

FORTHCOMING FUNCTIONS AT THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE

SPEAKER ANNA FUNDER (Author, *Stasiland*, [Text Publishing 2002])
TOPIC *Stasiland: Writing A World Gone Wrong*
DATE Monday 8 April 2002 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00 pm
VENUE 41 Phillip Street, Sydney **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**

SPEAKER **HON BRENDAN NELSON MP** (Federal Minister for Education, Science & Training)
TOPIC *A Vision of Education: Higher Education Reform*
DATE Wednesday 10 April 2002 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00 pm
VENUE BT Training Room (Room 401) Level 4, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney

SPEAKERS **NICOLA ROXON MP** (Shadow Minister for Children & Youth) and
CHRISTOPHER PYNE MP (Federal Liberal Member for Sturt)
TOPIC *Winning Back the Young Vote*
DATE Monday 15 April 2002 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00 pm
VENUE Clayton Utz Seminar Room (Level 25) 1 O'Connell Street, Sydney

SPEAKER **NEIL McDONALD** (Author and Historian)
TOPIC *On the Kokoda Trail, 1942 – with Damien Parer, Osmar White and Chester Wilmot*
DATE Tuesday 23 April 2002 **TIME** 5.00 for 5.30 pm
VENUE BT Training Room (Room 401) Level 4, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney

SPEAKER **SUSAN BOYD** (Australian High Commissioner – Fiji)
TOPIC *Fiji: Social and Political Upheaval*
DATE Tuesday 30 April 2002 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00 pm
VENUE 41 Phillip Street, Sydney **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**

SPEAKER **DR. JUDITH KEENE** (Department of History, University of Sydney & author
of *Fighting for Franco*)
TOPIC *Fighting for Franco – in the Spanish Civil War*
DATE Tuesday 7 May 2002 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00 pm
VENUE 41 Phillip Street, Sydney **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**

SPEAKER **GINA LENNOX** (Author, *Fire, Snow & Honey - Voices from Kurdistan*
[Halstead Press 2001])
TOPIC *Fire, Snow & Honey - Stories from Kurdistan*
DATE Monday 13 May 2002 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00 pm
VENUE 41 Phillip Street, Sydney **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**

SPEAKER **JOHN RALSTON SAUL - IN CONVERSATION WITH - DAVID MALOUF**
TOPIC *Canada and Australia: The Differences*
DATE Sunday 2 June 2002 **TIME** 12.30 for 1.00 pm
VENUE Bangarra Performance Theatre, Wharf 4/5, Hickson Rd, Sydney
NOTE – This function is in association with The Sydney Writers' Festival

SPEAKER **JENNY MACKLIN MP** (Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister
for Education)
TOPIC *To be advised*
DATE Wednesday 12 June 2002 **TIME** 5.30 for 6.00 pm
VENUE Clayton Utz Seminar Room (Lvl 25), 1 O'Connell Street, Sydney

THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE ANNUAL DINNER/LECTURE

SPEAKER **THE RT. HON. PATRICIA HEWITT MP** (Secretary of State for Trade & Industry, UK)
DATE MONDAY 15 JULY 2002 **TIME** 6.30 FOR 7.00 PM
VENUE GRAND HARBOUR BALLROOM, STAR CITY **DRESS** BLACK TIE

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THE

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QUARTERLY

POLITICAL BIOGRAPHIES



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MARCH 2002*

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an Australia-Japan
Day.

JOHN KUNKEL
on what's good about
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with Gerard Henderson's

MEDIA WATCH

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THE G-G AND THE PM

How times change. On 22 April 2001, John Howard announced that Peter Hollingworth would succeed Sir William Deane as Governor-General. The Prime Minister proudly predicted that "his appointment will be widely welcomed and supported within the Australian community". The following day, the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane (as he then was) gave a media conference. He maintained that "the most important and the most difficult task for a modern governor-general is to help interpret the nation to itself". Less than a year later, Australia's Governor-General is busy interpreting himself to the nation.

The current discontent surrounding the Queen's representative in Australia goes back to the original appointment. John Howard should not have offered the position to a bishop – any bishop. And Peter Hollingworth should have declined the appointment. Traditionally, the Queen's representative in Australia has come from such groups as the judiciary (William Deane, Ninian Stephen, John Kerr), politics (Bill Hayden, Paul Hasluck, Richard Casey), education (Zelman Cowen) and the military (William Slim). All are public institutions and, as such, all are subject to a degree of transparency. This should not necessarily rule out individuals with essentially private backgrounds from becoming the Queen's representative in Australia. It's just that the potential risk is much greater with such appointments. Peter Hollingworth's background was within a privately funded Christian church. In this sense the Anglican Church is no different to, say, the Catholic, Uniting or Baptist churches. Or to a Jewish synagogue or an Islamic mosque. The point is that religious leaders, at any given time, preside over institutions which have an accumulated history of which they may, or may not, be aware.

From the time John Howard announced Peter Hollingworth's appointment, it was apparent that neither man had thought through the implications of an ordained bishop taking up the position of Governor-General in what is, constitutionally at least, a secular society. Asked about this issue on 22 April last year, the Prime Minister replied that William Deane "is a devout practising Catholic" and Bill Hayden "a self-declared atheist". This missed the point that both men's private beliefs were precisely that. Namely, private. The confusion continued after the announcement of Peter Hollingworth's appointment as Governor-General. At the 23 April 2001 media conference, he acknowledged that he "shall, of course, be a bishop for life because that is the nature of Holy Orders" but recognised that, as Governor-General, he would "not be able to exercise that function in a public way". In an open letter published in the Brisbane Anglican magazine *Focus* in May 2001, Hollingworth seemed quite confused about the relationship between church and state. He (falsely) maintained that, unlike in the United States, "there is not a clear cut separation between church and State" in Australia. When Peter Hollingworth felt the need to have the title of "Doctor", this was provided by the (Anglican) Archbishop of Canterbury per courtesy of the essentially honorary Lambeth Degree of Doctor of Letters.

