# Forthcoming Functions at the Sydney Institute

## Australia Chooses

**Speakers**
- PROF PETER DRYSDALE (Executive Director, Australia-Japan Research Centre) & MASAKO FUKUI (former journalist at The Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Sydney Bureau)

**Topics**
- Australia-Japan Relations – Two Views

**Dates**
- Wednesday 18 July 2001

**Venue**
- 41 Phillip Street, Sydney

**Time**
- 5.30 for 6.00 pm

**Speakers**
- GREG SHERIDAN (Foreign Editor, The Australian) & BRUCE DUNCAN (Author, Crusade or Conspiracy? Catholics and the Anti-Communist Struggle in Australia [UNSW Press 2001])

**Topics**
- Remembering Bob Santamaria

**Dates**
- Tuesday 24 July 2001

**Venue**
- 41 Phillip Street, Sydney

**Time**
- 5.30 for 6.00 pm

**Speakers**
- THE HON PETER COSTELLO MP (Treasurer & Liberal Party Deputy Leader)

**Topics**
- Peter Costello – The New Liberal

**Dates**
- Wednesday 25 July 2001

**Venue**
- Mallesons Conference Room, Governor Phillip Tower (Lvl 60)

**Time**
- 5.30 for 6.00 pm

**Speakers**
- SUSAN MITCHELL (well-known writer & author of Splitting the World Open – Tall Poppies and Me [Allen & Unwin 2001])

**Topics**
- Tall Poppies – A Decade On

**Dates**
- Tuesday 14 August 2001

**Venue**
- 41 Phillip Street, Sydney

**Time**
- 5.30 for 6.00 pm

**Speakers**
- GARRY BRACK (Executive Director, Employers Federation of NSW) & DR SHARON BEDER (Author of Selling the Work Ethic [Scribe Publications, 2001])

**Topics**
- Work and the Work Ethic Down Under – Two Views

**Dates**
- Monday 27 August 2001

**Venue**
- Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Level 32, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney

**Time**
- 5.30 for 6.00 pm

**Speakers**
- CHRIS JORDAN (Chairman, New Tax System Advisory Board) & ANNA CARRABS (Partner, William Buck Chartered Accountants)

**Topics**
- Tax Reform – What Next?

**Dates**
- Tuesday 21 August 2001

**Venue**
- 41 Phillip Street, Sydney

**Time**
- 5.30 for 6.00 pm

**Speakers**
- NATASHA STOTT-DESPOJA (Leader of the Democrats)

**Topics**
- Globalisation and its Critics

**Dates**
- Wednesday 12 September 2001

**Venue**
- BT Training Room (Room 401) Level 4, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney

**Time**
- 5.30 for 6.00 pm

**Speakers**
- FRANK MOORHOUSE (Winner of the 2001 Miles Franklin Award for Dark Palace [Knopf]) & NIKKI GEMMELL (Best selling author of Skiver & Cleave and the about to be released Love Song [Viking])

**Topics**
- Australian Writing - The Challenges

**Dates**
- Tuesday 25 September 2001

**Venue**
- BT Training Room (Room 401) Level 4, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney

**Time**
- 5.00 for 5.30pm

(Note Time)

**Speakers**
- CLIVE CROOK (Deputy Editor, The Economist)

**Topics**
- To be advised

**Dates**
- Tuesday 23 October 2001

**Venue**
- Clayton Utz Seminar Room (Level 34) 1 O’Connell Street, Sydney

**Time**
- 5.30 for 6.00 pm
NO MORE LITTLEMORE

STEPHEN MATCHETT with three views of the Australian character

JOHN MCONNELL reviews big business and anti-communist Catholics

IAN HENDERSON on the GST and the 2001 election

GEORGINA GOLD explains rape in cyberspace

ANNE HENDERSON, Goldilocks and the Third Way

MEDIA WATCH on George Negus’ "Australia Talks"

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Stuart Littlemore’s Littlemore
- Gerard Henderson

Cyber Terror
- Georgina Gold

Lost our (third) way?
- Anne Henderson

Book Reviews
- John McConnell

Review of the Reviewers
- Stephen Matchett

Declaring an interest

Gerard Henderson’s

Media Watch

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Curtin - and Menzies

Talk about a beat-up. And consider how John Edwards’ oration to the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library entitled “In search of John Curtin” – became in effect, “Dumping on Robert Menzies”. Dr Edwards’ speech contained little criticism of John Curtin (Australia’s prime minister from October 1941 to July 1945) and there was no reference to David Day’s important biography John Curtin: A Life (Harper Collins, 1999). An unusual omission since this book – while quite revealing about the Labor Saint’s personal challenges – is, overall, quite sympathetic to its subject. In any event, the Edwards thesis was fresh. He argued that “Curtin is actually far more significant for his impact on the institutional and economic character of post war Australia than for his resistance to the allied leaders [Winston Churchill and F.D. Roosevelt], and to the Japanese”. He had in mind “the beginnings of Commonwealth control over income tax and of central bank control over the private banks”. Along with an expansion of immigration, an economic policy aimed at full employment and Australia’s involvement in “the institutions which reestablished a global economy after two world wars and the Depression – the IMF, the World Bank and the GATT”.

Fair enough. In a sense. However, apart from the Australian Financial Review, Dr Edwards’ views on John Curtin as an internationally focused economic reformer were overlooked in the media. Instead, attention was focused on the speaker’s reference to a personal letter which Robert Menzies (then leader of the conservative United Australia Party Opposition) wrote to Stanley Melbourne Bruce (then Australian High Commissioner in London) on 11 September 1939. This despite the fact that Dr Edwards acknowledged that the parts of the letter concerning World War II had been published a full quarter of a century ago in Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-49 Volume 11: 1939 (AGPS, 1976). In other words, there was no scoop.

The ABC Radio AM program led the beat-up. Compere Peter Cave referred to the “discovery of a letter” which had “reignited debate” about Robert Menzies’s “attitude to Adolf Hitler”. Reporter Luisa Saccotelli referred to the Menzies-Bruce letter as having been “located in Stanley Bruce’s papers…” and “unveiled…by historian Dr John Edwards”. AM, however, did interview Gerard Henderson who put the correspondence into historical perspective.

The background is as follows. On 11 September 1939 Robert Menzies wrote (it was probably dictated) what he termed a “rambling” note to S.M. Bruce. It is true, as John Edwards reported, that Menzies expressed the view “that Hitler has no desire for a first class war”. And that the Australian leader would have been content with gaining “the Corridor and Danzig”. Certainly Robert Menzies was naïve in believing that Germany would offer such peace terms to Britain in 1939 – or that they could be accepted. Yet Dr Edwards chose to ignore the follow-up comment by Menzies that, personally, he supported “law and order and an end of terrorism in Europe”. It was just that, circa September 1939, Menzies was a pessimist. In view of Germany’s military might in late 1938; along with the existence of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the neutrality of the United States, he had reason to be pessimistic.

In 1939-40 S.M. Bruce was a defeatist. However, the available evidence suggests that Menzies was not. This was the view Viscount Caldecote, the Dominions Secretary, as recorded by John Lukacs in Five Days in London: May 1940 (YUP, 1989). In any event, in November 1939 the Menzies government decided to send an expeditionary force to support the Allied cause in Europe and the Middle East. As David Day has documented, in late 1939 the Curtin led Opposition was far from enthusiastic about sending Australian forces to engage the Axis Powers. Accore to John Edwards, Menzies was an “appeaser…even after the war began”. But appeasers don’t declare war. Menzies, whatever his private doubts, did. The real appeasers at the time were those members of the Australian left who opposed the war effort up until Germany’s invasion of the communist Soviet Union in mid 1941. Lest we forget.
STUART LITTLEMORE'S LITTLEMORE

Stuart Littlemore QC should be aware of the maxim warning criminals against returning to the scene of a crime. It's good advice which has an extended application. For example, media performers who stumble on air should refrain from revisiting the scene of their on-air catastrophe. Stuart Littlemore QC, for example.

The ABC TV Media Watch program commenced in 1989. Stuart Littlemore was the presenter for the first nine years (by the way, his self-prepared entry in Who's Who in Australia 2001 gets the dates wrong – this from a serial pedant who is so critical of the errors of others). There followed Richard Ackland (1998-99) - and Paul Barry (2000). Paul Barry's contract was not renewed by Gail Jarvis, then the ABC's director of television. It is understood that Ms Jarvis intended appointing former journalist Gerald Stone to do the ABC TV Media Watch gig in 2001. The deal fell through, however, when it was found that Mr Stone had accepted a position on the board of the publicly funded rival station SBS. ABC management was of the view that an SBS board member should not work on contract for the ABC. This left the ABC without a presenter for the 15 minute slot on Mondays - between the end of 4 Corners and the 9.30 pm news bulletin.

Enter David Salter (who had been Stuart Littlemore's executive producer of Media Watch) and the Q.C. Himself. Messrs Salter and Littlemore proposed that the latter present a 15 minute program to be titled "Littlemore". No less. The idea was accepted and Littlemore commenced on-air on Monday 5 March 2001 for a twelve week stint – in the first instance, at least.

It was a surprise decision. Stuart Littlemore had departed Media Watch in late 1997 in some acrimony. David Salter had indicated his intention to step down as executive producer. Littlemore wanted Salter to stay. Failing that, he wished to decide on Salter's replacement. As it happened, negotiations broke down and Littlemore chose not to renew his contract. Salter, however, remained with the ABC for a while in various capacities until, in time, his contract was not renewed. In Quentin Dempster’s Death Struggle (Allen & Unwin, 2000), David Salter was "outed" as the author of No Collocation News – the anonymous four page house-newsletter which advocated the cause of those opposed to moving ABC television news and current affairs staff from Sydney's Gore Hill to the ABC headquarters in Sydney's Ultimo. After leaving the ABC, David Salter was involved in setting up the Zietgeist Gazette, a subscriber based internet current affairs website. It was a commercial failure. So, after a brief break, it was back to the taxpayer funded ABC – this time to be executive producer of Littlemore. For three months at least. And, with a bit of luck, for longer.

Stuart Littlemore's exit from the ABC involved more than a disagreement on how the Media Watch program should be run. On 11 November 1997 he had appeared on the ABC TV Lateline program. Jennifer Byrne was compere. Fellow panelists were Australian journalist Pilita Clark and former US television executive Steve Brill (who went on to establish the media magazine Brill's Content). Put simply, Littlemore put in a shocker. His characteristic self-righteousness annoyed Brill who was infuriated by Littlemore's refusal to acknowledge that the ABC TV Media Watch program made any errors. At one stage Brill interrupted Littlemore with the comment: "Stuart, you sound more arrogant that the most arrogant journalist I've ever heard." This followed Littlemore's claim that he was "not aware" that Media Watch had made "any" errors in the "last three years".

At this stage Littlemore QC threw the switch to personal and asserted "You've got a good sense of the dollar, Steve". The implication was that Brill had taken up media criticism for money. Not surprisingly, Brill responded by asking Littlemore whether he worked on the ABC TV Media Watch program "for free". Whereupon the QC replied: "Yeah, I do, actually". Jennifer Byrne provided Littlemore with the chance to back away from his claim but he declined to accept the opportunity. The fact is that Stuart Littlemore did get paid for presenting Media Watch. Moreover, the program did make errors.

For a decade, Stuart Littlemore took a holier-than-thou stance in dishing it out to those in the media industry who made false statements, intentionally or otherwise. So, how do you explain such a howler on Lateline? Initially Littlemore made no response to the criticism that he had misled the Lateline audience. However, on 8 December 1997, the Sydney Morning Herald quoted Littlemore as claiming that the statement that he was not paid for presenting Media Watch was made in "irony". In March 1998, during the question/discussion period following an address to The Sydney Institute, David Salter was asked to explain the Littlemore Lateline comment. Salter replied that "Stuart partly misunderstood the question" but added that "he also missed a gear going into that corner". (See the David Salter transcript in The Sydney Institute Quarterly, May 1998).

In any event, it seems that all was forgotten – perhaps even forgiven – and the Littlemore/Salter team was re-engaged by Gail Jarvis to deliver the newly formatted gig. On 8 February 2001 Stuart Littlemore Q.C. (that is how he was introduced) explained his intentions to Richard Glover on ABC Radio 702. Asked what had tempted him back to the ABC, S.L. replied:
Oh, the prospect of fun, I think, at the ABC. It's also a bit boring not having your own program, you know. There are people who don't. But, you know, you're only somebody if you're on the media. Aren't you?

Stuart Littlemore QC also told ABC Radio that lawyers (like him) are more conscious than mere mortals in getting facts right. His actual words were: "See, when you're a lawyer you get a bit more conservative about assuming facts". We shall see.

Amanda Meade reported (The Australian, 9 February 2001) that Stuart Littlemore had declared that he possessed a "thickish skin" and opined that "only journalists hate me". He maintained that "journalists are so narcissistic and self-important". Unlike Mr Littlemore, apparently. He also commented: "David [Salter] is a man the ABC cannot be without. One of the strongest reasons for getting back [to the ABC] is that I'm dragging David back with me".

So it came to pass that, on Monday 5 March 2001, Stuart Littlemore welcomed viewers to the latest version of his "own program" (with David Salter as his executive producer):

**Good evening and thank you for joining me. This series of programs is to be about the story of the week. Its media treatment, its real significance and a few matters of opinion. But it won't always be like that. This week, however, it will.**

So let's join Stuart Littlemore Q.C. - in his persona as ABC TV's *Littlemore* - for an exploration of the real "story of the week" - along with a little bit of something else. Now and then.

• **5 March.** *Littlemore* commenced much as S.L.'s *Media Watch* program had concluded. Having a go at presenters Ray Martin and Alan Jones. Who else?

There is no background of the Martin defamation action against Littlemore of recent memory. Moreover, Alan Jones is initially mentioned by reference to "the parrot". Viewers were expected to get the joke. Anyrate, the subject is the late Don Bradman and the lives-of-the-saints hagiography that followed his passing at age 92. S.L. gives the impression that he is the first on television to challenge the Bradman mythology - overlooking the fact that the Bradman hagiography was criticised a full week earlier on ABC TV *Lateline* program (26 February 2001).

