disarmament on the Iraqis and right to fight anybody who opposed him. He needs to prove that he did not so much fail as was betrayed by the cowardice, incompetence or shortsighted self-interest of his enemies.

And this is the book's greatest failing. Butler is too anxious to explain why he was right and above reproach for his argument to be completely convincing. Certainly his evidence makes it hard not to think that he should have been supported in finishing his work in Iraq. Yet the book is argued with such a desperate passion to be proved right that it inevitably generates a curiosity to hear another side to the story, not so much about the work of UNSCOM, but about Butler, if only to learn whether a different sort of man would have had more success against Iraq.

Which is where Tania Ewing enters, with her biography, *The Peace Broker: The Unorthodox Career of Richard Butler* (Macmillan) which fills in the gaps about Butler's background and the way in which his life prepared him to fight the Iraqi regime.

For students of the politics of arms control and readers fascinated by the Australian diplomatic service, Ewing's is an important and much-needed book. But life is short and there are many biographies and the challenge for Ewing is to demonstrate why Butler's public life, still hopefully far from completed, merits a life in progress.

Ewing worked very hard to produce a book which is well researched and which covers a lot of ground, but only from Butler's perspective. She appears to like Butler, in fact she appears to like him a lot:

From day one of his diplomatic career, Richard treated his chosen profession as if he were a politician, fearlessly, some say naively, standing by and expressing openly his own feelings ... As a young man he decided he would not be a conventional diplomat and he has remained

true to that original goal. It has earned him enemies who only saw flaws in his uniqueness. (pp235, 236)

Certainly Ewing acknowledges that Butler had defeats. It would be hard to ignore his combative nature and his rows with the Foreign Affairs bureaucracy and the failure of his campaign to have Australia elected to the Security Council while he was Ambassador to the UN.

But for every failure Ewing presents the criticism and then rebuts it. Butler's repeated fights with the Foreign Affairs hierarchy were always caused by his refusal to accept poor policy (p37) or meanness (p187). When he insulted nuclear disarmament campaigner Helen Caldicott, it was because she lacked intellectual discipline and was over-sensitive (pp95-96). When he lost the vote for membership of the Security Council it was because his hard work on behalf of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty had annoyed aspirant nuclear powers. (pp142-145)

There are also many and varied scores which are settled, with Ewing, doubtless after examining all the evidence and making a considered judgement, accepting Butler's position.

For example the failure of Butler's working relationship with another Australian diplomat in Bonn which deteriorated to an extent that Canberra intervened is put down to the other's bullying personality (pp73-74). Similarly, allegations of sexual harassment by a staff member's wife (who was also an employee) while Butler was ambassador to Thailand are refuted as the result of his having disciplined his accuser's husband for "authoritarian" behaviour. (pp122-123).

Most seriously, when Butler fell out with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan over UNSCOM's battles with Iraq the cause was Richard's frank and forthright style which too many in the UN found "boorish and unsubtle". (p213) The fact that an enormously experienced diplomat like Butler could not temper his behaviour to suit the circumstances does not seem to strike Ewing as a failure.

There is no reason to question any of Ewing's conclusions, but she is certainly not harsh in her criticism of Butler's behaviour or character over a long career. At the very end of the book, for example, Ewing does offer a tough judgement in criticising Butler for not confronting claims that the CIA used UNSCOM as cover to spy on Iraq (p 231), but beyond the bald statement there is no discussion of what in Butler's experience and character caused the failure.

This may be because Ewing is positive about the sort of man that Butler is - an open and direct Australian. It certainly shows in her treatment of his character. Thus she dwells on his youthful pride in his working class Bondi background. He played football, fought

bullies at school and loathed pretension. Ewing recounts one ancient anecdote of sibling rivalry that reveals a great deal about the man Butler is, if only in his capacity to remember people who he thinks behaved badly:

He remembered the anger and alienation he felt when (his brother) Peter and his new friend David Flint, ignored him at the Bondi Baths, talking in botched French to one another to deliberately exclude him from the conversation. (p4)

Probably the most interesting aspect of the book is less what Ewing tells us about Butler than the insights it offers into the Whitlam Generation. Her's is a tale of a much simpler and far less competitive Australia where an ordinary undergraduate degree could be the basis of a career, where people married young, struggled with religion and thought they could save the world.

The sensitive treatment of Butler's first marriage to Susan Ryan in particular demonstrates how much the Australian middle class has changed from a time when it was still considered quite normal for a young woman, married with children in her early twenties to be effectively barred from the workforce. The young Butler was committed to social justice but still appeared to have seen nothing out of the ordinary in his wife sacrificing her career in the interests of his.

The discussion of Butler's politics also illuminates a much different Australia. Butler began as a Labor man, but one less interested in the exercise of political power than in the potential of government to make things right. He was a man of the left rather than the Labor machine at university, rejecting its "pragmatism", evidently preferring grand symbolic gestures to the delivery of services and economic stability to the electorate.

Ewing's treatment of Butler's response to the Dismissal is revealing. Whatever the failings of the Whitlam Government the electorate simply got it wrong in 1975. The disastrous economic record and culpable stupidity of some of Whitlam's ministers was no reason to vote him out:

Richard passionately believed that Whitlam had invigorated a country that Menzies had kept stuck in the 1950s as an outpost of the British Empire. Even though the electorate eventually rejected Whitlam for a wide range of reasons, Richard remained a believer. He felt that Australia had matured under Whitlam: Australians now expected that their government had a responsibility to support intellectual and cultural activities as it supported the sick and the aged with health

services and pensions. The government belonged to the people under Whitlam, not the other way round and Richard truly mourned its passing (pp56-57)

Butler's brief period as Whitlam's chief of staff, which included the unwinnable 1977 election campaign, did not diminish his belief in either the man or his style of politics. And he remains a believer. On the book's last page Ewing reports that Butler's "only regret" was the 1977 loss, 'because the goals of the Labor Party of fairness and equality were more important than economic pragmatism'. (P 236)

It's a statement from another political age and one that explains much about Butler's career. While Ewing does not draw it out, the comparison is obvious, just as the Whitlam Government could make the Australian people wiser and better so the UN could impose disarmament on the Iraqi regime. For Ewing, the fact that Butler failed in both attempts is no criticism:

Richard is today a much more polished version of the boy that grew up in Bondi. He speaks a number of languages, he has read widely and well and he has met many of the world's great leaders. But the boy that fought in the playground at Randwick High School and the rugby league player who would invariably bounce back after a tackle remains. ... Richard has either basked in the glow of success or regrouped and licked his wounds after a failure, And then, he has moved on, prepared for the next challenge, readying for the next fight. (pp 232, 236)

Ewing makes it plain that her's is not an authorised biography and that Butler had no control over its contents. But it would take an ego even larger than Butler's, as revealed in these two books, to dislike Ewing's judgement of his career.

Which was pretty much the judgement on both books made in joint reviews in three of the papers of record, *The Age*, *Australian* and *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Michael Sexton (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 August) did not spend much time analysing either book, preferring to summarise them, offer a judgement of Butler, comparing him to Jefferson Davis for some extraordinary reason, and provide his readers with the far more interesting opinions on the Middle East of M. Sexton. But when he was not pontificating, Sexton went straight to the heart of the problem with Ewing's book:

Both books are autobiographies in a sense. Butler has obviously spoken at great lengths to Ewing and much of this

material seems to have found its way into the book without significant amendment.

In a particularly damning criticism of Ewing, Sexton also argued that Butler had produced a more balanced treatment of the UNSCOM years, calling his book "more detailed and more measured".