S.L. is at his pontifical best. Or worst, depending on your point of view. He refers to reporters who "never saw him [Bradman] play, let alone lived through the Depression they universally credited him with conquering". No names are named as to who "credited" Don Bradman with "conquering" the Depression. There is more like hyperbole. A pompous looking S.L. declares that "Channel 10, so in tune with its audience, it has illiterates for reporters". And the Olympic Games version of Tae Kwon Do is described as "a boring contest between bad tempered women trying to kick each other in the breasts". There was also time for a (gratuitous) go at the late Robert Menzies. S.L. quoted from Manning Clark's *A History of Australia* (Volume VI):

**In London he [Menzies] felt ashamed of Australians, of their coarseness, their lack of reading, their ignorance, their lack of interest in old civilization, and their lack of graciousness.**

But, according to S.L., Menzies "kept it, as best he could, to himself". What's the evidence for this? Alas, none is presented. Just opinionated Littlemore's opinion. That's all. In conclusion S.L. quotes former English cricketer and current commentator Peter Roebuck (whom he describes as "perhaps the only cricket writer to rise above the level of 'Gilchrist smashed the Indians'") saying that "private school boys" in flannels can be seen behaving badly "kicking and treading on the ball after unfavourable decisions and also insulting their opponents". Shame. He supports Peter Roebuck's view that "the game has been taken over by opportunists and loudmouths". Unlike Mr Roebuck, for example, who maintains the highest of standards. [Postscript: In May 2001 it was reported that Peter Roebuck had been charged in Britain with assaulting three 19 year old male cricketers.]

The program ends with some gratuitous advice from the presenter to the prime minister: "With respect, Mr Howard, political opportunism in appropriating Bradman's cricket [sic] is ill-advised: 1949 was a long time ago." Well, yes, so it was. However, with respect – of course - Don Bradman concluded his Test cricket career in 1948.

• **12 March.** The lesson for the night is about "a kind of media ignorance and bigotry that needs attention". S.L. makes some useful points about how the Australian media stereotype Muslims at home and abroad – even if the evidence is a bit thin and the examples cited sometimes dated. Still, amid the serious stuff, there is room for a put down or two. Viewers learn that *Time Magazine* is an outlet of "McDonald's journalism". No evidence is presented as to what is wrong with McDonald's – or with *Time*. There is also a reference to "Mr Murdoch's Miranda Devine" – overlooking the possibility that Ms Devine might leave Rupert Murdoch's News Limited and take up as a columnist on, say, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (as she did) without any apparent change in opinions. S.L. concludes with a plea that "the mass media accept that they'll have to work to gain an understanding of who we are…". Good point, to be sure.

• **19 March.** S.L. commences with an editorial. Declaring that it has been "a very bad week for the [Howard] government and its reputation as a sound economic manager is down for the count". Here follows a Littlemore treatise on good government. The problem, you see, turns on the existence of a "bipartisan agreement [that] you can't win a general election in Australia without buying votes".
According to S.L., "in recent memory, it all began in 1977" with the Coalition's Malcolm Fraser and his treasurer John Howard – the latter is referred to variously as "you know who" and "John". The Howard government is at fault in believing that "surpluses are to buy votes with" and that all our trials are caused by "taxpayer greed". S.L. asks the question: "Are we such a bunch of selfish bastards that we don't want vision from government, leadership, but simply that fistful of dollars?" The answer is in the affirmative. So there. Oh yes, S.L. runs the emperor-has-no-clothes cliché to explain something or other. He concludes by repeating the refrain:

It's depressing that our political leaders – on both sides – believe we're so selfish that we'd rather have a couple of hundred dollars than, say, a system of universal free education. But it's ineffably more depressing that they're probably right.

S.L. does not say precisely how a system of universal free education can be financed by taxing Australians an additional "couple of hundred dollars" per year. Perhaps next week.

- **26 March.** This time the target is (yawn) Rupert Murdoch's, News Limited, *The Australian* and all that. S.L.'s "theme for this week" is "this use of *The Australian* as an advocate for Murdoch's commercial interests!". There follows not so much a stream-of-consciousness but, rather, a stream-of-put-downs. In 1967 Rupert Murdoch showed "signs of puppy fat". The first edition of *The Australian*, in 1964, contained "gauche good intentions". Meanwhile, today, the Monday-Friday issue of *The Australian* sells "substantially less than the number of people who watch ABC TV's gardening program". Then there are references to News Limited personnel. Such as Lachlan Murdoch (referred to as "Little Lachie"), Mark Day (described as an "old gutter press man") and Paul Kelly (who, according to S.L., when editor of *The Australian* "was told to go into the News Limited library where he would find a pistol"). Bang, bang.

- **2 April.** The theme – the lead-up to the elections and "the worthlessness of media debate" on Australian politics. For example, S.L. objects to the question: "Who do you think would make the better prime minister?" and asks the question: "Has nobody told journalists that we don't elect the prime minister?!". A pedantic point, to be sure. But this overlooks the fact that electors may still have a preference as to who would make the better prime minister between, for example, John Howard and Kim Beazley. There are more such non-points of this kind. John Howard is presented as "unfortunately similar to 'Forrest Gump' – 'Forrest Howard'. Funny that.

- **9 April.** This time the target is the Melbourne based Institute of Public Affairs (IPA). The IPA was unwise enough not only to hold a poorly attended seminar on the ABC on a Saturday in Sydney but also to permit *Littlemore* executive producer David Salter to film the entire proceedings. The IPA alleges (see its website [www.ipa.org.au](http://www.ipa.org.au)) that S.L. made numerous factual errors in his report. Moreover, there were the usual put-downs where abuse is a substitute for argument. S.L.'s target was large and included the audience ("harmless duffers"), banks ("money lenders"), P.P. McGuinness ("that silly old sausage") and the IPA itself ("this tiny tight coterie of otherwise negligible hypocrites, muddle-headed wombats and mercenaries"). Oh yes, *Littlemore* managed to put a photo of Adolf Hitler on screen to demonstrate something or other, of the disapproving kind.

- **16 April.** This time S.L. comes up with a timely criticism of various "Australia First" campaigns – as epitomised by Dick Smith. You know, the sort of view that holds that non-Australians should buy Australia's exports while Australians should not purchase other people's imports. However, there is a feigned attempt at humour. S.L. claims that "Australia's own British airline practises child abuse to sell itself". The reference is to the use by Qantas of young children to sing it's "I still call Australia home" song as an advertisement. What a wit.

- **23 April.** This week's target is newly elected Democrats leader Natasha Stott Despoja – who is described as "the young woman who sold herself to journalists at her own valuation". Apparently S.L. doesn't like Senator Stott Despoja much. He maintains that Stott Despoja is "a woman of 31" who "ascended to the leadership of a party wholly and solely on the appeal of her assiduously developed celebrity". Interesting theory. For theory is what it is. The fact is that Natasha Stott Despoja replaced Meg Lees as Democrats leader on account of the backlash to the latter's support for the Howard government's new tax system. Without the GST and all that, Meg Lees would still be leader of the Democrats. But why let analysis distort from a bash at a "thirtysomething politician" with nothing "to say"? Unlike a fiftysomething lawyer with opinions on everything. And, of course, there is the standard *Littlemore* intellectual snobbery. This time it's readers of *Who Magazine* who are labelled "illiterates".

- **30 April.** The focus is on a tendency by the media to criticise adventurers and others who are lost and then found – and who then benefit financially from selling their stories to the media. The "hero/victim". As in yachtsmen Isabelle Autissier and Tony Bullimore, bushwalker Benjamin Maloney and Executive producer David Salter to film the entire proceedings. The IPA alleges (see

**At the heart of it, I suppose, is jealousy. Jealousy that others have the courage to risk their lives or, even more fundamentally, to be different from those whose lives of quiet desperation involve no greater risk than changing channels.**

So there you have it. According to *Littlemore*, we all live in "quiet desperation". Except for bushwalkers/sailors and, of course, presenters with their own
television programs. There were a number of S.L. in-jokes such as the reference to "the Packer 38 minute show". This is an old Media Watch term for Channel 9's 60 Minutes. A mere 38 minutes if you don't count the advertisements - get it?

• **7 May.** The lesson for the day is the ABC – in particular "programing of and about the arts". That's what "interests" Littlemore this week. The presenter declares that "it's worth a trip to the archives to get some feeling for the ABC's handling of the arts" nearly half a century ago. Flash to Michael Charlton on 5 November 1956, on which evening ABC TV presented a "live production of J.M. Barrie's play The Twelve Pound Look". Followed the next evening by ballet in prime time. Wow. And, shortly after, opera. Gee whiz.

S.L. declares that, at the time, the ABC's "commitment to the arts was serious". Then flash to a clip from a 1958 production of "the seminal review "commitment to the arts was serious". Then flash to S.L. declares that, at the time, the ABC's ballet in prime time. Wow. And, shortly after, opera. Twelve Pound Look. "Followed the next evening by ballet in prime time. Wow. And, shortly after, opera. Gee whiz.

S.L. declares that, at the time, the ABC's "commitment to the arts was serious". Then flash to a clip from a 1958 production of "the seminal review program" The Critics featuring Sylvia Lawson, Leonie Kramer and James Gleeson pontificating on something or other. The extract contains such Leonie-Kramer-literary-criticism-jargon about the novel as: "He doesn't answer a number of questions he raises, but I think it is important that he has raised them". Really. James Gleeson agrees with Dr Kramer - opining that the writer's "basic mistake was in making it into a novel; it should have been treated as a documentary". How helpful. Viewing the 1958 footage, S.L. comments: "Well, we were all younger in 1958". This overlooks the fact that you would need to be over 40 today to have looked younger in 1958.

There follows some stern advice for the ABC:

**The ABC should re-read its own charter. The government should study the budgets of high quality program production and not just arts production. If Canberra can't, or won't, pay for the ABC's proper functioning, the answer isn't in making the corporation responsible for raising its own money. Past adventurism in Pay TV, satellite broadcasting to Asia, and the siphoning off of money into online enterprises are equally doomed. No, the ABC has to see itself in context. A niche broadcaster alongside Pay TV, SBS and the networks, The [ABC] charter doesn't mandate 24 hour broadcasting. With the greatest of respect, my contention is that soap operas are covered elsewhere and so is most sport. This place can produce better journalism and better arts programing than the other broadcasters - and focus on that.**

How about that? The future of the taxpayer subsidised ABC TV should fit Mr Littlemore's own interests – current affairs and the arts. Frightfully interesting, to be sure. With the greatest of respect – of course.

• **14 May.** This week's target is David Flint, the chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Authority. He is twice referred to as an "embarrassment" and "our Dave" and once as "Dave". There is a reference to Professor Flint's "lickspittle thesis" and one to him (allegedly) "licking spittle". S.L. maintains that the ABA chairman "thinks only Milton Friedman should control the media" – but provides no evidence for this assertion and does not explain just who Milton Friedman is. Viewers are supposed to know, you see. Littlemore calls for David Flint's resignation. The program contains three "oh dear" refrains and one "pig's arse" exclamation. Oh dear. Pig's arse.

• **21 May.** It's the final night. This time the teaching is on "news and current affairs packages" which are becoming "tired, bereft of imagination and ideas and quite terrified of risk-taking". Unlike Littlemore, it seems. There is some pedantry – as in a reference to the "negative conjunctive imperative". Along with some in-jokes – a reference to "Barcelona Tonight" is not explained - in fact it's a put-down of Channel 7 Today Tonight program from Stuart Littlemore's ABC TV Media Watch program. There is much editorialising. S.L. advises Today Tonight and A Current Affair about the type of stories they "should" be covering. It turns out that the recommendations in question follow stories that had appeared on the day in question in The Age and Sydney Morning Herald respectively.

There is also some sensible criticism of ABC TV's 7.30 Report and its compere Kerry O'Brien. Yet it's hardly a fresh insight to hear that Kerry O'Brien "hogs the studio interviews" or that "his interviews... are too long". S.L. asserts that Kerry O'Brien's "past career as a paid apologist for Labor" makes the 7.30 Report vulnerable. But what about Stuart Littlemore's part time career as an apologist for the ALP – as in the 1976 Tasmania State election campaign? In The Media and Me (ABC Books, 1996) Stuart Littlemore recounted how "the ALP's agency" asked him "to come to Tasmania to work on the 1976 State election there". Alas, there is no mention of this particular "personal vulnerability", if vulnerability it is.

Then there is the final, ever pompous, comment:

**I know we've never met, Mr Shier, But let me offer my respectful suggestions about the 7.30 Report. Run it at 9.30. Break it out of its straight jacket, give it a sense of humour, authorise dangerous irreverence, license it to take risks and forbid self-importance. Just a few thoughts. And so ends the last of this series of programs. We hope to be back in the Spring. Thank you very much for joining me and good night to you.**

So there you have it. An avowedly humble Stuart Littlemore QC exits with the gratuitous advice that the ABC management should "forbid self-importance" among its presenters. Really.

In The Media and Me, Stuart Littlemore looked back
in happiness on his time on the ABC This Day Tonight program in the 1970s. He boasted that "TDT had built its success on assaulting the conservative values of postwar Australia...". A quarter of a century after S.L.'s glorious TDT days, he still maintains that it is his right to present his opinions - at taxpayers' expense - as he pleases. Moreover, by refusing to establish any right-of-reply mechanism, he still declines to acknowledge that he makes errors.

It's not precisely clear what Littlemore was all about – except for providing the presenter with his own program. Unlike Media Watch, Littlemore was not media criticism. Rather it was just opinion and, at times, exaggerated and factually incorrect opinion. Writing in The Age (10 March 2001), Peter Wilmoth recalled certain similarities between the performances of the leftist Stuart Littlemore and the conservative B.A. Santamaria (1915-98):

**With a less garish set than the [Media Watch] one from which he [Stuart Littlemore]quit...and a curiously muted delivery, some viewers were transported back to a Sunday afternoon and the stern visage of B.A. Santamaria on his opinion program Point of View.**

Good point. Except that Bob Santamaria did not expect Australia's taxpayers to fund the promulgation of his opinions without any right of reply. It is as if Stuart Littlemore has learnt nothing since his embarrassing on-air stumbles when confronted by Steve Brill in late 1997. Only the genuinely reformed should return to the scene of past failures.

**CYBER TERROR**

**Georgina Gold**

E ric Cartman, the "I'm not fat, I'm big-boned" eight year old character in the South Park series, knows how to use the internet. In a recent episode Cartman, deciding that he is too mature for his friends, innocently posts a message onto an internet chat room called Men Who Like Young Boys in the hope that he will find a more mature friend to hang with. Rather surprised, Cartman finds that his message is answered in astounding numbers. The third-grader eventually discovers that he is embroiled in an internet-based paedophile ring and is saved by the FBI. Cartman's naive messing around on the net, in a virtual community, resulted in a situation where he was placed in physical danger, in the real world. Although merely a fictional situation the makers of South Park aptly replicated what is becoming a terrifying reality.

This transcendence from the virtual to the real is something that websurfers, netizens and law-makers are trying to come to terms with. Disturbing reports of cyber harassment, cyber stalkings and "cyber rape" are becoming more common. Chat rooms, virtual worlds, MUDs, MOOs, and cyber communities are the crime scene, the criminals are users and the victims usually women.

How can a person be raped or stalked in cyberspace? The user is not taking up a physical space, they do not have a tangible identity so therefore they cannot be physically violated. They are sitting behind the safety of a monitor and keyboard and usually in their own home.

**Cyber Rape at LambdaMOO**

Although they do not exist physically, many users of virtual worlds such as MOOs ([Multi-User Dungeon] Object Oriented) create, through programming and text, such elaborate characters or identities and infuse them with personality traits that they seem real. One can create and assume any identity, any character or gender. In addition, the users of these MOOs create surrounding environments through programming to realistically enhance the creative experience. One of the oldest and most famous MOOs is LambdaMOO, a virtual chateau where people jettison their real personas at the entrance and assume their avatar when they jump in through the coat closet - the portal into the chateau. Thousands of people live in Lambda, programming their own rooms in the chateau from the living room (the main meet-and-greet area) to aviaries, gardens, libraries and sauna tubs. Characters float in and out of the rooms preceded by their physical and character descriptions which can be seen by the other users in the room. Discussions are varied from high-brow technical programming to cybertulture to everyday chitchat.

In the early 1990s, well before mass advertising hit the internet, Lambda was transformed from an anarchistic, social mish-mash to a governed, regulated law abiding cyber-society. But then things changed for the worse - one day, a crime was committed within the moat of Lambda. Two users were cyber-raped. Two regular citizens of Lambda, one a female and the other of indeterminate gender, were forced to "sexually service" Mr Bungle, a lewd harlequinesque character, "in a variety of ways". The two characters were violently, brutally and descriptively raped by the Mr Bungle character in the living room of the chateau where other residents were present. Mr Bungle used what is called a voodoo doll - a device that enabled him to take control over the two victims' characters and force them to act out the violent actions he constructed through the keyboard. The two violated characters were left powerless to defend themselves and the violence did not stop until a "virtual gun" was fired at Mr Bungle by one of the other characters in the room, disabling him and the voodoo doll and locking him in an impenetrable cage.

Even though the victims could easily turn off their computers and themselves escape the scene of the crime the rapist would still have been there. And
because he had taken control of the two victims' characters through the use of the voodoo doll he could continue perpetrating the crime on the victims' characters even without their presence in the room.

It sounds rather Dungeons and Dragons, doesn't it? Well it is in the sense of role playing and fantasy character creation. On the evening after the rape, Legba, one of the victims of the cyberrape explained on a mailing list how hurt and violated she felt after the incident. She called for the character of Mr Bungle to be "toaded". Toading refers to a command derived from sorcery role playing games which turns a player into a toad - destroying all the player's attributes and characteristics and replacing them with toad-like qualities. In a MOO, however, a toading also wipes out the player's account, so he is unable to access the MOO - the character is annihilated.

Instead, however, the community gathered together for its first cyber town hall meeting to discuss the ethical dilemmas surrounding the issue of cyber rape. Lambda was in the process of creating laws and rules; of becoming a self-governing cyber society with legislation and regulations. However, there was no crime in what Mr Bungle did according to Lambda politicos because rape had not been legislated against. Yet. Debate raged around the virtual room with technolibertarians vying against Mr Bungle's elimination and others seeking to find out the real world legal status of the offence. Mr Bungle, eventually, was banished, quietly, from the world of Lambda - his character erased from the dungeon.

In the cyber world the rape at LambdaMOO was a turning point for many netizens. The issues of civil liberties, freedom of speech, internet regulation, rules and civility were discussed throughout the cybercommunity. A few years on, though, and cyber rape and its menacing counterpart, cyberstalking have become increasingly worrying phenomena.

Cyberstalking and the Real World

In a press release issued on 7 December 2000 the Minister for Justice and Customs, Amanda Vanstone, warned that "like traditional stalking through the post, telephone or physically following someone, cyber-stalking can be as dramatic in the trauma caused to the victim".

A report by the Australian Institute of Criminology entitled Cyberstalking addressed the dangers of this new and pernicious offence and even, more worrying, how cyberstalking seeps from the virtual into the real world. Cyberstalking is defined by the AIC as being "analogous to traditional forms of stalking, in that it incorporates persistent behaviours that instil apprehension and fear". The advent of cyberstalking emphasises the potential of the internet to facilitate some types of crimes and highlights the difficulties in legislating against these crimes due to the borderless and anonymous nature of the internet. The report outlines three types of cyberstalking - email stalking, internet stalking and computer stalking.

Email Stalking

Email stalking takes place when unsolicited emails, including hate, obscene or threatening mail are sent to the victim, in a manner that is designed to intimidate. This form of cyberstalking is the most closely aligned to telephone or mail stalking. In the first case to be prosecuted in Queensland a woman received a friendly email and when she attempted to stop communications further down the track the emails became threatening. Eventually she received death threats from the offender who threatened to rape her and upload the videotape of the crime onto the internet. These cases are reasonably easy to prosecute under Australian law, once the identity of the sender is discovered, as they are synonymous with postal stalkings.

Internet Stalking

Internet stalking occurs when the offender follows his or her victim to their usual internet haunts, usually chat rooms, and makes their presence known to the victims and to others. In one case, a female university lecturer was stalked for some months by her ex-boyfriend. He would visit her usual chat sites, record her every online move and post false information about her in chat rooms. In addition, he posted information about her up on pornographic chat rooms, including photographs of her as a young child. In another situation, a woman was harassed by a man after she rejected his romantic advances in the real world. In response, he went online impersonating her in chat rooms and gave out her personal details, including her physical address, asking for her rape fantasies to be fulfilled. The report, Cyberstalking released by the Australian Institute of Criminology, documents that the woman was woken repeatedly in the night for months with men banging on her front door screaming they were there to rape her.

What is terrifying about this form of cyberstalking is that it tend to transcend the cyber and filters into the real. With cyberstalking the victim never knows how close the offender can be. They could be overseas, interstate or sitting outside the front door with a laptop and a modem.

Computer Stalking

Computer cyberstalking further transcends the boundary between real life and computer mediated communication by the stalker taking over control of the victim's computer. Any "windows based" computer, once connected to the internet, is identifiable and can be connected to by another computer. The stalker then has knowledge of whenever the victim logs onto the internet. This means that it is useless for the victim to avoid chatrooms or the usual haunts where the stalker might be waiting. In one documented case a woman received a message saying, "I'm going to get you" and her CD-ROM drive opened and closed seemingly on its own accord. It was in fact the stalker proving he had control over her computer. Now it is possible to view a user's desktop in real time and real time
keyboard strokes - that is, every command entered into the computer is viewable from an external source. Privacy and surveillance issues are the main concern with this type of stalking. Currently, it is a sophisticated task to take control of another’s computer but instructions are becoming readily available on the web on how this can be achieved.

It is difficult to know how to avoid or how to legislate against any form of cyber harassment. The identity of the offender has to be discovered before any action can take place and with multiple methods of ensuring degrees of anonymity accountability is not easy. As Emma Ogilvie comments in the AIC paper, Cyberstalking, "If a stalker in California uses an Internet Service Provider in Nevada to connect to an anonymiser in Latvia to target a victim in Australia" it is not only difficult to trace the stalker but the question of which jurisdiction has responsibility regarding the regulation of cyberstalking comes to bear. Even within Australia there are different laws between the states and territories regarding cyberstalking let alone throughout the world. In fact, only Victoria and Queensland have included stalking via electronic communications as a criminal offence. Definitions of what constitutes stalking can be applied to cyberstalking in some states in that it includes aspects of harassment, surveillance and intimidation. However, in New South Wales and Western Australia the law identifies specific locations such as following or watching places of residence, work or business which, due to physicality being defined, does not necessarily include cyberspace.

Legislative Developments in Australia

The Australasian Centre for Policing Research outlined in its report The Virtual Horizon: meeting the law enforcement challenges. Developing an Australasian law enforcement strategy for dealing with electronic crime that "It is necessary to take steps now to ensure that law enforcement will be able to respond appropriately to the various manifestations of this ubiquitous and challenging crime. This is particularly so in light of the lead-up time that is required to ensure funding, establish necessary infrastructure and achieve significant legislative reform." Duncan Kerr, Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs, in a speech given to parliament (7 November 2000) maintained that "the Australian Federal Police, responsible for all crimes against the Commonwealth, have only 13 positions available in their cybercrime unit. Out of a staff of 2800, there are only 13 personnel dedicated to investigating all crimes against the Commonwealth that have an information technology element and occur anywhere in Australia or that occur anywhere in the world and have an impact on Australia." In addition, Kerr claimed that "AusCERT - the Australian Computer Emergency Response Team, Australia's peak agency in the prevention of computer based attacks - has confirmed that Australia has seen a dramatic rise in the number of reported incidents." During 1999 a total of 1800 incidences had been reported to AusCERT. By April 2000 this figure had jumped to 2200. The figures released by AusCERT include a variety of cyber related crime.

Although there has been some discussion by legislators regarding cybercrime not much action has ensued. It seems as though due to the difficulties involved in legislating against cyberstalking the most successful way to deal with cyberstalking is either by careful use of the technology or technical fixes. Personal protection by not releasing personal information on the internet and maybe using a non-gender specific name in chat rooms alleviates unwanted approaches. From a technical standpoint filter programs, firewalls and learning how to disarm intruders into your system allows the user to have the technical upper hand.

Even though cyberspace is based upon anarchistic ideals and, more importantly, freedom of speech, civil behaviour is an essential component so that a degree of order is upheld. Protection for the individual is necessary especially when cyber crime transcends into the real world.

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CHERYL KERNOT

CHALLENGES

JEFF KENNETT'S

GST

Ian Henderson

When Peter Costello was officially advised exactly five years ago to narrow the areas of government activity to those where the private sector could not adequately deliver services, one brick in the foundation of the current Federal election campaign was laid.

That advice – coming from the Howard Government's National Commission of Audit – highlighted for the Treasurer the limitations of the established tax base as a means of funding the public sector.

It thereby also highlighted for Costello once again the pressing need for a new and broad-based goods and services tax, unless governments were willing to hack ruthlessly into virtually all areas of their spending.

“A range of economic and social pressures are forcing most developed countries to rethink where and how governments should be involved in the...
community’s activities,” the Commission of Audit reported to the Treasurer. “Those same pressures apply in Australia.”

Costello’s reaction to the report he has personally commissioned in one of his first acts as Treasurer was two-fold: to attempt to avoid provoking widespread public disquiet at its radical plans to recast the public sector in the hope of kicking off a constructive debate on the scope and role of government; and to attempt - ever so discreetly - to re-focus political attention on the implied need for a GST to fund government spending.

Costello had already privately been warning his Coalition colleagues against a rush to dump John Howard’s 1996 election campaign promise to “never, ever” introduce a GST. It wasn’t that the new Treasurer was against such a tax. He had, after all, been at the forefront of John Hewson’s failed GST-centred Fightback campaign of 1993. Costello in 1996 still regarded the GST as an idea with policy merit.

But, with the fate of Fightback etched into his soul, Costello thought it was an idea that was simply too hard to manage politically. So he told his eager colleagues – buoyed by Howard’s sweeping election victory – that there was little point in debating the issue, because the government would not be introducing a GST. Full stop.

Yet, the Treasurer was well aware of the flaw in that advice, and he hoped the National Commission of Audit would help expose that flaw. Costello was counting on the public’s learning from the findings and recommendations of the report that it could no longer expect existing benefits and services to be paid out of the existing tax base into the future.

In his view, if the community picked up on that lesson from the report’s advocacy of smaller government, then the project would have been worthwhile – and the GST might be forced back onto the public agenda.

Five years later, Costello could be regretting the government’s 1997 decision – driven by Howard – to formally re-open the prospects for a GST and Howard’s decision a year later to fight the 1998 Federal election on a GST-based platform.

The GST has already been blamed by one of its non-partisan expert supporters – Reserve Bank of Australia Governor Ian Macfarlane – for part of the economic slowdown in the second half of 2000 that, temporarily at least, undermined the Coalition’s politically valuable credentials as the best party to manage the economy. The GST is also cited by backbenchers as one of the main reasons why a prime Coalition constituency – small business – has been feeling antagonistic towards the Howard Government.

Hence the decision by Howard and Costello in late February 2001 to ease the private administrative burden associated with filling out the business activity statement and the instalment activity statement – the forms that either are, or are seen as part of, the GST regime.
We’ll be hearing much more of that view later this year, if Howard and Costello are forced out of office at the polls.

But the GST is not a problem simply for the Coalition. The tax – or, rather, Meg Lees’ support for a version of the tax – has already led to her being dumped as Australian Democrats leader by an overwhelming majority of her own party members. And then there’s Beazley’s GST problems.

If the anti-GST campaign works for Labor, they will be disguised, for some time at least. Even so, and well in advance of the election, Cheryl Kernot has pinpointed what could turn out to be a crucial weakness of her own party’s fixation on the GST as its hope for the next six months.

Commenting on the election of what she called “the dream team for the symbolism of a generation and for jaded older idealists” as the new face of the Democrats – leader Natasha Stott Despoja and deputy leader Aden Ridgeway – Kernot could not have been more blunt about the debate now raging between Beazley and Simon Crean on the one hand and Howard and Costello on the other.