Amin Saikal (*The Age* 23 July) was far tougher, particularly on Ewing, who he saw as too close to her subject:

on the whole, it is very much an uncritical biography. Referring to Butler throughout as Richard, Ewing displays a tacit admiration for her subject and a thin understanding of the complexity of Middle Eastern politics and social-cultural settings

Saikal went further and argued that Ewing failed to scrutinise Butler's arguments: "The book's weakness is that it is considerably based on Butler's accounts with little attempt to measure his assertions against those of his critics." In dealing with Butler, Saikal made it quite plain that he liked the author a great deal less than the text.

Thus he described the book, as "concise and challenging" and then proceeded to spend the rest of his allotted space sticking it to the author. Saikal was critical of what he saw as Butler's habit of blaming, "everybody but himself for the stumbles and twists in his career". But the example Saikal used at greatest length, that Butler was culturally insensitive in dealing with the Iraqis is the least likely to convince many readers:

Butler's claims that the Iraqi leaders were on many occasions threatening to him. Yet he fails to mention that at times he may have also been equally intimidating towards them as he frequently warned them against the consequences of their refusal to meet his demands. Nor could he comprehend the Arab bargaining culture where barking is often used as a substitute for biting.

Perhaps Butler was so rude that the Iraqis were simply too scared to deal with UNSCOM. For anybody who followed the news of the way Saddam's regime treated Butler's teams this is hardly a serious criticism.

Saikal also provided an ambiguous criticism of Butler for being concerned for the security of Israel. He argued that it was inappropriate for Butler to refer to Tel Aviv, rather than Tehran or Riyadh as a possible target for an Iraqi missile strike, "given the Arab and Western (especially American) sensitivity towards Israel his statement could be very inflammatory". Saikal rhetorically inquired: "was it because of (Butler's)

two predispositions: a deep hatred for the Iraqi regime and an increasing sympathy for the Jewish people".

Which raises in turn a question for Professor Saikal, does he have a problem with either of Butler's sentiments?

Sian Powell (*Australian*, 8 July) reviewed the two books as one but was also far harsher on Ewing:

She out-Butlers Butler in her regard for his drive, eloquence, intelligence and determination. No mean achievement since (Butler) is a fairly keen blower of his own trumpet.

Nor was Powell convinced that either author had made a completely compelling case for Butler's genius. She pointed to some of his more extraordinary ideas, such as the "loony-tunes" episode when he thought the CIA had a hand in the dismissal of the Whitlam Government and failures such as his inability to win a Security Council seat for Australia. In the end Powell's criticism of Ewing was all the more compelling for its moderation:

despite its lack of criticism and its occasionally clumsy prose, this book makes for fascinating reading. ... Butler is the insider's insider who has led an interesting life and lived in interesting times. So this is an interesting book. If it were slightly more balanced, it could have been even more interesting

But for whom? Butler has led a fascinating life but there is nothing in either his or Ewing's book that demonstrates him to be more than a man who is vain but brave, abrasive but talented, an Australian very much of his time. Butler has served his country and the international community well but so have thousands of others who have no biographer, at least not yet.

One of Ewing's reoccurring themes is Butler's love of Manhattan, where he now lives and which has a policy community large enough to create a market for his book.

As for Ewing, perhaps she lacked the skill to communicate all the stuff of Butler's life that merits a biography, but then again perhaps there is nothing sufficient in his life and work.

On balance her biography of Butler is yet another disposal biography for the season. Nobody, not even in Manhattan-based *Sex and the City*, is likely to use it to pick up girls in bookshops.



A DYING DISCIPLINE?

A row has broken out over Henry Reynolds' historiography. But Stephen Matchett queries what good it has done either the cause of Australia's indigenous communities or Australian history.

In the universities the cultural theoreticians are smoothing the pillow of the dying discipline of history but for the rest of us the study of the nation's past matters.

Paul Keating, particularly in partnership with speechwriter Don Watson, appealed to Australian history to show us the way forward on the Republic, ties to Europe and Asia and of course on indigenous relations. And while the academy may not be interested in the relevance of the past to the present, the opinion leaders in politics and the media most definitely are. Henry Reynolds put it well, in a recent speech at the National Library, when he said:

To the circling theoreticians, traditional history appears old-fashioned, unreflective, unsophisticated. But events outside the academy re-affirm the moral authority and political potency of history. While it has always been used by the rich and the powerful, it is a weapon within the reach of the poor, the oppressed and the disregarded. (www.nla.gov.au/events/history/papers/Henry_Reynolds.html)

Professor Reynolds should know. His long years of research into the response of indigenous Australians to European settlement, has become a metaphor for the broader political dispute over the debt, or otherwise, settler Australia owes to the continent's original inhabitants.

Reynolds' work on 19th Century Anglo-Australian perceptions of Aboriginal links to the land was vastly influential in the Mabo decision and his work on Aboriginal resistance to settler occupation has shaped the views of a generation of scholars. (Heather Brown's profile of Reynolds, *Courier Mail* 16 January 1999, is an excellent overview of the man and his work.)

But sooner or later his version of the record would be disputed. The reaction began in September 2000, when Keith Windschuttle delivered a long paper at a *Quadrant* conference which alleged, in part, that Reynolds' estimate of the number of Aborigines killed in frontier violence was not adequately supported by archival evidence. This is a charge of the greatest magnitude against any historian. But in making it Windschuttle had an even larger purpose, one he cheerfully admitted:

the debate that has sprung up this month over the number of Aboriginal deaths on

the frontier of the Australian colonies in the past two centuries is only partly about the quality of historical research. It is also about the foundation of the Australian nation. Was it based on the rule of law and civilised values that abhorred the killing of the defenceless? Or was it one that colluded in the massacre of many thousands of Aborigines who were doing no more than defending their traditional lands? (Sydney Morning Herald, 19 September)

Whatever Windshuttle's motive, he generated a fierce debate that had less to do with scholarship and more with advancing partisan political views on contemporary relations between settler and indigenous Australians. As Reynolds' himself put it in an interview with Bruce Montgomery:

It's clearly a well-organised political campaign to grab the intellectual high ground. They clearly are unhappy with the whole thrust of Aboriginal politics and want to undermine it by undermining the intellectual underpinning to it (Australian, 12 September)

But it was not just Windschuttle's supporters who were happy to use the dispute over the number of Aborigines killed on the frontier to make a contemporary political point. The usual suspects of the pamphleteering right were happy to speak up for Windschuttle. Michael Duffy (*Courier Mail*, 23 September) was less interested in the argument over Reynolds' scholarship than the politics of contemporary race relations:

A small but growing number of white and black people believe that Aboriginal policies of the past 30 years have largely failed. In order to move forward (so it's believed), the habit of seeing Aborigines as victims needs to be broken; one way of doing this is to re-evaluate parts of history where their victimhood might have been exaggerated.

Duffy's frankness was commendable. In advocating the very subjugation of the historical record to the needs of contemporary politics his grasp of the role of history was less so.

Christopher Pearson ran a superior version of the same argument; that the record of the past must be subjected to the needs of the present. His first piece mildly suggested that it was important to get the record right on the number of Aborigines who died in frontier violence and praised Windschuttle's work for not denying "actual outrages" but also for his interest, "in accurate tallying and what really happened". (*Australian Financial Review*, 11 September)

His second, (*Australian Financial Review*, 18 September) argued that left-wing historians were attempting to suppress any debate which did not suit their agenda and that they had controlled the

intellectual high ground for far too long. For evidence, all right thinking men and women had but to look to the Opening Ceremony of the Olympics:

a mixture of kitsch, jokey post-modernism, and genuflections to indigenous culture, (which) is one measure of the debilitating effects of a debate in which historians and propagandists of the far Left have too long held sway.