While Stott Despoja and Ridgeway are talking about power-sharing by women, about reconciliation, about post-school education, the environment, animal welfare, the challenges of new technology and its consequences for twenty-first century ethics, “where are the rest of us on these issues?” Kernot asked. “Still talking about tax reform!” she answered her own question.

Calculated or not, that remark - published in Kernot’s analysis in The Australian newspaper of the Democrats’ leadership change - effectively challenged the core element of Beazley’s election campaign strategy: an all out concentration on whatever emerge as unpopular aspects of the Coalition’s GST.

Without any doubt, there is one more Federal election in the GST. But whether that serves the longer-term public interest is another matter.

Sorting out political and economic problems created by the GST has already consumed much of Howard’s energy – not to mention much of his fiscal room to move in the short term – that might have been better directed to, or at least shared with, getting other policy reforms into place. After all, the GST is the sort of tax most other industrialised nations adopted 20-35 years ago.

For Labor the issue is even more stark. If antagonism towards the GST becomes the reason for the existence of a Beazley prime ministership, what legitimacy will his administration have on other matters? And if Labor fails to win the coming election on that platform, what will that mean for the party’s immediate future?

Costello’s mid-1996 view that a GST could be justified to a sceptical public only after the latter had been convinced that such a tax was the only way of avoiding harsh reductions in the level of government services was sound five years ago, and no less sound now. That the Coalition failed to win the community to that view – indeed, barely even tried to do so – is something that Howard and Costello could well regret by the end of 2001.

Equally, Labor’s conviction that its anti-GST campaign offers the only hope of a change of government seems bound to ensure that the debate that should be taking place in Australia – about the role, size and scope of the public sector – will continue to be virtually ignored at the top level of politics.

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LOST OUR (THIRD) WAY?

Anne Henderson

Spare a thought for Goldilocks. Not only did her claim to fame once centre on the tastes of three brown bears, but her choice of lifestyle is now linked with policy analysts of the “Third Way”, with the gurus of Britain’s think tank Demos and its fellow traveller the Blair Government.

In December 1998, The Economist came up with a nickname for new age public policy theories of the neither right nor left Third Way. “Goldilocks politics” the magazine called it, meaning that the ideas behind the policy directions of the Third Way were little more than the only choice left if you had rejected the extremes. In other words, a philosophy crafted from seeking either a kindlier capitalism or a more economically sound social democracy. A sort of fumbling about with what might be left of political theory after what totalitarianism had done to socialism and rampant market forces effectively do to social conscience.

Or, more specifically, what The Economist explained as a way of helping Tony Blair to “talk seriously about social justice … without having to say much about socialism, a word deemed to have outlived its usefulness”.

But if the Third Way is what’s left for today’s social democrats, is “just right” (to use Goldilocks’ phrase) the answer? The latest study from Third Way gurus at Demos, entitled “Basildon – The Mood of The Nation”, suggests it is not. In fact, where the electorate is concerned, there are problems in the longer term for the proponents of Third Way politics. And politicians need to get on message.

The term the Third Way is not new. Much of its earliest use came from the right. The label had its origins in the notion of subsidiarity, stemming from...
Pope Leo XIII’s social teachings in the 1891 encyclical *De Rerum Novarum* and the realisation in the late nineteenth century of a growing and seemingly unbridgeable gap between what Britain’s Prime Minister Disraeli called “two nations” – the rich and the poor.

The rise of socialism in the 1880s had prompted Pope Leo’s new doctrine – the notion that a higher body (government or bureaucracy) should not assume the functions on behalf of a lower one (people) where the lower body can act for itself. In other words, society is best organised at a grass roots level by communal and co-operative engagement.

This became known as distributism and was advocated by, among others, British commentators G K Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. Utopian in outlook, few practical success stories of distributist outcomes evolved. The Third Way was a term applied to many distributist programs. On the extreme right, Mussolini, Oswald Moseley and Hitler all had policies labelled as the Third Way.

On the left of the political spectrum, the Third Way was also used to outline an alternative to revolutionary Bolshevism on one side and capitalist reaction on the other. Works like Eduard Bernstein’s *Evolutionary Socialism* rejected revolution and advocated gradual change through the legislative process aimed at chipping away at capitalism’s control and status quo.

So there is nothing fresh about the term the Third Way. But its resurgence in the late twentieth century has come from a new quarter. Global buzz word popularity for the idea of a “Third Way” came as the US Democrats reinvigorated themselves behind Bill Clinton.

In 1992, presidential hopeful and eventual 43rd president, Bill Clinton began a reshaping of progressive politics in the information age. The pillars of this revival were to be the promotion of equal opportunity to all, mutual responsibility rejecting the politics of entitlement and the policies of abandonment, and governing in a way that empowers citizens to act for themselves. Much of which would have been familiar ground to Pope Leo XIII.

Social democratic parties across the globe have now linked policy heads around the Third Way theme. Drawing on the Clinton experience and with a study of Australia’s Hawke-Keating years after 1983, in the United Kingdom Tony Blair and a revitalised New Labour won victory at the polls in 1997. Centre-left policies in the Third Way vogue also brought Gerhard Schroeder to power in Germany in 1998. Such has been the growing literature espousing and explaining the ideals of the new doctrine, it could be said social democrats seem at present to have found the (third) way, the truth and the light.

Of course, language rather than specific policies is often the key to the success of Third Way literature and rhetoric. In a clever reworking of set phrases, followers of the Third Way have cutely disguised as their own much of what was originally formulated by Margaret Thatcher’s Tories.

For example, Third Way gurus castigate Maggie Thatcher for rejecting the notion of “society”, when the full text of what Thatcher actually said is a statement that could be slipped “into any fashionable tract on the Third Way without it looking out of place”.

“There are individual men and women,” said Margaret Thatcher, “and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first. It’s our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbour. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations. There is no such thing as an entitlement, unless someone has first met an obligation.”

Compare that to the reworked theme from the pen of Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair a few years later in the Fabian Society pamphlet “The Third Way: New Politics for a New Century” published in September 1998.

“The Left … has in the past too readily downplayed its duty to promote a wide range of opportunities for individuals to advance themselves and their families … For too long the demand for rights from the state was separated from the duties of citizenship and the imperative for mutual responsibility on the part of individuals and institutions. Unemployment benefits were often paid without strong reciprocal obligations; children went unsupported by absent parents. … The rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe.”

For all that, the formulation of ideas surrounding the Third Way remains one of the few interesting focal points for political discussion in a world increasingly pragmatic, functional rather than idealistic and anxious over its well being. The question is, though, nearly half a decade on, has such a political strategy changed real lives or merely rejuvenated the publishing industry?

Anthony Giddens, the intellectual figure behind much of Tony Blair’s political direction and author of the seminal *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Polity Press 1998), expressed what the Third Way was on about early in his book:

*Socialism and communism have passed away, yet they remain to haunt us. We cannot put aside the values and ideals that drove them, for some remain intrinsic to the good life that it is the point of social and economic development to create. The challenge is to make these values count where the economic programme of socialism has become discredited. Political ideas today seem to have lost their capacity to inspire and political leaders their ability to lead. Public debate is dominated by worries about declining moral standards, growing divisions*
between rich and poor, the stresses of the welfare state.

What Giddens was arguing is that without a touch of romance and idealism, politics can be wearing, boring, plain and practical. Without a grand vision, politics is much like housekeeping. And, amid the disillusionment of an era reflecting on the failed grand visions of much twentieth century history, idealism these days is proving a hard act to work up. Third Way thinking, on the other hand, is much like a papal encyclical. It can reinvigorate with a host of general aspirations for good in the tangle of everyday decision making and its greyness.

It’s a matter of the rhetoric. The Third Way is a platform of belief and as such, it is argued, captures believers. Creates a sense of the cause, the worthy campaign to swell the ranks of followers. The distraction of a vision, a burst of hope in a better world for an otherwise alienated electorate. Refashion the language, focus on key words like community, empowerment, knowledge, democracy online, enabling state, and there might be a chance to breathe life back into the political corpse. An admirable intention. And, along the way, some good ideas.

But much of the Third Way dialogue is often criticised for trying to be all things to all voters, and of sprouting so many principles it’s often contradictory. “Traditional values” for Blair but a “fundamental paradigm shift” for Giddens. Not a lot, some say, that is of practical advantage in everyday politics. The e-democracy of Australia’s Third Way advocate Mark Latham MP has been soundly criticised by his colleague Kevin Rudd MP as “nice in theory but, on close inspection, not all that flash in practice”.

Such is the difficulty in understanding the full implications of much Third Way thinking, in 1998 the Economist referred to it as “like wrestling with an inflatable man. If you get a grip on one limb, all the hot air rushes to another”. Even technology, what Third Way theorists tell us is intrinsic to empowerment and self help in the information age, has temporarily come unstuck with NASDAQ shares hitting new lows.

Right now Prime Minister Tony Blair is riding a wave of electoral success in Britain. His Conservative opponents can’t seem to lay a glove on Labour. But, in an election campaign marked by race riots and a collective yawn thoughout, it was not the rallying cries of the Third Way that pushed the polls so strongly to Labour but old style presidential personality politics. Tony Blair out manoeuvred William Hague on the personals – talking about young Leo Blair’s first word, Euan’s drinking spree or Nicholas’ way with drums. Even Cherie Blair being caught in a lift seemed to make the Blairs more human than the lifestyle of the less than charismatic Conservative leader.

As many commentators have now put it, the real winner of the British election campaign was apathy. Election day saw the lowest turnout of voters in 80 years, even lower among younger voters. Just one in four voters opted for Blair’s New Labour and yet he won with a record lead over the Tories.

This is why, in the long run, the recent Demos study of what is happening to the voters of Essex’s Basildon is worth considering. Because, while the intellectuals find the discussion of where-to-next politics fascinating, voters are turning away. They’re more individually focussed, they’re alienated and their tolerance of new ideas is increasingly short lived.

Basildon, the seventh and largest of the post-war New Towns planned for outer London, has often proved a barometer of party fortunes at elections since the 1950s. It’s a town long dominated by skilled manual workers, although these days such workers are more likely to be in financial services and computer software than the engineering works of their fathers. None the less, they are the class of voter believed by both sides of British politics to be the key to electoral success.

In the 1980s Basildonians went with Thatcher, in fact the aspirations of post-war Basildon with its drive and sense of self improvement actually predated Thatcher.

After the war and in the seventies, as Basildonian Alf Dove put it when interviewed for the survey, ‘Labour’s vision dominated the aspirations of the town. It was a vision that gave them homes to rent after long years away from home: 

Suddenly the chance of starting a new life ... The concept of the new town was you came here from the smoke and you got a house. People like me just back from the war I was pleased just to have a house to rent! And it came along. If you worked in a factory you rented a house. Marvellous. A garden. Flowers. Everyone was happy. ... Labour was in control from 1971 to 1979 – eight solid years. We had socialism then. The OAPs went on holidays. Bus passes. If they couldn’t get out of the house they had a food parcel or a food voucher. A coal subsidy or a heating subsidy. Television subsidy. That was real socialism in those days because we looked after the old first.

Then, as the Thatcher spirit spread across Britain, Basildon went middle class. Alf Dove, a Labour supporter, watched Basildonians turn against Labour at election after election telling local candidates that Thatcher had given them their houses - a mortgage of course but with it came real home ownership. “This is the beginning of Basildon Man,” said Alf, “House owner, car owner, keeping up with the Joneses.”

At the general election of 1992 the Tories had held on to Basildon as they did the country. Labour hadn’t managed to convince voters it was a party of winners. In May 1997, however, Basildon voters swung strongly to New Labour. Angela Smith won Basildon, nearly an hour after midnight on 2 May, with a 14.7
per cent swing. So, four years down the trail, the Demos study “Basildon: The Mood of The Nation”, by Dennis Hayes and Alan Hudson, is an important measure of the impact of the Blair Government and its message of Third Way values on average Brits. After surveying the electorate of Basildon, the authors conclude that the electoral shift to New Labour “cannot be taken for granted. It masks a deeper underlying change in people’s attitudes to politics, making it harder for any collective institution to claim their allegiance for very long.” Basildonians generally present a quietly optimistic view of life, although many believe the future will not be so rosy for coming generations. Less than ten per cent of those interviewed placed their jobs or careers as the most important thing in their lives and younger workers were quite well adjusted to the flexible labour market and having to move about a lot. Work, hobbies and relaxation activities did not seem to provide Basildonians with their social networks, many preferring to occupy their leisure time in individual pastimes like cycling, walking, gardening or reading.

The one dominant network that takes a central place in the social lives of Basildonians, however, is the family, what the authors call “the bedrock of social interaction”. By no means was this just the nuclear family but very broad family relationships created from “divorce, remarriage, single-parent families, step-parents, widows and widowers”. In other words, as people’s involvement with outside institutions like trade unions, church, clubs and so forth has faded, family life has gained their interest.

Hayes and Hudson interpret this as people “repositioning the balance of their lives between public and private concerns”. And while people feel their own lives are improving, they believe there will be fewer possibilities for the next generation. This, say the authors, is a “poignant expression of the dislocation between individual identity and the sense of social possibility … the inability to connect an individual project or set of hopes and aspirations with collective fortunes and endeavours”.

It also explains the new emphasis on family relationships. Self reliance has impacted on the post Thatcher world. Success means being the best survivor and there is only the family to rely on. This connects with another finding in the study, that of a general alienation in voters with all political parties and a belief that present day political institutions are inadequate, and even incapable of solving social problems. “The voters,” write Hayes and Hudson, “have very little faith in anything other than themselves.”

Basildon may be physically a long way from Australia, but echoes of the study can be found in all Western societies, and in particular Australia. The disengagement from traditional institutions, the distrust of elected representatives, the feeling of having to go it alone. Winding back the welfare state has left a vacuum, one that advocates of the Third Way are hoping they can fill with a bright and empowered citizenry. But if Basildon is a guide, the terrain is more fragile than expected. Evangelical rhetoric is unlikely to shift such alienated and individually focussed voters. Rhetoric that urges networks of small communal projects, the involvement in civil society, looking outward for the sake of community well being, and “joined up government” both globally and nationally. Especially when words usually fail to match actions. Instead, voters feel they have given enough. Economic reform seems to have stripped them of quite a bit over a decade and more. And they believe they deserve something in return, more than they have been given so far. It’s the sort of mood that explains scapegoating in politics – the dole bludger, the welfare rorter, the tax cheat. So much has been taken, so little seemingly to see for it, someone must be getting more than a fair share. The electorate is not in a giving mood, but one of expectation.

Faced with having to absorb yet another manifesto for change, this time from intellectuals of the Third Way, Basildonians are in a mood to resist. The Third Way could in fact be a most alienating message to foist on any electorate right now, especially if it’s the trust of voters politicians want. Tony Blair in the future could be well advised to spend more time being seen with baby Leo rather than writing pamphlets for the Fabian Society.

Anne Henderson is editor of The Sydney Papers

BOOK REVIEWS

John McConnell


Some thirty years ago, the word spread that a mining company had discovered nickel. Many people believed the rumour. So they bought shares in the company - Poseidon. Poseidon’s share price began to soar to giddy heights. In less than a year, it moved from under a dollar to $280 a share and no capital gains tax to pay! A speculative mood engulfed the share market. It was a punters’ paradise.

Indeed many punters did shift their gaze for a while from the racetrack to the stock exchange.
Stockbrokers led a profitable if hectic life. At the office of L.P.Bain and Sons in Sydney, 200 workers were on the daytime payroll. Another 200 worked the night shift. The firm’s turnover increased fivefold. The bubble, of course, had to burst. And it did.

The nickel rumour was exposed as false. Poseidon’s share price swung into seesaw mode. Down the price went to $63. Up briefly to $130. Down to $72. Up to $90. Then down in free fall to $9. The Poseidon episode reminds us of a time when a frenzy gripped speculators and punters alike. To say the market overshot seems an understatement.

The mining boom of the Poseidon era and the resultant employment loss that accompanied the share market’s return to reality convinced Jim Bain that pursuit of stable profits and continuity of staff were incompatible with sole reliance on the stock exchange. He therefore sought to develop institutional and corporate business. He guided the firm into fixed interest dealings, options and futures trading, underwriting, corporate advice, property mortgages, commercial and domestic leasing.

Meanwhile, Bain became an enthusiastic supporter of stock exchange reform. It was no wonder that some people at that time referred to the stock exchange as a “gentleman’s club”. It was conservative. It was a male WASP-dominated environment. Jobs in small Sydney sharebroking firms went mainly to partners’ relatives, especially to former students of select private schools.

Jim Bain wanted to relax the rules applying to advertising. He favoured all larger parcels of shares being exposed to the market. He sought to open up the stock exchange to younger partners with limited capital resources. A reform minded Bain became chairman of the Sydney Stock Exchange, a position he held when it merged into the Australian Stock Exchange Ltd. He played a key role in the transition from chalkies to computerised share trading.

Jim Bain combined a busy professional life with contributions to community and political associations. His concerns embrace a wide agenda – from social welfare policy and factors affecting employer-employee loyalty to how individuals can manage to lead a balanced life that includes time for family and community causes while operating in an increasingly competitive, globalised business environment.

The Remarkable Roller Coaster is an inside view of the finance industry. Many of us only glimpse this specialised world from afar. Jim Bain reveals this specialised world in a set of easy to read and self-contained chapters that include the Leopold Minerals disaster, Alan Bond and the Santos affair and the business of underwriting. He also covers Pitt Street grazing, investing in Lloyds of London and the increase in Sydney’s influence in the Australian financial sector.

CRUSADE OR CONSPIRACY? CATHOLICS AND THE ANTI-COMMUNIST STRUGGLE IN AUSTRALIA
By Bruce Duncan
UNSW Press, pb 2001, rrp $49.95
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No one should doubt Bruce Duncan’s work ethic. His Crusade or Conspiracy? Catholics and the Anti-Communist Struggle in Australia should convince even a doubting Thomas of the author’s dedication to task. The book represents the product of his labours over more than a decade.

More than 400 pages of material are sourced to 47 pages of endnotes. An eleven page select biography supports the foregoing. Details litter the pages of the book like pieces of confetti. All manner of details.

To read Crusade or Conspiracy is to encounter information overload. Details reign. Valuable research lies buried among mountains of detail. One piece of information piles on top of another, and yet another. The slow recital of so many details – some significant, others less so – displaces the main story.

The main story involves an examination of Australian Catholic responses to communism from the 1930s until around 1960. I worked for the National Civic Council for three years in the early 1970s, and there is not much about Santamaria the person in this book.

Bruce Duncan met Bob Santamaria (who founded the Catholic Social Studies Movement – the Movement – in the early 1940s) only once. Some correspondence occurred between the two but the author of Crusade or Conspiracy did not have access to Santamaria’s personal papers. Bruce Duncan is a Catholic Redemptorist priest with a Ph.D in Political Science. Fr. Duncan has poured over old newspaper files and gained access to Catholic Church records. Crusade or Conspiracy reports statements and views of political activists and prelates, editorial writers and journalists. He reassembles previously published material plus some new information. The latter includes Bob Santamaria’s “astonishing request” to...
the Victorian Catholic bishops for a share of state aid finance. This (unsuccessful) appeal was to enable the National Civic Council to build a capital base.

Bruce Duncan also reveals that Dr Daniel Mannix, the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne (1917-63), sought deferment from World War II military service for Bob Santamaria. Another item concerns the television program *Point of View*, Bob Santamaria's weekly television program on Channel 9. This program together with a weekly column in *The Australian* newspaper exposed Bob Santamaria to the general public on a regular basis. According to Bruce Duncan, it was Frank Packer who arranged *Point of View* following the death of Dr. Mannix. Archbishop Mannix died on the 6 November, 1963. His successor, Dr Simonds, preached the panegyric on the 12 November. Two days later, he gave Santamaria his marching orders from the Catholic television program on Channel 7.

The Federal election was due to be held on the 30 November that year. Frank Packer provided the *Point of View* time spot prior to the election. This is indeed a very tight timetable. Events certainly appear to have moved with a surprising swiftness, presuming the timetable is accurate.

Bruce Duncan’s own point of view is set out in the final chapter. What the reader may have suspected - based on how the author constructed events on earlier pages - becomes clear in the conclusion to the book. Bruce Duncan's interpretation of Bob Santamaria is critical but essentially fair. Santamaria, he says, was no intellectual. Rather, he was an “astute political pragmatist”. This appears to represent a criticism to the author. This is not without irony. Bob Santamaria never claimed to be an intellectual. Indeed he said he was not an intellectual. He even said that with some apparent pride. His claim centred on a self-definition as an activist and publicist. Bob Santamaria may have taken an unconventional political path. But he was engaged nevertheless in the practice of politics – with some policy success.

Perhaps the author feels less comfortable with practical politics, its necessary compromises and decisions made on the run before all the evidence is to hand. To Bruce Duncan, the communist threat was real but “absurdly exaggerated” at times. However, he believes that “the long struggle to defend the unions and the ALP was in principle an honourable one.”

Duncan disapproves of Santamaria running a secretive political organisation. I wonder what his judgment is of the Fabian Society? Bruce Duncan does tend to be a little easy on those he supports. This results in a somewhat naïve framework at times.

He is quite harsh on Dr. Mannix. He is more charitable to members of the Sydney hierarchy whose position he supports – Norman Gilroy, for example.

True, Cardinal Gilroy did not run a secretive political organisation. But he did enjoy a special relationship with the NSW Labor Party. It was a different form of political involvement to Victoria. But it was a form of political involvement nevertheless. Bruce Duncan recognises that Bishop (later Archbishop) James Carroll made use of the Catholic Knights of the Southern Cross for his own political purposes.

Bruce Duncan’s comments on the Vatican fall readily into his favoured interpretation. Vatican involvement in Italian politics during the late 1940s, involvement not in line with Bruce Duncan’s position, is glossed over. A golden rule permeates much of the discussion about the distinction between Catholic Action and political activity by individual Catholics acting independently. It is the gospel according to French philosopher Jacques Maritain.

The test of what is right and wrong hinges on whether an action meets Maritain’s criteria. But Maritain was not necessarily the font of all political wisdom. He extended undue trust to Leonid Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders.

In one sense, *Crusade or Conspiracy?* is about the past as a foreign country. How the times have changed – with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the demolition of the Berlin Wall, and a host of other developments. And what a difference 50 years makes. How would our contemporary multicultural society react to the personal attack Dr. Evatt et al launched on B.A. Santamaria? What Duncan calls, “anti-Italian attitudes, with overtones of links to Spanish Fascism and clericalism”.

Bruce Duncan does not find Santamaria attracted to fascism, as many of Santamaria’s opponents were quick to allege over the years. He documents some of Bob Santamaria’s political errors. He is critical of some of the hyperbole in Bob Santamaria’s speeches. Santamaria, he says, came to regret some of the things that he had written.

*Crusade or Conspiracy?* lines up with the interpretation advocated by those associated with *The Catholic Worker* magazine. Bruce Duncan believes that Bob Santamaria used the ambiguities surrounding the role of the Movement, in relation to the Catholic Church, to maximise his own political advantage. But too many details overwhelm Duncan’s story.

*John McConnell is the author of several senior text books*
Perhaps Pauline Hanson has done us a favour after all.

By draping herself in the flag, she put the question of what it is to be an Australian on the main media agenda. It is an issue that is gradually permeating all sorts of discussions of ethnic and regional identity, of whether there are defining characteristics shared by all Australians and of the responsibility owed by those who have the ability and power to articulate these issues to those who do not.

The academic establishment is conducting its version of the debate without reference to the rest of us. Miriam Dixson’s excellent study of national identity and multicultural Australia, The Imaginary Australian, was denied the influence it merited by being written in impenetrable academic prose. But amongst the commentariat, the journalists and writers whose books and opinion pieces lead community discussion, national identity and relations between Australians of different backgrounds are the issues of the hour.

While presented in divers guises, at their heart is the question posed by those who would have us One Nation; what is it to be an Australian when the assimilationist ideals of equality for all who are willing to accept the rhetoric of mateship and the fair go are no longer universal?

Three very different books demonstrate the fascination with defining Australian-ness; Broometime ( Hodder Headline) by Anne Coombs and Susan Vargas, Julietta Jameson’s, Tibooburra and the legend of the Tree of Knowledge (Simon & Schuster) and Pauline Armstrong’s, Frank Hardy and the Making of Power Without Glory (Melbourne University Press).

Coombs and Varga went bush to discover the differences between the lifestyle and values of people whose opinions and prejudices are respectfully presented in newspapers and books and those whose aren’t. Armstrong’s express purpose was to call to account the memory of a famous larrikin-left writer but in the process she also cast a bleak light on the way oft-assumed traditional values of mateship and distaste for authority could be manipulated to suit sinister political and bullying personal agendas.

Jameson did not annoy anybody, unsurprising given her cheery descriptions of the good-hearted community of secular saints who inhabit the desert hamlet of Tibooburra. But the other two books certainly incurred the wrath of people affected. The prospect of what Armstrong might actually write so disturbed her subject, Frank Hardy, that he withdrew her access to his papers and members of his tribe of ancient lefties disputed her findings.

Coombs and Varga spent a year in Broome where they appear to have upset a great number of people for reasons that varied from their innocent breach of court procedure and an unintended offence to an Aboriginal family through to over-blown personal sensitivities. All of which in turn raises another question about our changing character; whether we have abandoned the great Australian tradition of coping it sweet.

Given the enormously complex mix of race and class that shapes life in Broome it was unavoidable that Broometime addressed questions of identity and the responsibility of reporters to fairly record what people say through the prism of relations between indigenous and settler Australians. The tragedy for Coombs and Varga is that their critics appear to have decided that the book is not sufficiently sympathetic to Broome’s indigenous communities. In consequence they are forced to defend their methodology and intent rather than the substance of their argument. The media controversy generated by allegations of confidences breached generated more coverage of the book than Broometime merited.

Suggestions that the authors are superficial or unsympathetic to indigenous issues are certainly demonstrable nonsense to anybody with the patience to plow through Broometime. The discussion of race and class in the book demonstrates that the authors are deeply troubled for the future of the city’s indigenous peoples but that they are equally committed to providing a balanced discussion. For all the talk of Broometime being part of a great tradition of investigative travel writing it is a curious book, part exercise in social observation, part polemic in which the authors exercise their remarkably numerous opinions, part personal journal and part reportage.

Susan Wyndham (Sydney Morning Herald, 26 March) reported that publicists compared it to John Berendt’s famous non-fiction novel of Augusta, Georgia, Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil. But Coombs and Varga are simply not the writers Berendt is and the sad result is that the only real comparison between the two books is that both are set in towns with challenging climates.

Coombs and Varga’s book is a diary with alternating entries by the co-authors. It described the joint experience and separate perceptions of a year spent in Broome through which they intended to discover what observing a country town could tell them “about the mechanics of a society and its heart” (7). They wrote as both participants and observers. And by book’s end, while much is revealed about Broome - so is a great deal, most of it not entirely compelling, about the authors. Neil Jillett (The Age, 9 April) certainly decided it included too much of the authors’ personal lives, remarking that their “humourless silliness makes it hard to take any of the book seriously”.

Stephen Matchett

REVIEW

OF THE

REVIEWSERS
But there is certainly no sense in the book that Coombs and Varga were anything other than fair in describing the people of Broome. They identified the brave and variously bitter or forgiving indigenous Australians of the city, the petit bourgeoisie intent on turning Broome into a far northern suburb of Perth and a range of loveable and less-so eccentrics of varying ages, genders and ethnicities. There are people who are presented as unimaginative and mean - generally white businessmen and officials and people presented as inspirational - generally indigenous men and women or Europeans working with them.

Those of the characters who are presented in great detail are subject to the authors' cool and confidently judging eyes. They admired the Catholic bishop, presenting him as a complex man committed to his difficult job. They became great friends with various movers and shakers in Broome's cultural life and watched the operators in the parallel white and indigenous political establishments plot and scheme.

But for all their diligent reporting of drinks and dinners, factions and feuds and their baroque fascination with blood-lines and claimed and denied links to the land, not a lot happens in Broome and it showed in the recitation of the mechanics of small-town life. This is not an exciting narrative.