From this Pearson leapt to Mabo and the level of Aboriginal access to land to argue that "the interpretation of post-colonial history is important in its own right and also from the ways in which it impacts on the national interest". The evidence of how serious things are is that the level of non-petroleum mining exploration is at June 1993 levels. Who says there is no robust frontier tradition in Australian thinking?

And, when there is need for a conservative polemicist, can Frank Devine be far away? Devine weighed in with an entirely uncritical puff-piece in praise of Windschuttle which was less than well inclined towards Reynolds. Devine summarised Windschuttle's argument before attributing to him the claim that many estimates of the number of Aborigines killed in frontier violence was "preposterous guesswork" which is peddled "by people knowing it to be baseless but wishing, for various motives, to present an exaggerated picture of deadly violence against Aborigines", (*Australian*, 11 September).

In the other camp Margaret Wenham played right into the conservatives' hands by refusing to debate Windschuttle's charges in favour of denouncing governments past and present for the tragedies of Aboriginal health and the Stolen Generation, (*Courier Mail*, 21 September).

Professor Mark Finnane simply ducked the question of historical accuracy by arguing that it did not matter all that much whether Reynolds' estimates of the number of Aborigines who died in frontier violence was bang-on or otherwise; "is there not something unseemly about engaging in a debate on how great a holocaust really was"? (*Australian*, 13 September)

Finnane confused moral imperatives with historical accuracy and did not appear to understand that any claim that an historian has fudged the primary evidence calls into question the professional credibility of all their work. His was a foolish argument which did Reynolds' case no good turn.

Bain Atwood produced a far superior version of the argument, suggesting that the conservative charge that there was a "school" of historians running a line on Aboriginal deaths on the frontier was not true and asserting Reynolds' high academic standards. But in the end his argument rested on a desperate appeal to the primacy of the expert. Atwood suggested that Reynolds' critics had no case because they are not historians, and accordingly "at a loss when it comes to grasping the complex nature of historical

knowledge". If that was not enough, he went on to argue that the documentary record of Australian settlement is not appropriate source material:

Reynold's conservative critics blithely assume that the historical truth about Australia's frontier conflicts can simply be found by discovering the facts that are held in the historical record. (Australian, 20 September)

But it's not a bad place to start. Atwood's argument that the details of frontier violence did not always make it into the public records is obvious and sensible. But to simply deny the importance of the primary sources is to play into the hands of the conservatives who argue that they alone place the pursuit of facts over ideology. And facts, troublesome things that they are, are what general readers who do not understand that historical interpretation should be left to the professionals, often find interesting.

The most emotional rejection of Windschuttle's argument came from the usually measured Robert Manne, (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 September). Manne's unhappiness that *Quadrant*, a magazine he formerly edited, now runs pieces disputing the numbers and suffering of the Stolen Generation is on the record. Perhaps it was this that shaped his aggressive treatment of Windschuttle's conference paper. His attack on Windschuttle's methodology and motivation was certainly harsh but not unreasonable - on the battlefield of ideas one dishes it out and cops it back.

Windschuttle has done no historical research in the area of Aboriginal history. Yet somehow he believes he knows that the numbers of frontier killings have been vastly exaggerated. ... Perhaps the true numbers of 19th Century Aboriginal deaths have been revealed to him in his dreams.

But this was Manne just warming up for a conclusion that was intemperate:

Our Prime Minister's favourite magazine is now no longer treating the question of the Stolen Generation as a hoax. To judge by Windschuttle's contribution to the study of 19th Century Aboriginal deaths, it is also now beginning to drift towards a form of historic denialism of the kind that David Irving has pioneered.

Manne seems to have forgotten that calling your opponents names is one sure way to ensure that their ideas get a hearing; something to do with everybody getting a fair go.

Among all the partisan posturing it was left to Nicholas Rothwell (*Australian*, 16 September) and Malcolm McGregor (*Australian Financial Review*, 15 July) to provide the balanced coverage of the dispute over deaths on the frontier so lacking in most of the commentary.

Rothwell provided a masterful analysis of the

contested ground where historiography and politics meet and pointed to the high stakes: "Native title has, during the past decade, turned local histories of oppression and dispersal into virtual property deeds." It was the usual Rothwell piece, elegantly written and closely argued but sticking to the source material that there is no trace of what he thought. Which made a change from the self-indulgent posturing of the supposed professional scholars.

McGregor's piece pre-dated the Windschuttle affair but he anticipated the dispute when he argued that it was incontrovertible that Europeans had invaded and conquered Australia and that it was fruitless to pretend the course of history was different to suit a contemporary political agenda:

Australia was effectively invaded. There was widespread armed resistance by the indigenous population and there were significant battle casualties on both sides. ... We cannot undo the events of the past, nor should this generation feel an immediate sense of shame about our history. But surely we have the maturity and integrity to acknowledge fearlessly the truths of our national existence.

The terms of the dispute are really quite straightforward, but sadly they have little to do with history. On the one hand some scholars and commentators argue that indigenous Australians were conquered by European settlers and massacred when they resisted. Generally this view is held by people who also have a strong view on the necessity for land rights, accept the existence and grievous suffering of the Stolen Generation and believe that the past and present damage done to indigenous Australians can be repaired in part by public expenditure.

Their opponents argue that the settlement of Australia was undertaken under the rule of law and that organised violence against Aborigines on the frontier should be proved case by case. They tend towards skepticism on damage done and the need for current guilt for past wrongs.

It is an argument that does the study of Australian history no good. If Windschuttle could disprove Reynold's estimate of the number of Aborigines killed fighting the invader what possible difference does it make to the condition of indigenous Australians in the 21st Century? If Reynolds' figures are right how does it increase the debt owed by white Australians to black ?

The ground for this quarrel should have been the challenge to the research findings of one of Australia's most senior historians. The fact that Reynolds' supporters and detractors preferred to rehearse arguments about contemporary politics demonstrates a contempt for the craft of history that is at best alarming.



GERARD HENDERSON'S MEDIA WATCH

SELF-INDULGENTLY YOURS - PER COURTESY OF THE ABC

The ABC has a new managing director. But, so far at least, there is scant evidence that Jonathan Shier has changed the culture of the organisation. Maybe this will come later. Sure, the staff have been retrenched and contracts not renewed. And new staff have been employed and fresh contracts written. There is also a revamped management stream – replacing the former managerial structure. Yet programs like Philip Brooks's *My Own Private Oz* still get through the system.

Philip who? Well, Philip Brooks belongs to that all-too-familiar genre of Australian story-tellers. As the following brief bio demonstrates. Philip Brooks – born in Tasmania in 1953 to recently arrived British migrants. Moved to Melbourne in 1972 as a dedicated follower of leftist fashion. Gee wiz. Went to Paris circa 1975. Came out. Became a film producer. Came back, briefly. To do a documentary on Australia. Produced with the assistance of the ABC, of course. At Australian taxpayers expense. Complete with historical howlers.

In other words, Philip Brooks is just another alienated expatriate who seeks to tell Australians what Australia is all about. Give or take some major howlers. You know the type. It's something of a tradition – initially established by the likes of Germaine Greer, Robert Hughes and John Pilger. The social critic obtains standing by living outside Australia. Then returns to Australia to do a doco. As presented on the ABC – the longer the expatriate is away from Australia, the more insightful he/she really is.