Nor are the descriptions of indigenous festivals, the community's vigorous social life and petty politics, shaped by an entirely detached analysis of the town's sociology. It seems as if Broome was simply too small to be discreetly observed by outsiders and it is a problem for the writers who were not always sure whether they were observers or members of the community. The book was certainly strongest when the authors abandoned neutral observation and wrote about their friends, in particular the relationship between a white legal aid lawyer and his young indigenous lover who are at its center.

As presented in the book, the two men live complicated lives and the power in their relationship swings back and forth. The older of the two has a vast number of what the Americans call "issues" in his personal life but brings to his work as a legal aid lawyer a fierce commitment to assisting his clients, tempered by an amused cynicism. His young partner lacks the status authority conferred by a powerful job and good income but his determination to live his life the way he chooses without regard to the conventions of settler society provides him with strength and independence. In essence the old man has the money but the young man has the power.

In comparison to most of their descriptions of people, Coombs and Varga pulled no punches in their description of this pair and their way of living. The record of bickering and boozing which, in the way Coombs and Varga portray them can most generously be described as petulant, are set out in detail. But the authors were both clearly fascinated by the pair and they play a crucial role in the book. They are in fact a metaphor for the evolution of a unique Australian culture being created in Broome, which is the most interesting aspect of the book. The people of Broome are descendants of Europeans, Chinese, Aborigines, Japanese, Malays and Timorese and they have created their own living and growing Kriol language. Broometime sets out the worse nightmare of Anglo-centric racism with an Australia where ethnic distinctions between the Caucasian majority and the others are blurred, even meaningless. Broome is a community that is inventing itself, taking cultural references and social forms from Southeast Asia and the Kimberley and its political framework from Westminster.

And while the Europeans enjoy the institutional power and set the conventional business agenda the book demonstrated that they do not set Broome's cultural pace. The city takes its festivals, art and music from all its source peoples and shows little interest in conventional boundaries and forms.

This raises a fundamental question, one which permeates the book but which Coombs and Varga do not explicitly address, what sort of civil values will emerge from a community where Western political and cultural forms do not dominate? Thus the authors did not confront what must have been a bitter debate when Broome patrician Elizabeth Durack took to painting in the guise of an Aboriginal artist.

The relationship between indigenous and other Australians dominate the book and while Broometime is long on description and short on analysis it does confront the moral question of choice for the liberal left; the condition of indigenous Australians.

Coombs and Varga were obviously overwhelmed by much of what they saw in Broome, in particular the chronic alcoholism and senseless violence that is destroying a generation. The book reports the loss of men who are drinking themselves to death and crippling their families in the process. Coombs and Varga were unsettled by the absolute dependence of Aboriginal Broome on the public purse in one form or another and they were obviously deeply disturbed by an Aboriginal death in custody.

The fact that the book proposed no definitive solutions to the crisis in indigenous communities is no criticism; nobody much else has. But Coombs and Varga are not blind to the complexities of indigenous Australia and one of the book’s strengths is its refusal to assume that liberal guilt and public money will solve Broome’s and, by extension, all of Aboriginal Australia’s problems.

Neither do they avoid the unsurprising, but sometimes controversial, truth that politics among indigenous
Australians is pretty much like politics the world over - a struggle for resources and authority between competing groups often united by little more than self-interest. And their reports on the way members of the community dealt with the stolen generation debate demonstrated the ambiguity of dispossession.

For example, the authors discovered that not all the old women who were taken from their families as girls to be brought up in a convent school regretted it. Coombs and Varga were sufficiently brave to suggest that the orthodoxy of the stolen generation as universal tragedy is not universally accepted in indigenous Australia.

In the end the authors offered no grand answer as to what Broome might hold for the future of Australia beyond the generous judgement that with luck, it might be the precursor to “a polyglot, robust place where the racial mix merely adds spice and zest rather than unease and distrust” (p 236).

But for all their willingness to record what they saw in Broome and their cautious optimism, the authors were ambivalent about their task. As they became more involved in the life of the town they had to face the obvious question which confronts every writer who has ever lived the double life of becoming a friend to their sources; are they potentially betraying confidences in truthfully recording what people tell them?

This was not a problem faced by Julietta Jameson in her take on the desert town of Tibooburra. Jameson’s book was a paean of praise to a rural life characterised by all the values individuals, regardless of their ethnicity. It is that there is a core Australian culture, one that she believes to be the support of his wife and Party comrades

...right there and then I felt proud of my heritage. There was no sporting win, no heroics by the armed forces, no Olympic Games. Just a bunch of blokes living a tradition that helped define the Australian character. (p 240)

Jameson may have arrived in Tibooburra as an observer but there is nothing dispassionate about her description of the community whose members became her friends. And it shows in her very traditional expression of patriotism, an assertion that there is a core Australian culture, one that she believes values individuals, regardless of their ethnicity. It is an old fashioned and optimistic judgement, one that probably would not play all that well in Broome.

Pauline Armstrong’s book on Frank Hardy is set in Australia far removed from Tibooburra and Broome but this biography of the communist author addressed many of the same themes of identity that still play in the bush.

As portrayed by Armstrong, Hardy acted out the stage Australian all his life. He was a gambler and drinker, a man who would yarn to anybody and who valued the camaraderie of the pub and the track. He was a man who stood up for what he believed which included communism and indigenous land rights. As a socialist-realist writer he may never have written a story where a bad man was made good by a woman on a tractor but he came close in a series of books that proclaimed the virtues of working class Australia.

His best known novel, Power Without Glory, was a comprehensive hatchet-job on John Wren, the nearest thing Australia has ever had to a Tammany Boss. Wren ran illegal gambling in Melbourne and through it exercised great political power in Melbourne for fifty years and Hardy’s book shaped the political perceptions of a generation.

But, as Armstrong portrayed him, Hardy was also a dishonest man, an inveterate liar who welshed on his debts and whose sense of honour and obligation extended no further than his self-interested whim. He toadied to the Soviets (until 1968) and dreadfully abused the support of his wife and Party comrades
who laboured hard and unthanked to support his advancement.

Hardy’s great novel was also the result of a highly organised Communist plan to undermine the Labor Party and the political dominance of right-wing unions in post-War Victoria. *Power Without Glory* was less a work of creative genius than a compilation of information from many sources, designed to secure by stealth the political influence the Party always failed to win at the ballot box.

And he betrayed his mates. In writing *But the Dead Are Many*, a novel of a tragic hero martyred by the Communist Party, Hardy ransacked the life of a dead friend and demeaned his memory. As reported by Armstrong it was a particularly odious act as Hardy relied on the help of his friend’s widow in researching the book.

The history of *Power Without Glory* Armstrong pieced together was an extraordinary story that demonstrated the ruthlessness of Stalinism, even in its marginalised Australian form. But in demonstrating the book to be less fiction than a work of partisan faction, an early example of the now fashionable non-fiction novel, Armstrong raises questions of authorial autonomy and the debts that writers owe to their sources - which her book shared with Coombs and Varga.

Armstrong began work while Hardy was alive and she variously enjoyed his halfhearted support and active opposition. She reported that she began with Hardy’s written permission to access his papers that he dishonoured when he retrospectively closed his papers for up to 50 years after his death. According to Armstrong, the only way she could use these sources following his death was by submitting her text to his literary executor. Nor was Armstrong permitted to quote directly from Hardy’s writing.

On the face of it this was an act of intellectual sabotage, designed to protect Hardy’s memory from the harsh light of scholarly analysis. It is hard to find any justification for denying a competent writer access to research material. But while truth must prevail and the sullying of reputations is collateral damage, it is understandable that people will wish to protect the memory of a man they loved.

There were certainly some people not happy to see Frank Hardy’s memory sullied. Jenny Hocking, a self described Hardy biographer, condemned Armstrong for her lack of “intellectual empathy” with the great man and for “the willful partiality of the treatment of Hardy both personally and politically”. (*Australian*, 13 January 2001). According to Hocking, by relying on primary sources such as interviews with many of Hardy’s associates at the time of writing *Power Without Glory* who were still alive, Armstrong missed the real man:

In the uncritical use of such interviews, she gives no consideration to either the fallibility of memory or the inevitability of error. The Hardy this creates would appear to bear little resemblance to the life as lived.

Of course one way to provide a balance would have come from material in Hardy’s own papers. It is a bit steep to criticise Armstrong for relying on the sources that she was able to access. Dorothy Hewitt (*Australian Book Review*, April 2001) made the same point, albeit emotionally. For a start Hardy’s failings were outweighed by his status as a writer: “He didn’t always pay his debts, except for the one big debt and the only one worth remembering: the debt of living, to the end, a writer’s life.” Hewitt went on to attack Armstrong’s book and a favourable review of it by James Griffin:

Hardy is portrayed as a lecher, plagiarist, welcher, bludger and anti-Semite. What about his dedication to the cause of the working class, the endless struggle to become a writer, and the generous help he gave to new writers, all of which needed a deeper honesty and commitment than the writer of this biography or your reviewer seem able to comprehend?

Ms Hewitt concluded that because she did not like the version of Hardy the sources provided to Armstrong, the book was unfair, unbalanced and rude: “I am not suggesting that biographers and reviewers should whitewash their subjects only that they treat them with fairness, objectivity and respect.”

If it was tough for Armstrong to record her subject in the face of his posthumous opposition, it is even more difficult for authors like Coombs, Varga and Jameson who rely on living people as source material. It’s a problem that journalists face every time they conduct an interview on the record; while they may win the trust of their contact people forget, or not understand in the first place, that what they say will be reported.

Dealing with people who incorrectly claim to be misquoted or presented unfairly in an article, when their real grievance is with how their accurately reported words or behaviour make them look, is an occupational hazard for journalists and writers and film makers. The hostile reaction from some of the people who appeared in Dennis O’Rourke’s film on the bush town of Cunnamulla makes the point (*Daily Telegraph*, 1 June 2001).

But it was not a problem that bothered Jameson who had nothing but praise for everybody she met, or at least named in *Tibooburra*. The crucial question of relations between author and reporter did not bother Jameson either. “I went there with love in my

Which may be why the media largely ignored her book; because in the absence of any controversy there is not a great deal to say about Tibooburra.

Mark Day (Australian, 26 April) reminisced about Jameson’s journalist-father before being nice about both book, (“warm and gentle”) and author (“she confronts her fears and wrestles with some of the paradoxes of being Australian”). It was also good journalism, “a chronicle of a time and a place, which is exactly what journalism is”.

Susan Mitchell (Sydney Morning Herald, 19 May) did not think much of it in a review which was tough in parts and just plain mean minded in others. Certainly Mitchell had a point in suggesting that the “tree of knowledge”; referred to in the book’s title is a “rather pathetic device to tell yarns that go nowhere”. It was a fair comment, the motif of the old tree was an excellent marketing hook and made for a good book cover but it was incidental at best to the text.

Mitchell was less fair when she unfavourably placed Jameson’s book in the context of Truman Capote and John Berendt. These famous books report murders while the most alarming thing Jameson saw in Tibooburra was a half hearted petrol theft. Mitchell went on to dismiss Jameson’s writing:

It is simply not enough to land in an exotic location and retell other people’s stories in language that at times slips to the level of poor-quality journalism. Crafted prose is very different from straight reportage and publishers who allow first-time writers to ignore this fact do them a disservice.

A criticism that missed the point that as a highly experienced tabloid journalist Jameson was consciously writing in a specific voice to tell a deliberately crafted story. The fact that her book was even intermittently interesting when absolutely nothing happened in Tibooburra while she was there demonstrated how wrong Mitchell was.

Jameson had no problem with reporting on the people of Tibooburra and they in turn trusted her to look after them (Australian, 14 April). But Coombs and Varga had a much harder time of it, both in writing Broometime and in dealing with the controversy it generated. Throughout their book they reflected on the ambivalence of their role as initial observers but over time increasingly as participants in the life of the community.

The authors make it clear to people that they were writing a book about the community and that their interest in making friends was as much professional as personal. The judgements on many people who appear in the book are undoubtedly fair and truthful but many are definitely harsh.

So, it was hardly surprising that individuals not experienced in the ways of the media could take affront in the way they were presented by the authors. It is ironic that it was an innocent breach of court procedure that led to the first edition of Broometime being withdrawn rather than legal action by one of the subjects. The book may well have been legaled within an inch of its life but there are still many descriptions of people who might have wondered whether the way they are portrayed was likely to reduce their community standing.

And while none are reported as suing, many complained and the media response to the book was dominated by the attacks of the aggrieved. The Australian (24 March 2001) reported that people in Broome felt they were misrepresented by the book and that the authors had betrayed the community’s trust (22 and 23 March 2001). Broome resident Wendy Attenborough, not noted as a major source by Coombs and Varga, complained that because the authors did not run a suitably positive line about Broome that they had got it wrong, and mischievously so (Australian 22 March 2001):

Leaving aside the factual inaccuracies, the highly personal depictions of the lives of the town’s “characters” and the sense of trust betrayed, it is the wrong-headed audacity of this book that has distressed locals. ... lairrikism rolls through the pages of this book tackling complex issues and relationships with an insensitivity that is breathtaking. This isn’t fearless iconoclasm – it’s naive. Coombs and Varga were unable to overcome an innate sense of mischief. Their book reopens old wounds and entrenches differences many people have spent their lives trying to overcome.

The difficulty with Ms Attenborough’s argument is that the responsibility of the authors was to respect their sources, declare their purpose and report what they saw honestly not report what the Broome community in all or part wanted to hear.

Some of the reviewers, such as Susan Kurosawa (Australian, 29 March 2001) did not think much of the book and suggested that it would have enjoyed only modest sales without the controversy. While she made no comment about Coombs and Varga’s method, Kurosawa did pointedly explain the approach she used in her own book on life in a country town: “Every resident I spoke to at length was taped with their consent; a local historian read - and corrected, thankfully, my chapters on heritage”.

Neil Jillett (The Age, 9 April 2001) made the same point more directly: “So intimate is some of what they were told that the circumstances of the interviews should have been revealed. For instance, how often were recorders used?” But some commentators were concerned by the implications of all the criticism of Broometime. Jane Sullivan (The Age, 6 April 2001) commended Coombs and Varga for

...trying to do something that is difficult and daring ... and that is still very rare in Australian writing: to engage honestly with Aboriginal and mixed raced people, rather than with polemics.
Jane Sullivan was also concerned by arguments that the authors had betrayed the community in the way they recorded their conversations:

Clearly this is more than reportage and the authors are more than impartial observers. What is going on? Have Coombs and Varga got on top of it? How much should they report, how far should they speculate, and are they justified in their conjectures, even if these might be achieved (however unwillingly) at their subjects’ expense? These are the things we should be talking about, that this book has opened up to us. But before the debate has even begun, it has been swamped by angry reaction, threats and breathless trivia.