No "Aussie-comes-home-to-tell-it-as-it-is" ABC documentary is ever free of significant factual errors. In *My Own Private Oz* (which was shown on ABC TV as part of "The Big Picture" series – 2 November 2000), Philip Brooks

- declared that the Australian Imperial Force suffered "military defeat and butchery at the hands of the Turks in 1916" - this would have surprised some viewers who thought that 25 April 1915 was the inaugural Anzac Day and that the AIF departed Gallipoli in late 1915.
- maintained that "today" Tasmania "is governed by a red-green Coalition" – this would interest observers of Australian politics who were of the opinion that the Tasmanian Labor government had an absolute majority in the Legislative Assembly and was not dependent on the Greens to remain on the ministerial benches.
- alleged that "in exchange for Australian beef for the American market, Australia sent its youth to the jungles of Vietnam on the side of the Americans" – needless to say no evidence was produced in support of this troops-for-beef sales conspiracy theory.
- claimed that Australian troops were withdrawn from Vietnam following the election of the Whitlam Labor government in December 1972 - interesting theory, especially

since all Australian combat troops had departed from Vietnam before the 1972 Federal election.

- suggested that the election of the Whitlam Government had prevented him from being conscripted for military service in Vietnam - re which see above.

In any event, the focus of Philip Brooks's *My Own Private Oz* was not history - true or false. But, rather, self-indulgence. This applied even to the humour. How about this "joke" à la Tasmania: "This is a place where men are men, women are up the spout and the sheep are nervous." Laugh now.

But nothing was more self-indulgent than Phillip Brook's own private tale – which he returned from Paris to tell.

Take 1: PB comes back to find out whether Australia was still the "narrow-minded, bigoted, xenophobic" place which he left in 1975. On arrival Down Under, PB soon meets his old flame Sally. At the Melbourne Cup, no less. And reflects: "We laid each other and we laid bets together". Fancy that.

Take 2: PB reflects on his first 18 years in Tasmania. He classifies the State as "just Britain" with the "heat turned up" – overlooking the fact that non-indigenous Australians did not all come from British stock. Indeed in the years after European settlement there was considerable conflict between Australians of British and those of Irish background. There follows considerable discussion about homosexuality in Tasmania. Then and now. PB alleges that Tasmania was once named "Sodom's Isle" – but does not say by who.

Take 3: PB flees Hobart for Melbourne – desperate to prove he's heterosexual – and shares a house with Sally, Helen and Ponch. He tells viewers "we all fucked each other". Golly. But fails to ask the pertinent question. As in – who cares? PB falls in love with Helen Garner. It doesn't last long. Alas. But he and Sally and Ponch – and Helen, of course – all score (fictional) parts in Helen Garner's novel *Monkey Grip*. For the record, Helen is the narrator Nora, PB's "best friend at the time", PB is Martin and Shovas is Jarvo. Thanks for that.

Take 4: PB and HG discuss their youth. Deeply. Helen G wonders whether they experienced "extended adolescence" - or just an "extended...childhood". Good (unanswered) question. HG declares that she both hated, and was attracted to, junkie culture. PB then heads off to meet a somewhat confused Shovas (at a town somewhere in Australia) who has the current status of "reformed junkie". Shovas admits to having "drunk from the cup". Then puts forward a (deeply philosophical) proposition. As in: "It would have been much better without the drugs – do you know what I mean?" Well, yes. Shovas suggests that "maybe" the drugs "were secretly pumped into it" – meaning the "chemical business" and/or "the whole thing". Oh, yes.

Take 5: PB leaves Australia. According to *My Own Private Oz* he was a junkie at the time. Moreover he was a homosexual, desperate to come out. It's all too difficult Down Under – but Paris provides the necessary relief. So to speak. In perhaps

the only non-indulgent section of the documentary, Denis Altman tells PB that, in leaving Australia, he was actually running from himself. And that, a quarter of a century ago, Australia was not as repressive – or as homophobic – as PB alleged. PB agrees now.

Take 6: PB meets up with Sally again. On camera, of course. She's getting treatment for Hep C. Sally reckons she contracted this in 1973 sharing needles at 504 Nicholson Street. Is this Carlton - or Fitzroy? Anyrate, our Sally still resents the doctor who expressed disapproval at her one-time lifestyle when her illness was diagnosed circa 1990. Declares Sally: "Well I actually had a really good time doing it" (i.e. injecting). So there. A real heroine, to be sure. According to Sally, it's "not such a big deal".

Take 7: PB declares that Sally embodies everything that's great about Australia. After all, she sings in a multicultural band. And supports reconciliation. PB declares that he has now confronted "the ghosts and skeletons" of his past he would have "preferred to forget". He concludes that he had "to leave" Australia "to re-invent himself". And that it's easy for him to be an Australian – provided he lives in Paris. How profound. No doubt the taxpayer funds obtained from the ABC for *My Own Private Oz* will help his French lifestyle.

Roll the credits.

HRH RE-VISITED

Talking about documentary-inclined expatriates, consider the case of hyperbolic Robert Hughes. As in HRH. The good-news is that HRH has dropped his intention to write a book provisionally titled *Crashing*, on his 1999 motor accident in north-west Western Australia. The news of the junking of the tome in question was revealed in a Bryan Appleyard column in the "Culture" section of the London *Sunday Times* (28 August 2000). HRH told Appleyard: "I don't want to revisit this miserable stuff". He also commented that he was contemplating becoming an American. Spoke our HRH :

**I feel Australian and, culturally, I am an Australian.
But I thought, f***, I don't want to be part of that
stupid country. They can write whatever they
want about you and they never check anything.**

HRH also complained to the *Sunday Times* about the reception in Australia of *Return to the Fatal Shore*.

**Every hissing hack in the press industry has
found it a heaven-sent opportunity to revile
me...my friends say there has not been such a
frenzy of tall-poppy-opping in living memory;
they are utterly bewildered by its ferocity.**

For his part Bryan Appleyard described Robert Hughes as "the greatest living Australian" and opined that "his country just doesn't deserve him". And HRH described *Return to the Fatal Shore* as the best television he has done. It was that kind of interview.

Anyrate *Crashing* has been junked. Perhaps HRH realised that it seemed like a bad idea. Or, perhaps, he was concerned about the type of critique such a tome might receive.

You see, others have expressed interest in HRH's story – as told in his documentary *Return to the Fatal Shore* and elsewhere. Most notably journalist Lindsay Onley - in an article published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 28 October 2000. Onley's research revealed that, due to HRH's very own

work, the "crash and surrounding events were selectively mythologised or fictionalised".

- **HRH version:** When local fishing guide Danny O'Sullivan arrived at the crash site, petrol was dripping from Hughes' car. HRH asked O'Sullivan whether he had a pistol and then declared: "Well if this blows, just shoot me".

- **Fact:** Western Australian Police claim that Hughes's rented car was not leaking with petrol at any time after the accident. Moreover, Danny O'Sullivan does not own a gun.

HRH version: When involved in the accident, Hughes was in possession of a huge tuna. HRH later alleged (apparently in humour) that the tuna was abducted.

Fact: The tuna wasn't stolen. But it would not have mattered had this been the case. For the fish in question weighted a mere 750 grams.

If *Crashing* had made it on to the bookshelves, it could well have found a place in the fiction section. Anyrate, it will not now appear. Fortunate, eh?