Anne Henderson (Australian, 3 April 2001) agreed and argued that while Broometime examined issues of race and identity which may upset people they still needed to be explored.

Varga and Coombs do not write sleaze. There is every reason to believe them when they say they wanted to capture Australia in miniature. They may have succeeded. As revealed in the recent race debate, Australians are not as tolerant as we look on the outside. At the time of our national debate, some blamed the media for reporting what was a reality.

Nor did Henderson see anything wrong in the reportage.

What Coombs and Varga have done is little more than what writers of fiction have been doing for decades. The only difference is they give the real names. Why not? As Helen Garner discovered with The First Stone, changing names doesn’t ensure identities won’t be identified.

But the last words to date on Broometime went to the authors who enjoyed a right of reply in an address to the Sydney Institute (2 April 2001) and in the Australian (26 May 2001). In both pieces they addressed the two crucial questions; whether they speculated, and are they justified in explaining why indigenous Broome could not understand that they were not writing to an ideological agenda:

We suspect that the indigenous world and some people outside it, too, were taken by surprise by a book that simply observed indigenous people - their complexity their difficulties and triumphs - without taking a clear polemical line, without making recommendations or offering solutions. (Australian, 26 May 2001)

In an argument that was cogent but certainly not cursed by false modesty on behalf of their book they also suggested that criticism of Broometime was impeding much needed progress in the debate on the needs of indigenous Australia:

Australians are beginning, we suspect, to tire of the pro and anti reconciliation rhetoric. They are at the point of turning off. It’s like hearing about the atrocity of the Holocaust once too often. New strategies are needed. The vast majority of indigenous people are not living petrol sniffing, grog-soaked lives: neither are they noble upholders of an intact, ancient, romanticised culture. … They are all sorts of fascinating things in between. They need to be better known. (Australian, 26 May 2001)

The irony is that the response to Broometime and the way its authors defended their work were more illuminating about the way some Australians expect their lives to be interpreted and the debate over relations between all the nation’s people than the book itself.

The Anglo-Celtic Australians that Jameson and Armstrong recounted are both gone. Australia’s future is far more likely to resemble the ethnic mix of Broome than it is Melbourne in the 1950s or a bushman-dreaming Tibooburra. The fact that media interest in Broometime focused on the authors’ standing in the town rather than on the issues the book raised does not bode well for the debate on how Australia is to accommodate the aspirations and beliefs of all its peoples.
DECLARING AN INTEREST

Business journalists like nothing better than a good jeremiad, as the debate over Shell’s proposal to take over Woodside made clear to Stephen Matchett.

The times are certainly changing when government can do something as old-fashioned as intervene in the operations of the market without being howled down by the pundits of the policy press. But that is exactly what happened in the debate over Shell’s plan to take over Woodside Petroleum – a proposal much of the media considered in terms of the broader national interest rather than just the interests of the market.

Of course, it depended on who you were reading. According to the keepers of the free-market faith writing in the Australian Financial Review, all that stood between Australia and national penury was Treasurer Costello approving Shell’s bid for a majority share of Woodside Petroleum. Shell’s supporters argued that the debate had as much to do with the politics of popular fear at the integration of Australia into the global economy as it did with a calm analysis of the nation’s best interest. However there was remarkably little rhetoric about the evils of multi-national capitalism from writers who opposed the bid.

Stephen Koukoulas set the context for the debate (AFR, 19 February) by arguing that fear of One Nation was eroding the government’s commitment to continuing economic reform and that if the Shell bid was blocked and international investment dried up, “a fully fledged $A currency crisis could emerge”.

It was a sunny optimism shared by Terry McCrann (Herald Sun, 3 March):

… knocking back the Shell bid would be one way of bequeathing incoming prime minister Beazley a seriously poisoned chalice. Maybe budget blackholes are yesterday’s disasters. The 21st century political chic could become banana republic crises.

John Hewson was similarly unimpressed by arguments that it was important to keep a strategic resource like the North-West Shelf energy fields in Australian hands. Shell already had effective control and Australia desperately needed the cash and technology injection its take-over of Woodside would bring. “There can be no further flirtation with fortress Australia,” he wrote (AFR, 16 March).

But the market purists did not have the debate to themselves and Ivor Ries (AFR 31 March) returned the debate to practical politics. He agreed that the markets would not like a decision to block the bid but argued that the voters would like it less:

Approving the bid will be seen as the Howard Government selling off another piece of the farm, on the cheap, to rapacious foreign multinationals. Australians have a deep-rooted (and probably inaccurate) fear that the nation is rapidly losing control of its destiny. When the government permits the sale of the country’s most successful oil and gas company to one of those deeply mistrusted foreign oil companies, that fear can only be heightened.

His ambivalence was shared by one of the pioneering advocates of continuing integration of Australia into the global economy, Paul Kelly, who was not at all convinced that Shell’s bid was even popular with big business: “Within the halls of commerce in this country there is a distinct undercurrent - a sense that it might be time for Australia to draw the line.” (Australian, 7 Feb)

Presumably the halls of commerce are submersible.

The debate was all part of one of the most organised lobbying efforts of recent years as both Woodside and Shell lobbied politicians and presented their cases to media opinion makers and politicians in very sophisticated exercises where self and national interest just happened to happily coalesce.

But at the end of the day it was politics as much as economics which shaped the decision with supporters and opponents of the bid agreeing that Shell, for all its billions was not going to move many marginals in the forthcoming election.

Even the AFR’s editorialist (16 February), presumably having studied the same currents as Kelly, argued for a joint Shell-Woodside venture to run the North-West Shelf rather than a straight takeover, in part because,

… there are few other projects in Australia more deserving of “national sovereignty” scrutiny. If the development and marketing of a big Australian resources project like the North-West Shelf was retarded by the other regional interests of a company like Shell, the country would suffer.

Costello’s decision to forbid the takeover didn’t change anybody’s mind. According to Alan Wood (Australian, 24 April) it was clever politics but -

Dick Smith economics. It plays to the xenophobic fear of foreign investment and competition that is a dominant strain of Hansonism … The damage done is longer term, raising doubts in the minds of the foreign investors and hence in the risk premium on Australian investment. It also makes our access to overseas capital more difficult and expensive. Go too far down this track and national development and growth will suffer.

However cautious its editorial line, columnist in the Fin fulminated when Costello decided to deny Shell the prize. According to Mike Nathan, Costello’s decision was “a sad day for Australian capitalism” and
the result of the xenophobia, “which has infected a large proportion of the Liberal Party, particularly in Western Australia, as well as the electorate” (AFR, 24 April). The Chanticleer column was also mightily exercised by the Treasurer’s decision, “to effectively nationalise Woodside” (AFR 24 April):

This was a fundamentally bad decision amid myriad extraordinary policy reversals from a supposedly free-trade supporting government designed to boost the country’s economic fortunes.

And the only good thing that Stephen Koukoulas (AFR 24 April) could find in the decision was that it would keep Pauline Hanson quiet: “With the federal election just six months away, the government is aiming to appease wavering Coalition supporters tempted to vote for One Nation on the basis of the snake oil being peddled by Ms Hanson.” Even The Age (24 April) editorialised it was a victory for politics over policy.

It is not credible that this decision was made according to the usual criteria, or chiefly on commercial criteria. It is an election-year decision, made by a government that faces serious political problems in the lead-up to the election. … This is not the first time in recent months that the Howard Government has acted more out of political considerations than principle. It raises serious questions about how policy is decided.

Or, as Mark Westfield put it, “the Prime Minister is prepared to run a risk on the dollar to save even a few hundred votes”. (Australian, 24 April) Bryan Frith agreed that “Pete the Pusillanimous” had done his master’s bidding:

A panicked Howard decided weeks ago - after the rout of Richard Court’s government - to knock Shell back. It was a purely political decision. Howard thought there would be votes in it because the man in the street dislikes big business, particularly if its foreign. (Australian, 24 April)

Not according to opponents of the take-over who all greeted the Treasurer’s decision as a triumph of the national interest over the ideologues of the business pages. Stephen Bartholomeusz (The Age, 24 April) argued that Costello had protected the national interest against a foreign company that may not have chosen to develop the North-West Shelf in Australia’s best interests. And so said that double act of political punditry, the Ramsey-Tingles.

Laura Tingle (Sydney Morning Herald, 24 April) discounted the argument that the take-over was a litmus test for the government’s commitment to globalisation. Rather, she argued, Costello had sensibly declined to hand over Australia’s largest energy project to a foreign company that already owned competing projects in the region. And the proof that Costello had made the right decision was demonstrated by the howls of the losers who argued that to deny Shell was to turn Australia’s face from the world.

That he has upset such powerful interests is a point which should be weighed carefully by those seeing the Woodside decision as no more than a panicky appeal to a reform-weary electorate. … This decision, like any rational investment decision by overseas investors, should be seen for what it is and not as a catalyst for something much larger.

Ramsey made the same point the next day:

The perception is rampant, fed by press gallery cynicism and the government’s opponents, that this is an election-year decision only, and one driven by the Prime Minister. Well, you would have to have rocks in your head to think that Costello and Howard could have shut out all thought of the politics of the issue. Of course not. But that in no way denies the primacy of the national interest or the correctness of the Treasurer’s decision.” (Sydney Morning Herald, 25 April).

And while The Age’s leader writer disliked the Treasurer’s decision, Tim Colebatch loved it:

Peter Costello tells us his rejection of Shell’s bid to take over Woodside was a one-off decision. So it was, but maybe it was also something more than that: a decision that could mark a turning point towards a more sophisticated policy to govern Australia’s role in the global economy.” (The Age, 2 May)

Colebatch proceeded to point out that the various economic murrains that would supposedly descend on Australia if Shell did not win control of Woodside had not and would not arrive, whatever the bizzoids said. The dollar had not collapsed as panicked bankers evacuated their funds to a safer market and there was no sign that foreign investment would dry up.

But it took that obsessive’s obsessive Alan Ramsey, to explain that the really important outcome of the Treasurer’s decision was that it confirmed his claim to the Liberal leadership:

The authority Costello brought to the detail and manner in which he argued his decision to say no to Shell which would have been persuasive to all but the ideologues, the thick and the venal was light years removed from the gauche caricature of those earlier years. In this context, there can be no more argument of Costello’s right to the succession of Howard’s leadership.

It was a fascinating debate that demonstrated that outside the AFR bunker there is no overwhelming constituency in the policy press for free flows of investment capital in and out of Australia. It was another step in the long retreat from the orthodoxy of free trade and globalisation. Anybody see protectionist country up ahead?
GEORGE NEGUS’ VERY OWN ABC – ALIENATED, BLOKEY, CONSPIRICIST

ABC Managing Director Jonathan Shier maintains that “the ABC is not standing still”. He’s correct. In so far as the ABC TV and Radio news and current affairs are concerned, the taxpayer funded Aunty seems to be heading backwards. Why else re-engage the likes of Stuart Littlemore and George Negus to present programs? After all, both Messrs Littlemore and Negus commenced with the ABC a quarter of a century ago. Or thereabouts.

Jonathan Shier took over as ABC managing director in March 2000. The first significant change to news and current affairs was to contract Stuart Littlemore QC and executive producer David Salter to present Littlemore. The decision was made by Gail Jarvis – the (then) head of ABC TV who had been appointed by Jonathan Shier. Ms Jarvis’s decision was agreed to by the ABC’s senior management team. Littlemore was not a success (see the analysis at pages 3-7 of this issue). In late June 2001, Sandra Levy (who replaced Gail Jarvis in early June 2001) announced that the Littlemore program would not return to the ABC. She was reported stating that she did not see any future for the program’s “essay format” (Sydney Morning Herald, 21 June 2001). Previously Gail Jarvis had indicated her concern that the Littlemore format was not viable while it contained neither an avenue for corrections nor a right-of-reply mechanism.

In June 2001 Jonathan Shier tried again. Appearing before the Senate Estimates Committee on 7 June 2001 he announced that ABC TV would have some new current affairs programs. One on a Sunday morning. The other on a weekday evening. He described the changes at greater length in an article in the Daily Telegraph:

The ABC is not standing still. We have recently announced new programming for the arts on radio and television, a new current affairs program for Sundays (Agenda) and a new weekly audience participation, debate program (Australia Talks) set in regional Australia and hosted by George Negus. More announcements will be made soon. (Daily Telegraph, 20 June 2001).

This was on 20 June. Within three days it was announced that the Sunday morning program would be called Insiders. Apparently the ABC powers-that-be found out what most media watchers already knew. Namely that Sky News on Pay TV already had an Australian current affairs program entitled On the Agenda. Insiders will be fronted by Barrie Cassidy. Barrie Cassidy is a professional and considered journalist who will perform well. However, he is hardly a fresh face - having worked, on and off, for the ABC over some decades. Moreover, he shares with George Negus and ABC TV 7.30 Report presenter Harry O’Brien a common background as an ALP staffer to Labor ministers during the Whitlam or Hawke governments. Are there no former Liberal or National Party staffers who can front current affairs programs on ABC TV?

BACK ON THE TAXPAYER SUBSIDISED DRIP

The decision to re-engage George Negus reflects the earlier ill-judged attempt to revive Stuart Littlemore’s (taxpayer subsidised) 15 minutes of televised fame. A brief look at Mr Negus’s career demonstrates that he embodies certain ingrained virtues of the ABC of old. As in Alienated, Blokey, Conspiracist.

• Alienation

George Negus is very much a throw back to the fashionably leftist alienated types of the 1960s. In fact he is quite contemptuous of Australia and Australians. In case Jonathan Shier and Sandra Levy missed these, here are some examples:

• Writing in the December/January 1990-91 edition of What’s on the Planet, George Negus commented:

People must realise that politics affects every aspect of their lives. To think that they can go about their existence ignoring it, and only thinking about it at election time is very silly. Australia is largely an apolitical country. Almost every country I have travelled to in the world, including third world countries in some cases, is more politically sophisticated and aware than this one.

• Interviewed in Who magazine (7 November 1994) George Negus restated the line. He told Michael Sheather:

This country bothers me because it is so politically unsophisticated. I have been to
Third World countries which are more politically sophisticated than Australia.

- The same alienated theme appears on George Negus’ most recent book entitled *The World from Italy: Football, Food and Politics* (HarperCollins, 2001):

  The horrible truth is that politically Australia is probably nowhere near as sophisticated, let alone mature, as many of the less developed countries of the old “Third World”. Admittedly, many of the grubby little dictators of the Third World do make a habit of knocking off their political opponents in awfully nasty fashion. On the other hand, we Australians are far more humane. We kill our polities off slowly and painfully by verbally bashing them into comparative insignificance.

- **Blokey-ness**

  On 26 March 1995 *The Sunday Age* published Doug Aiton’s profile of George Negus. Mr Negus related how he once had to junk an interview with New Guinea political leader Michael Somare because they were “both hungover” following a drinking session the previous evening. Wow. He also reflected on international airlines:

  The airline industry is remarkable. I’m less critical of that industry than I am of most. I am a great admirer. They feed me, water me, and occasionally you get to screw their hostesses. In another life, of course.

  How blokey can you get?

- **Conspiracy Theorist**

  Remember John Friedrich (alias Johann Friedrich Hohenberger)? The late Mr Friedrich stole money and then faked his death in Europe. Subsequently, he gained entry into Australia under an assumed name. An inveterate liar and serial thief, Friedrich became managing director of the Victorian National Security Council (VNSC). The VNSC went bust due to massive managerial incompetence. Mr Friedrich committed suicide in July 1991 – shortly before he was due to stand trial in the Victorian Supreme Court for fraud and shortly after he was interviewed at some length for a George Negus special on Channel 7.

  All in all it was a sad case. John Friedrich became chief of the VNSC at a time when some banks were
willing to lend on little security. In this case the (former) State Bank of Victoria (SBV) lent the VNSC around $300 million. The security was some 100 containers which Friedrich claimed were full of rescue gear but which, in fact, were empty. As journalist John Silvester pointed out at the time, the SBV “allowed the VNSC to make just $10 million a year but spend about $60 million”.

It was a straight-forward case of fraud and megalomania. However sections of the Australian media, along with some left-wing conspiracy theorists, could not resist the temptation to label it all a gigantic conspiracy. For example, early on, the (then) Victorian Labor MP Joan Coxsedge told ABC Radio AM (28 March 1989) “you could imagine that the CIA would be rather attracted to” the VNSC. Well, you certainly could imagine this.

George Negus was heavily into this particular conspiracy theory. He theorised that Friedrich’s scam on the VNSC was all part of a huge international intrigue. He told The Sunday Age’s Paul Daley that the likely co-conspirators should not be confined to the CIA:

To make a connection alone between Friedrich and the CIA is limiting it. If there is a conspiracy theory that could be advanced, the red herring would be to restrict it to the CIA. The intelligence community is very broad (Sunday Age, 28 July 1991).

George Negus also told Paul Davey that he was almost certain Friedrich and Hohenberger were not the same person. The fact is that there was no evidence of any kind to link Friedrich’s fraud with any intelligence agency, including the CIA. Moreover, it is clear that Hohenberger changed his name to Friedrich – as he himself conceded to Australian immigration officials before his death. Yet as late as September 1994 – when he published a collection of his newspaper columns in By George!: Twenty Years behind the typewriter (ABC Books, 1994) – Mr Negus was still alleging “governments and police” were covering up the Friedrich case.

The truth was quite hum-drum. As John Silvester wrote at the time:

If you believed everything you’ve heard about Friedrich since he shot himself last Friday, he worked for the CIA, KGB and ASIO and was probably a pen pal to Anthony Blunt. A lot of mystery that surrounded Friedrich was fanned by the man himself... The truth is that the National Safety Council Friedrich headed was not a front for any clandestine intelligence organisation. (Herald Sun, 1 August 1991).
It turned out that the CIA/ASIO allegations grew from the fact that, in one instance, the Australian Federal Police hired a helicopter from the VNSC to monitor a demonstration against the Australian/United States Joint Facility at Pine Gap. That’s all. But it was good enough for your man George.

George Negus’s conspiracy theories of recent memory have not been confined to matters Australia. As a committed internationalist, he has international theories. In September 1996 (at the time he was hosting the ABC TV *Foreign Correspondent* program) he reflected that the United States might have an interest in maintaining Iraq leader Saddam Hussein in office:

> To the chagrin of many including the media, the latest Gulf flare-up has almost certainly failed to spark World War III. But it’s not over yet. If Saddam Hussein is the ultimate “evil man of history” the Americans have got to maintain their rage. Or is it Saddam Hussein they have to maintain? Is that just too conspiratorial altogether? (*Sunday Age*, 8 September 1996)

Well, er, yes it is. But, no matter. There is always another column. Or another television program.

**THE (NEGUS) WORLD FROM ITALY**

George Negus’s return to ABC TV co-incides with the publication of the book *The World from Italy: Football, Food and Politics*. This is his third non-fiction work. It follows *Across the Red Unknown: A Journey through the New Russia* (Weldon Publishing, 1992) and *By George!: Twenty Years Behind the Typewriter*. In the introduction to *By George*, the author reflected on the past. He wrote how, as a student, he was “encouraged by the likes of Marcuse, McLuhan, Laing, Chomsky” on the way to becoming “politically progressive”. How twee. And he described Australia in the 1960s and early 1970s as “dominated by near-mindless conservatism”. How fashionable.

*The World from Italy* is also twee and fashionable. And your man George is still a lightweight. It’s just that his (lightweight) reflections in this particular book focus on Italy – with a few Australian comparisons thrown in. *The World from Italy* has been subjected to a devastating critique by Geoffrey Luck – a former Australian journalist now living in Italy – in the “Spectrum” section of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (24 May 2001). Geoffrey Luck referred to the author’s all-too-numerous serious factual howlers and to the fact that “Negus has been betrayed by his inability to speak or read Italian [and] forced to rely on his information in English-language newspapers from outside the country”. Geoffrey Luck concluded:
The book reads, and sounds, just like a series of George Negus pieces to camera for 60 Minutes. But those had the virtues of being tighter, impersonal and well edited. Unfortunately, Negus does not seem to understand that a book requires its own special discipline and rigour, that superficial observation, sweeping generalisations and cliches are not enough. Small-screen celebrity status alone does not carry the day.

This is a harsh, but fair, judgment. There is, however, an alternative view of The World from Italy. Namely that it is just a Negus spoof. The author may not agree. But this is how it seems as the reader ploughs through the five designated parts, two of which carry the customary Negus exclamatory trade mark. As in “Football. Is Life!”. How amazing!!!!

**Part One**  G.N. reverts to the hackneyed Negus-ism by declaring that he is trying “to make sense out of the daily nonsense we laughingly call life”. He does not say what he would call it. He repeats the adage that “Australia is probably nowhere near as sophisticated…as many of the less developed countries…”. The chapter is littered with generalisations - sometimes highlighted by the Negus endorsed exclamation mark! Put simply, G.N. reckons that his “working sabbatical” in Italy has convinced him that Italy invented the “Third Way”. More of this big news later.

**Part Two**  Venice is both “mindblowing” and a place “where time stands still”. But, alas, not cliches - of the travel genre. G.N. maintains that “to the Italians…politics means a hell of a lot more than how much tax they pay or whether interest rates are going up or down”. He declares that “unfortunately, the same can’t be said of other parts of the world, including one you may be familiar with south of Papua New Guinea and West of New Zealand”. It’s Australia, get it?

There is much discussion about football in Part Two. Including the observation that “in a serious sociological way, to be anti-football is to be anti-Italian”. Really.

**Part Three**  G.N. quotes what he terms a favourite “little bauble” : “Food, as we know, is the world’s greatest cure for hunger”. How profound. He also declares, without acknowledgement: “We are what we eat”. How original. G.N. reveals that his “true and ultimate aim in life…is to become the best risotto cook in Australia”. He quotes Valentina Harris to the effect that “making a good risotto is rather like making love” with the resultant “hissing column of steam known as il sospiro, the sigh” - and so on. G.N. reflects:

Interesting analogy, but I don’t know who Valentina’s been making love to. Hissing

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**AUSTRALIANS AND WORK**

Sharon Beder, author of Selling the Work Ethic (Scribe), is a professional engineer and associate professor in Science, Technology and Society at the University of Wollongong. In her new book, Sharon Beder examines the origins and practices of a triumphant culture of work in which the wealthy are respected and inequality is justified. Dr Beder shows that these values are neither natural or inevitable but rather have been actively promoted.

Garry Brack is the Chief Executive Officer of Employers Firsta (formerly known as Employers Federation of New South Wales), a position he has held since 1985. Employers Firsta is the largest multi-industry employer organisation in New South Wales and one of the largest in Australia specialising in representation of, and advice to, employers on industrial relations and human resource management. Garry Brack has had over 26 years experience at National and State levels in business policy and practical industrial relations.

**SPEAKERS**: GARY BRACK (Executive Director, Employers Federation of NSW) and DR SHARON BEDER [Author of Selling the work ethic (Scribe Publications, 2001)]

**TOPIC**: Work and the Work Ethic Down Under - Two views

**DATE**: Monday 27th August 2001

**TIME**: 5.30 for 6.00 pm

**VENUE**: Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Level 32, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney

**FREEMAIL**: mail@sydneyins.org.au

**WEBSITE**: www.sydneyins.org.au
columns of steam have not been among my lover’s repertoire. Yet Harris is perfectly correct to compare making risotto to making love. I’ve often told interested inquirers that you don’t stir a risotto, you fondle it, you stay with it, you keep coming back to it, tenderly stroking it towards its climax.

Thanks for that. Part Three contains much discussion about food – and wine. G.N. raises the question as to whether “the fact that all [sic] Italians were wine drinkers help[s] them to get on, even find political compromises”. As, say, in Benito Mussolini’s Fascist Party. Or the Red Brigades who kidnapped and murdered Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978. Or even the Mafia. Wine drinkers all. And, according to G.N., wine consuming compromisers. All, apparently.

**Part Four** G.N. refers to a familiar theme that “there is no way on earth that it is ‘better to be dead than red’.” There follow not-dissimilar inanities. He reveals (shock/horror) that “there is a north of Italy and a south of Italy” and that the former is more prosperous than the latter. Really. He maintains that “it may come as a surprise” to learn that the concept of the “Third Way” was not invented by Tony Blair or Bill Clinton. Be rather by – wait for it – the “Italian Communists”. Interesting theory – which overlooks the fact that Benito Mussolini’s Fascists and the Catholic Church were referring to the Third Way, in different contexts, before the theme was ever heard about by the Italian Communist Party. There is much discussion about politics in Part Four.

**Part Five** This time the focus is on Catholicism and erotica. There are the usual (old) blokey jokes. The breasts of “girls” on Italian TV are described as their “main qualifications for the job”. Good one. And there is time for generalisations. As in: “In the US, drive-by shootings kill people. In Italy, some sexologists argue that drive-by sex is possibly keeping half-dead marriages alive”. How about that? G.N. declares that “there is a north of Italy and a south of Italy” and that the former is more prosperous than the latter. Really. He maintains that “it may come as a surprise” to learn that the concept of the “Third Way” was not invented by Tony Blair or Bill Clinton. Be rather by – wait for it – the “Italian Communists”. Interesting theory – which overlooks the fact that Benito Mussolini’s Fascists and the Catholic Church were referring to the Third Way, in different contexts, before the theme was ever heard about by the Italian Communist Party. There is much discussion about politics in Part Four.

So there you have it – whatever it means.

**Acknowledgements** In case you’re wondering about the author’s sources for all of the above, they are revealed. Essentially an “almost religious reading of the International Herald Tribune and its daily lift-out, *Italy Daily*”.

Now Italy is a fine nation. And the *International Herald Tribune* is a good newspaper. So how come our George came to write such a lightweight book? The answer seems to be that in Italy George Negus saw what he wanted to see. And he concluded what he wanted to conclude. Namely that Italy “should be listened to”. Especially by Australians.

*The World from Italy* is an all-too-familiar Negus tract. There are a lot of idiots around. With the notable exception of the author HIMSELF. Your man George knows how to make sense of what he terms “the daily nonsense we laughingly call life”. His is a simplistic view of the contemporary world. How else do you explain George Negus’s claim that Bill Gates is “possibly the most dangerous man since Hitler” *(Sunday Age, 26 March 1995)*.

There is more of this in *The World from Italy*. For example in the introductory chapter where George Negus declares:

> Right now, wherever you are – Australia, Italy, wherever – it’s difficult if not impossible to fathom who’s worse off: the post-communist strugglers falling to cope with the ruthlessness of the global economy or the stragglers of the *New World Order* falling by the wayside in their desperate scramble to stay on or even get on the “information superhighway”, a journey where the bottom line and the bottom of the barrel look frighteningly similar.

When referring to “Western democracies”, G.N. places the word democracies in inverted commas. There is also criticism of “single-minded free marketeers and greedy merchants of the West” – but only the West. Then there is the simplistic political/economic analysis:

> [In November 1999] only Spain and out-of-sight, out-of-mind Australia were among the few Western democracies with right-of-centre governments possessed with the post-communist “end of history” mentality. Indeed, leaders like Australia’s John Howard and his Treasurer Peter Costello were policy-making as though Margaret Thatcher was still Prime Minister of Great Britain. Moreover, their approach to politico-economic matters seemed to suggest that the
THE NEW LIBERAL

Peter Costello: The New Liberal is a book five years in the making. Using the perspective provided by interviews with Costello's detractors (as well as his supporters) to inform his assessment, Shaun Carney has created a well-rounded portrait of the man who would be Prime Minister. Shaun Carney is an Associate Editor with The Age newspaper in Melbourne.

SPEAKER: SHAUN CARNEY [Associate Editor with The Age newspaper in Melbourne & author of Peter Costello: The New Liberal (Allen & Unwin 2001)]

TOPIC: Peter Costello- The New Liberal

DATE: Tuesday 14th August

TIME: 5.30 for 6.00 pm

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