BOB ELLIS'S RHYMING MONICAS

And now for some more good news. Of sorts. Remember that dreadful Bob Ellis doggerel-as-poetry. Initially it ran in the *Sydney Morning Herald* until the *Herald* had the good sense to drop it. Then Comrade Ellis hawked this mush to *The Australian* who rejected it immediately. Following this Bob Ellis found placement in *The Sunday Age*. Needless to say, ABC Radio 702 in Sydney is still committed to broadcasting Ellis's poetry. But then it would? Wouldn't it?

To get an idea of how bad this is, here are the first few lines from Bob Ellis's "October".

**A month of sex and phones and sex,
Geoff Clark found innocent, Bill Darcy guilty
Office romeos everywhere testing their virility.
Writing sonnets, kissing hands and biting necks,
At a Soft Left Democrat uncharmed by his virility
Who made her feelings known to all Australia:
It isn't for a better bonk a Democrat defects.
The month Bill Clinton, stupidly, one suspects,
Bade his foes apologise for emphasising Monica,
A subject on which, in his view,
they should have been laconicker,
Not blathering to the lewd, sperm-sniffing media
All those many brief encounters tackier and seedier
Then [sic] any office party's rapid fumble;
"Before the President," said Bill,
"you should be humble,
Like Monica, for instance - I'll read that card again."**

That's so bad, it's good. Who else would have thought it appropriate to rhyme "virility" with, er, "virility" and Monica with loconicker? The man's a genius.

Meanwhile the poems – from February (called "Summer" to make up for missing the first month of the year) to September have just been published by Pluto Press. Accompanied by some Bill Leak cartoons previously published in *The Australian* and *The Weekend Australian*. Well, at least, Bill Leak is funny. *The Ellis-Leak Almanac: 2000 AD* contains the following publisher's note: "The poems by Bob Ellis were previously published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* and broadcast on ABC Radio". No mention is made of the fact that the *SMH* junked Ellis' monthly self-indulgence some time ago.

LES MURRAY'S MEMORY HOLE

And now to another poet, albeit of real standing. Les Murray; no less. On 29 November 2000 Peter F. Alexander's *Les Murray: A Life in Progress* (OUP) was launched in Sydney by poet Robert Gray. In the *Sydney Morning Herald* (30 November 2000) Susan Wyndham reported that Robert Gray described our Les as the "pre-eminent poet in English" and praised the author's portrayal of his life story. However Robert Gray, perhaps somewhat harshly, referred to the biography as "verging on hagiography...the story of the apotheosis of Les and the people who hindered or abetted that". Gray opined: "It misses a lot of the multiplicity in Les' character, it misses his glee and playfulness, and treats him as a passive victim of others' spite and greed."

Come to think of it, that is probably how Les Murray would like to be portrayed. The only proper criticism of the Alexander tome is that the author appears not to read *The Sydney Institute Quarterly*. Not on a regular basis, at anyrate. At page 257, Peter F. Alexander acknowledges that his subject had "depended" on Australia Council grants "for so long" and that he had put this "funding...to such good use". He then reports, without qualification, Les Murray's decision circa 1995 "that he would never again accept a grant" from the Australia Council. According to the author, "others of his friends took the same difficult decision, including Jamie Grant, Hal Colebatch and Peter Kocan".

It is unclear whether or not Messrs. Grant, Colebatch and Kocan have kept their promise in this instance. However, as readers of *Media Watch* will know, Les Murray is again in receipt of Australia Council largesse. For poetry published in Christopher Pearson's *The Adelaide Review*, no less. For example, the December 2000 edition of *The Adelaide Review* contains a full-page Les Murray poem – alongside the Australia Council logo. Perhaps Peter F. Alexander might discuss Les Murray's most recent funding metamorphosis in the second edition.

KNEES-UP IN BALMAIN

These days Les Murray is *Quadrant* magazine's literary editor. P P McGuinness is editor. Bill Hayden is chairman of the board which consists of Emeritus Professor David Armstrong, Peter Coleman, Miranda Devine, Christopher Pearson and Imre Salusinszky.

On 4 August 2000, the Prime Minister officially opened *Quadrant's* new office in the Sydney suburb of Balmain. John Howard said that "this, from recollection, is only the second social gathering organised by *Quadrant* that I have ever attended". The inaugural occasion was as long ago as 1984. The Prime Minister praised *Quadrant's* role in questioning "political correctness", commenting: "Perhaps the intellectual divide, if you want to use that expression, in our community now is not so much between so-called elite opinion and popular opinion, but between political correctness and common sense". According to reports, no one said precisely what "political correctness" meant. However, this may well have been the first occasion in which the concept had been bagged in elitist/latte drinking/trendy inner-city Balmain. The alleged home of, er, political correctness - where PP both lives and works.

The occasion was reported in the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*. On Monday 7 August 2000, Miranda Devine waxed lyrical about the opening. Mentioning, in passing, who was there. Her list

included historian Keith Windschuttle. The following day Piers Akerman used the *Quadrant* turn to have another go at, yes, political correctness. He also focused his attention at the line-up: "For whatever reason, no Fairfax editors nor ABC editors were able to attend this gathering of quite distinguished minds". Distinguished minds like Piers Akerman's very own. Apparently.

But Piers Akerman did not disclose the invitation list. Were Fairfax and ABC editors actually invited? It is known that invitations were not extended to quite a few *Quadrant* types who had worked for and/or contributed to the magazine when it was not fashionable to be a political conservative. Unlike today.

In its day, when intellectual fashions were overwhelmingly on the left, *Quadrant* played a significant role in arguing the case against totalitarianism (of both right and left) and supporting economic reform. It seems that some of those who supported *Quadrant* - and its first editor Jim McAuley (1917-1976) were not invited to hear John Howard at Balmain. Yet some of those who had opposed Jim McAuley and his causes were present to drink to the success of the *Quadrant* ethos. What fun. A few examples illustrate the point.

- Throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, *Quadrant* maintains a consistent position of opposition to Soviet totalitarianism. This involves unambiguous opposition to Soviet communism in all its manifestations and unqualified support for the United States' stance in the Cold War.

- P P McGuinness takes up the position of manager of the Economist Department in the London office of the Moscow Narodny Bank in 1966 and stays on the staff until 1967. This is at the height of the repression engendered by Leonid Brezhnev and his fellow Moscow-based dictators.

- Circa 1965-1971 *Quadrant* supports Australia's commitment in Vietnam and, in particular, the Australian Defence Force personnel serving in Indo-China.

- Piers Akerman signs an advertisement sponsored by the leftist Association for International Co-operation and Disarmament which is published in the leftist *Review* on 27 November 1971. Piers Akerman's co-signatories include such leftists as Alex Carey, Jennie George, Laurie Aarons, Jim Cairns, Lionel Murphy and Jack Munday. The AIDC advertisement alleges that Australia has become involved "in one of the most obscene crimes of the 20th Century", describes Australian military personnel as "mercenaries" and refers to the "cesspool of American imperial politics".

- Circa April 1975 *Quadrant* opposes the imposition of totalitarian rule over Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos by the communist victors following the fall of Phnom Penh, Saigon and Vientienne.

- Christopher Pearson and his tutorial group in Contemporary Social Theory at Adelaide University hears on 16 April 1975 that Phnom Penh has fallen to the communist Khmer Rouge. CP and his fellow comrades adjourn to the Staff Club to toast Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge victory with Great Western Champagne.

- Circa the mid-1980s *Quadrant* continues its support for the Australia-US alliance at the time of the what is called the Second Cold War.

- Bill Hayden, in his capacity as Foreign Minister, unilaterally threatens to close the US-Australia Joint Facilities if Washington does not enter into serious discussion with Moscow about arms control – the story is told in Bob Hawke *The Hawke Memoirs* (Heinemann, 1994).

• Circa 1985 *Quadrant* continues to run a series of articles calling for reform to Australia's industrial relations system and for freer trade.

- In *The Media* (Penguin, 1985), Keith Windschuttle bags what he terms "the political programme of the New Right which originated as part of the baggage of monetarist economics and which, from the mid-1970s onwards, has set out to change the capitalist world". He attacks the opponents of Keynesian economics – and favours "government restrictions and regulation" over "private enterprise and free markets".

CHRISTOPHER PEARSON AND THE "CULTURE WARS"

Thankfully, all this was forgotten as born-again Australian political conservatives, in the presence of the twice elected Prime Minister, toasted victory in what Christopher Pearson has termed Australia's very own version of the "culture wars". Soon after, in his *Australian Financial Review* column of 11 September 2000, CP reflected on the influence of conservatism on the contemporary political debate in Australia:

It is often said that the Australian commentariat [meaning body of commentators] is dominated by dyed-in-the-wool conservatives. If only that were half true it would make for much less predictability in "the national conversation". The truth, however, is that very few conservatives get to have much of a say. In terms of weight of argument, though not of numbers, the predominance – in Michael Duffy's phrase – is with sceptical ex-Lefties who just got mugged by reality.

"Mugged by reality" is the phrase invented by American conservative Midge Decter. She used the term in the 1980s to describe former members of the left – like herself and her husband Norman Podhoretz – who had junked leftism and embraced conservatism. "Reagan Democrats" was the jargon used to denote the more general phenomenon – i.e. traditional Democratic Party supporters who were attracted by the conservatism of Ronald Reagan's Republican Party.

It is important to remember that Midge Decter et al were "mugged by reality" some two decades ago – at a time when the left was still very fashionable. Particularly within universities and the media. The ex-leftists to whom Michael Duffy and Christopher Pearson made reference departed the left in recent years – i.e. at a time when left-wing views were no longer fashionable. In fact, by then, leftism was becoming increasingly unfashionable.

So the question becomes – were the current lot of ex-leftist conservatives (in what CP calls "the Australian commentariat") really mugged by reality? Or did they just move with the fashions? In other words, were they happy to be leftists when intellectual leftism was in the ascendancy – and happy to join the conservatives once political conservatism had prevailed over leftism in the battle of ideas?

These issues were addressed by social commentator Catharine Lumby in a 1999 article in *The Bulletin* ("Looking for Mr Right", *The Bulletin*, 20 July 1999). She commented: "Duffy once ran an anarchist bookshop in Sydney, McGuinness was an economic adviser to the Whitlam government and worked for the Moscow Norodny Bank, and Pearson edited the *Labor Forum* in the early 80s". And she quotes P P McGuinness as declaring that he still asserted "old left wing values".

Writing in the *AFR* on 19 July 1999, Christopher Pearson responded to Catharine Lumby's article. He objected to the use of the term "conservative" to describe P P McGuinness, Michael Duffy and Max Teichmann (the latter writes for Christopher Pearson's *Adelaide Review* and the late B.A. Santamaria's *News Weekly*) preferring the term "sceptic".

This time CP did not use the "mugged by reality" terminology to explain the move of all three gentlemen away from the left. Rather he cited the (much quoted) comment of John Maynard Keynes – namely that, when confronted with compelling new arguments, he generally changed his mind. No doubt he did. But this does not eliminate the possibility that others, apart from Lord Keynes, may change their position because they were or are followers of fashion.



AUSSIE ALIENATION UPDATE

The 2000 Olympics encouraged the publishing world to see a potential market in Australia as fashion. However, once again, those who are presented as having views worth listening to on Australia don't actually live here. They are either travellers to the Antipodes (Bill Bryson, Michael Davie) or expatriates (Phillip Knightley, Ross Terrill). And then there is the collection on Australia chosen by Granta editor Ian Jack. It's very much Australia as others see us. With a heavy dose of alienation – mostly of the leftist genre.

Visit any mainstream bookshop in New York. You will not find much Australian non-fiction. Except, possibly, *The Fatal Shore* by New York based Australian Robert Hughes. It's much the same in London. There the best selling tome on Australia, over time, would be *A Secret Country* by expatriate John Pilger. The former work is penology dressed up as general history and accompanied by considerable hyperbole. The latter is replete with factual errors and prone to seeing the nation and its citizens as the victims of numerous conspiracies, quite a few overseen by Western intelligence agencies. Neither Hughes nor Pilger present an adequate account of Australia's past or present. However, in the Northern Hemisphere there is not much else available on Down Under.

This is not a reflection on Australia's relatively small population. Bookshops in New York and London carry much non-fiction about, say, Ireland and Israel. Yet Australia's population is around double that of the two nations combined. Of course, much of the interest concerning Ireland and Israel in Britain and North America can be explained in terms of the Irish and Jewish diaspora. But it is more than that. Both Ireland and Israel experienced wars of independence in the 20th Century. There was also the Irish Civil War. And Israel has been racked by internal division since its establishment in 1948. In short, the two nations are interesting because they

are sites of conflict within recent memory. Moreover, they are not that far away from the population centres of Europe and North America. Unlike Australia.

The East Timor commitment and the republic referendum focused rare international attention on Australia. Likewise the 2000 Olympics. It's possible that some interest will remain until the Centenary of Federation in 2001. Then it's likely to be back-to-the-past, in so far as Australia's place in the world is concerned. Baring any international or national crisis affecting the Antipodes.

Publishers used this (temporary) rise in curiosity to issue, or re-issue, works on Australia. By foreigners and expatriates alike. The United States born travel writer Bill Bryson has written *Down Under*, his inaugural account of Australia. English born journalist Michael Davie, who has spent considerable time in Australia including a stint as editor of *The Age*, has assessed *Anglo-Australian Attitudes*. London based expatriate Phillip Knightley has come up with the ambitiously titled *Australia: A Biography of a Nation*. The once an Australian, then an American, now dual citizen holder Ross Terrill has revised his 1987 book *The Australians*. And *Granta* editor Ian Jack has put together a collection of writing, which he has termed *Australia: The New World*.

The very volume of material suggests that there will be more on commercial bookshelves about Australia in Western Europe and North America. For a while at least. Will this contribute significantly to a greater knowledge of Australia? To some extent, yes. But...

Bill Bryson first visited Australia in 1992 when he addressed the Melbourne Writers' Festival. There were four more trips before *Down Under*. During his fifth journey the author decided "to see the real Australia – the vast and baking interior, the boundless void that lies between the coasts". According to this view, "you cannot say you have been to Australia unless you have crossed the outback".

Early on Bryson declares his love for Australia which he is anxious to place "on the record". Here it is: "The people are immensely likeable – cheerful, extrovert, quick-witted and unflinchingly obliging. Their cities are safe and clean and nearly always built on water. They have a society that is prosperous, well ordered and instinctively egalitarian. The food is excellent. The beer is cold. The sun nearly always shines. Rupert Murdoch no longer lives there. Life doesn't get much better than this."

Sounds like the Garden of Eden before The Fall. Along with the oh-so-fashionable bagging of Rupert Murdoch. Like him or not, the Australian born Murdoch is this nation's most successful business achiever by far. Yet he is summarily dismissed early on in *Down Under* - while the cold beer is much praised. This is the problem with Bryson's work. Sure he is a witty writer, of the travel genre. Even so, the book is unnecessarily trivial. It's true, as the reader of *Down Under* is told early on, that Australia is "mostly empty and a long way away". But the assertion that "Australians can't bear it that the outside world pays so little attention to them" is an undocumented generalisation. Then there is Bryson's depiction of Australia which "has more things that will kill you than anywhere else". Oh, yeah.

According to this view: "If you are not stung or pronged to death in some unexpected manner, you may be fatally chomped by sharks or crocodiles, or carried helplessly out to sea by irresistible currents, or left to stagger to an unhappy death in the baking outback". It's good (hyperbolic) fun. Provided the reader already knows, or finds out from other sources, that the

overwhelming majority of Australians sleep safely in their beds each night. In urban areas or substantial towns.

At times Bryson's humour-by-exaggeration contains factual errors. For example, it is simply false to allege that "shark attacks are much more likely inside the [Sydney] harbour than out". Whilst few would deny that there is considerable heavy drinking in the Northern Territory, what is to be made of the claim that "nearly every person" he saw on Darwin's streets "scuffled along with a wino shuffle"?

Bill Bryson acknowledges that he read Robert Hughes' "majestic history" *The Fatal Shore*, along with John Pilger's *A Secret Country*, before coming to Australia. But not much else on the evidence available, despite the bibliography. No problem here. The author visits many lands and cannot be expected to have a factoid's knowledge. It's just that he regurgitates much mythology when moving from gee-wiz expressions about this "most extraordinarily lethal country" to reflect on Australian history and politics.

Down Under presents the intellectually fashionable view of Australians as dupes. In the past Australians "swore allegiance to king and country, and when Britain went to war they unhesitatingly went off to die in foreign fields for her". This overlooks the fact that Australia had its own strategic interests in 1914-18 and 1939-45. Since Germany had possessions in the Pacific, the future of Australia was directly bound up with the outcome of the World War I battles in France and Belgium. Bill Bryson does not even consider this point. It's much the same with the present. Conservative John Howard gets a terrible pasting. The Prime Minister is depicted as "by far the dullest man in Australia" and presented as a mediocre local funeral director. Compared with which political leaders? George W Bush and/or Al Gore?

Still, Bill Bryson cannot be blamed for repackaging the Aussies-as-willing-cannon-fodder mythology. It has become part of the Australian genre. Phillip Knightley runs a similar line, grossly inflating Australia's World War I fatalities in the process. He refers to "enormous" casualties, depicting 23,000 dead "in seven weeks' fighting in the valley of the Somme River in the late summer of 1916" and "38,000 men at Passchendaele in October-November 1917". My uncle, Alan Dargavel, died in the latter battle. It was a dreadful conflict. But it makes no point to exaggerate the outcome. All up, the total Australian fatalities for the duration of the World War I hostilities were around 60,000. Yet according to Knightley, the Australian dead reached this level in four months on the Western Front alone.

Ross Terrill runs a similar line, depicting 1914-18 as "Europe's war". Yet this view was not held by any one significant group in Australia at the time. Were all the political leaders of their day mere dupes? In his *Granta* essay, Hobart born and Oxford based academic Peter Conrad repeats this all too familiar refrain: "Australian troops were always available to die in Britain's wars. At Gallipoli, they were used by the imperial generals as common fodder, and lined up to be massacred". Pure mythology but, alas, now received wisdom which is picked up and promulgated by such popular writers as Bill Bryson.

Michael Davie does challenge the depiction of Australia as, for the most part, Britain's lackey. Yet even he maintains "it was axiomatic that most of its citizens would...respond with enthusiasm to the needs of the mother country". There follows a list of Australia's major military commitments, apart from Korea. Following which Davie comments that it "is open to debate" as to "which of these wars affected Australia's national interest". Well, so it is. The problem is that Davie gives the

impression that he agrees, sort of, with historian Stuart Macintyre's description of Australians as "white Gurkhas". Which, in a sense, closes the discussion immediately.

The problem with much of this debate is that it ignores the Australian reality. Namely a small isolated population occupying a vast continent and dependent on sea lanes and air corridors to move people and trade. Australia has certain similarities with Ireland and Canada. Ireland is a European nation - increasingly so as the European Union has developed and been embraced by the Irish as a means of averting the British question. Canada is part of North America and NATO - and, also, the North American Free Trade Association. Whatever the wishes of the Irish and the Canadians, their security has been, and is, ensured because of their proximity to Britain and the United States respectively. It's not only in real estate that location matters.

In view of Australia's isolation, it is understandable why successive Australian governments (conservative and Labor alike) have seen fit to side with traditional allies in a range of conflicts. Including both world wars, Korea, the Malayan Emergency, Confrontation and Vietnam. The Vietnam commitment was the only military involvement which engendered a significant party political divide. However, had the ALP been in office circa 1965, it is far from certain that Australia would have declined to support the US militarily.

Michael Davie dismisses the Aussie Diggers-as-cannon-fodder-mythology. Even so, he fails to fully grasp the implication of distance for Australian policy makers. Like Bryson, Davie is a fine storyteller. It's just that the tales about Anglo-Australian attitudes seem antiquated. His is a quaint book. Valuable for those interested in stories about State governors, Antipodean Royal romances, the 1932-33 Australia vs England test cricket "bodyline" controversy, gentlemen's clubs and the like.

In a sense the problem resides in the book's title. Under the term "Anglo", Davie includes all Australians of Anglo-Celtic background. The English, of course. But also "persons of Welsh, Irish or Scottish descent". It is true that, for the most part, Scottish and Welsh groups did not have a high profile in Australia. This cannot be said of the Irish. Every now and then Davie refers to Protestant-Catholic divisions in Australia, which he depicts as conflicts between "Irish Catholics and Protestants". This overlooks the fact that Catholics (or Irish origins) in Australia were Australian. Not Irish.

At times this labelling leads to confusion. In his preface, Davie refers to former Labor prime minister Paul Keating as "the underprivileged son of an Irish Catholic boilermaker, and a school leaver at fourteen". In fact Paul's father Matt Keating was neither Irish nor underprivileged. He was born in Australia; the Keating family arrived in Australia as early as 1855. Moreover, before the onset of illness, Matt Keating ran a successful medium sized business supplying the ready-mix concrete industry. In her book *Paul Keating: Prime Minister* (1992), Edna Carew described the company as a "thriving business".

Davie also tells a tale of how, when visiting the Queen at Balmoral, Annita Keating's hosts could not fathom her accent - confusing "fishing" (which she didn't say) with "fashion" (which she did). The implication is that the Brits do not understand the Aussie accent all that well. Maybe. But Annita Keating was born in The Netherlands and arrived in Australia in her twenties. The lesson - it is unwise to make assumptions about the backgrounds of citizens in multicultural societies.

At times Davie hovers near the Catholic-Protestant tensions of the day. For example, he agrees with one-time English cricket captain G.O. Allen that the "Roman Catholic element in the [Australian] side" did not give "full support" to their captain Don Bradman. This is a wild statement yet it indicates that the author is aware of Catholic-Protestant tension in Australia. How then can he justify lumping Australians of Protestant British background with those of Irish Catholic heritage and labelling them all "Anglo-Australians"?

Phillip Knightley refers to Australia circa 1914 as a "British-Irish community in the Pacific" which he later describes as consisting of "Britain's sons". Rather confusing, to be sure. Especially since he also maintains, without evidence, that "many Irish-Australians made it appear as if they did put the welfare of Ireland above that of Australia...even though they were born in Australia they remained more Irish than Australian". It is a re-run of the discredited theory about Irish disloyalty. The fact is that, especially after the Irish Civil War of 1922-23, most Australians of Irish background lost interest in the land of their ancestors. Catholics of Irish background in Australia did not call Ireland "home". Many Protestants of British origin did think of Britain as, variously, the "Mother Country" and "home".

Australia: A Biography of a Nation starts well and ends with a challenging portrayal of a "sense of collectivism" as the "predominant Australian characteristic". Yet elsewhere Phillip Knightley lapses into overstatement, tinged with a sense of conspiracy.

No democratic society has one defining characteristic. There are, however, common threads. In the 213 years since European settlement, Australia has been essentially a pragmatic and empirical society. Distance from European ideological hot spots has had a dampening-down effect on beliefs and causes alike. That's why the early divisions between Protestant and Catholic had relatively benign outcomes. That's why in the 1990s the wars in the former Yugoslavia did not lead to mini-ethnic battles among the Serb, Croat and Bosnian communities living in Australia. What's remarkable about contemporary multicultural Australia is the relative absence of ethnic violence. Even compared with such tolerant democracies as Britain and the United States.

Yet, reading Phillip Knightley, you get the impression that Australia went close to following Britain, Ireland and the US by resolving civil conflict through civil war. Early on in his book, Knightley alleges that "Australians...came much closer to civil war than many today are prepared to admit". The evidence? Well, it's pretty light. He depicts Australia in 1932 as being "on the brink of a civil war between the Commonwealth government and the state of New South Wales". The reference is to the New South Wales constitutional crisis when populist Labor premier Jack Lang instructed NSW public servants not to abide by a Federal directive to pay certain revenue to the Commonwealth Bank. Lang was attempting to default on the payment of overseas debt. He breached the State Audit Act and was subsequently sacked by the Governor, Sir Philip Game.

Australia's next constitutional crisis occurred in late 1975 when the Coalition blocked supply in the Senate. When Prime Minister Gough Whitlam refused to call an election, the Governor-General Sir John Kerr dismissed Whitlam and commissioned Malcolm Fraser as caretaker prime minister pending a double dissolution of both houses of Parliament.

Knightley presents a worse case scenario of what might have happened - with Whitlam's supporters taking "to the streets" and Kerr sending in "the army to maintain order". It was all possible because, as in the early 1930s, "there were still secret armies and paramilitary organisations around in the mid-1970s". Hence the possibility of "bloody clashes on the streets" of both Sydney and Melbourne.

All this is hyperbole built on scenario. What was significant about 1975, and 1932, turned on the absence of civil disturbance. Phillip Knightley has lived outside of Australia for many years. Even so, he should recognise that civil war is most unlikely to occur in an essentially non-ideological society.

Then there is the unfortunate (Pilger-like) assertion that, somehow or other, Kerr's decision was influenced by, yes, the US Central Intelligence Agency. According to Knightley, to believe that the CIA "had not the slightest influence on his [Kerr's] decision defies logic". Whose logic? In the 1990s I spent many hours in private conversation with John Kerr about the dismissal and all that. Agree with Kerr's decision or not, I have never believed that the CIA, or any other intelligence agency, had any influence on the Governor-General whatsoever. Nor has any evidence emerged to the contrary. Even Gough Whitlam is on record as dismissing the CIA conspiracy theory. In any event, it is known to whom Kerr went for advice. Namely to the High Court of Australia - (then) Chief Justice Sir Garfield Barwick and (then) Justice Sir Anthony Mason.

It's a pity really. *Australia: A Biography of Nation* was shaping up as a lively, if flawed, short history of Australia. Until the author did a Pilger, so to speak. References to imminent civil war and the intervention of foreign agents to determine domestic political outcomes distorts the reality of 20th Century Australia. Which was a practical, empirical, non-ideological place and, consequently, remarkably peaceful. Phillip Knightley readily acknowledges that contemporary Australia meets the "definition of a civilized society" - meaning that it takes "care of its young, old, sick and poor, no matter what their means". Yet he tends to overlook the ethos which made such an outcome possible. For most Australians anyway, the obvious exception being the first peoples.

Bill Bryson, Michael Davie and Phillip Knightley give the impression of having consistent views on Australia whenever they have focused attention on the nation. Not so Ross Terrill. Although he shares with all three an apparent reluctance to give as much attention to the views of contemporary Australian women as men. There are very few female voices in any of the four books. In his manifestation as a China expert, Terrill belonged to what some have termed the "whateverist school". Meaning he tended to agree with whatever the leaders in Beijing were up to at the time. So, for a while at least, the so-called Great Leap Forward was a good idea. Ditto the Cultural Revolution. Later on Beijing's economic reforms seemed appropriate. And so on.

There are strains of whateverism in *The Australians*. The 1987 edition, subtitled "In search of an identity", was written when Labor was in office. At the time the author queried whether "a mature consciousness of the nation really has arrived" - in view of the fact that "Queen Elizabeth is still the Australian head of state". The 2000 version, published when John Howard (who dislikes the quest for "national identity") is prime minister, has its subtitle "The way we live now". In it

the author reveals that he "shocked" himself "by voting No at the [November 1999] referendum" on the republic. In any event, John Howard would be pleased.

Like Bill Bryson, Ross Terrill believes that "Australia as a nation...is finer than it generally believes itself to be". Fair enough. And he now acknowledges that "compared with 20 years ago, Australian society is dynamic and efficient". This despite the fact that in 1987 he doubted that "Australia will quickly solve its present severe economic problems". What is consistent about the two volumes is a penchant for cliché, generalisation, hyperbole - and whateverism.

This time round, Terrill has targeted the "New Dispossessed" - it's a mocking term which equates with the "chattering classes" put down. He also refers to the prevalence Down Under of "left cultural gatekeepers" and quotes poet Les Murray as referring to this group as "an unelected para-government". Strange, then, that the politically conservative poet managed to obtain so many taxpayer subsidies as grants over so many years. *The Australians* also refers to "the personal treatment of Geoffrey Blainey by some of his fellow intellectuals in the 1980s as the "unfaced Dreyfus case of recent Australian history". The real Dreyfus would be so lucky. After all, Professor Geoffrey Blainey AC has been awarded Australia's highest honour and is a personal friend of the Prime Minister.

Bill Bryson, Michael Davie, Phillip Knightley and Ross Terrill have produced works of uneven quality. Moreover all books contain significant factual errors - suggesting that extra care should be taken in the fact-checking department when foreigners and/or expatriates write about Australia. Nevertheless most publicity is better than none at all. Particularly for an isolated society which rarely makes the international news because it is essentially democratic, peaceful, and, for the most part, tolerant. So, in this case, more is better.

When in his polemicist mode, Thomas Kenneally is wont to exaggerate. However his brief *Granta* essay "My Father's Australia" captures the nature of Australia better than Messrs. Bryson, Davie, Knightley and Terrill alike. Kenneally portrays the deep social divisions in Australia which, in reality, was multicultural from 1788. He depicts the interchange between "inhabitants derived from Britain and Ireland" in an isolated society. And he demonstrates the all pervading Australian pragmatism. In 1914 the writer's grandfather "mistrusted the imperial fervour of the early war" but his son Johnny (Tom's uncle) joined up since "for young Australian men, the war was their current test of worth". In time Tom's father volunteered for World War II.

And that's the point about Australia. In an isolated multicultural society, it made sense to be practical and empirical. Ideologies are always interesting but invariably bring death and destruction. This was not to be the Australian way. Which explains why so few books on Australia become international best sellers.

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