Peter Hollingworth's blurring of the church/state distinction has continued in office. For example during his (counterproductive) ABC TV *Australian Story* interview he was filmed at prayer at Yarralumla. The Governor-General is the representative of the Queen for all Australians. Yet a glance at the Vice-Regal News (www.gg.gov.au) indicates that, as Governor-General, Peter Hollingworth has chosen to publicly worship in Anglican cathedrals (in Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, even Wellington) and, on occasions, Anglican and Presbyterian churches. That's all. In Australia, where there is a separation between Church and State, it makes little sense to appoint religious leaders as governors-general. In order to succeed in the position, appointees would need to have few (if any) links with their religious past and demonstrate an intention to reach beyond their religious allegiance when in office.

Interviewed on the ABC TV *Lateline* program on 26 February 2002, Lord St John Fawsley (who has close connections with the Palace) indicated that the Queen was displeased with the current controversy concerning her representative in Australia. Lord Fawsley added that it had been an unwise decision for John Howard to appoint an archbishop as Governor-General. Quite so. Peter Hollingworth is in difficulties today primarily due to his apparent inability to properly manage issues. However, his ultimate problem stems from the fact that his appointment was not a good idea at the time.

AUSTRALIAN POLITICS

Ian Henderson

LABOR AND THE UNIONS

TRADE union leaders were bemused and angered when their organisations were pushed into the firing line for the ALP's latest federal election defeat. Several prominent Labor Party figures – including the party's new leader Simon Crean and its industrial relations shadow minister Robert McClelland – not to mention outsiders from the media and the Liberal Party were quick to point to the party's relationship with unions when searching for possible explanations for Kim Beazley's defeat on 10 November 2001.

But in the view of senior union leaders, blaming the party's links with the unions – more specifically, the so-called "60:40 rule" – for that defeat must be about the most simple-minded explanation put forward so far. They have a point.

The internal inquiry into the party's future that is now under way – and that will inevitably attempt to draw some lessons from Beazley's failed bid for The Lodge – is bound to wonder aloud about the value of the longstanding union-ALP links, even if only because they have been pushed into the spotlight by the immediate post-election commentary.

But, if that review fails to go any further than looking at that relationship, it will have badly let down Labor's supporters.

Even a quick reminder of recent political history shows just how shallow any analysis is of Labor's problems that focuses on its links with trade unions. Consider these facts, for a start:

- Between 1983 and 1993, federal Labor won five elections in a row – encumbered, if that is the appropriate word, with the same trade union links as currently exist; and
- Right now, the ALP is in government in all six states and in both territories – having won elections in each of those separate jurisdictions during the past three years with exactly the same union links as are now being widely blamed for federal Labor's recent defeat.

Surely if unions deserve any of the blame for Beazley's defeat, it only stands to reason that they deserve part of the credit for the recent wins by Bob

Carr, Steve Bracks, Peter Beattie, Geoff Gallop, Jim Bacon, Claire Martin, John Stanhope and Mike Rann – not to mention both Bob Hawke and Paul Keating? At the very least, the people running or falling for the line that the unions' links with Labor are a burden too heavy for the party to bear must be embarrassed by that evidence to the contrary!

In fact, in the eyes of the union movement itself, the latest attacks on the trade unions' links with Labor amount to little more than an assault on both the political and the industrial wings of labour by its arch opponents – whether those attacks stem from the media or from the Coalition parties.

Some of the comments linking Labor's electoral woes with its union base stem, so some in the union movement's leadership believe, from ALP figures with personal axes to grind. But Crean is not the target of that particular criticism.

After all, Crean, as a former union chief himself, knows better than most just how limited is the power of the union bloc within the Labor Party.

It is true that in states like New South Wales some 60 per cent of the delegates to the ALP's state conferences are sent there by the party's affiliated trade unions and only the remaining 40 per cent are sent by the party's rank and file membership – the "60:40 rule". (In other states, that split is different – and at the party's national conference, unions have no direct representatives, having to rely on their representatives being elected from the party at state and territory level.)

But, as the unions say, it is only rarely the case that all the union delegates at these crucial state assemblies take the same side in any vote on policy. The left-wing union delegates vote with other left-wing delegates while right-wing union delegates vote with other right-wingers. Unions that vote together on issues like privatisation in union forums can be seen taking opposite sides in party gatherings.

Putting it bluntly: Within the party, it is factions rather than unions that reign when it comes to taking up positions on matters of public policy. And for those unconvinced by that fact, union bosses are happy to remind anyone who will listen that they – just like rank and file ALP members – have almost no say on the detailed policies that are taken to federal elections by party leaders. Indeed, some unkindly claim that the ALP's leaders too often just ignore the party's platform that is decided at the various conferences at which unions and the rank and file are represented.

So if it's not union-dominated policies that sunk Beazley, maybe it's union-dominated candidate selections?

ALP candidates are selected in different ways in different states and territories. But in the highest profile state of all – NSW, in which the ALP lost several seats on 10 November and failed to pick up any extra seats to offset those losses, and where incidentally the quality of the party's federal MPs has attracted some internal criticism – the party's rules provide, in the first instance, for all lower house candidates to be selected by ballots of local party members alone.

Unless candidates are picked by extraordinary means – by the party's central administrative committee, for example, a body whose makeup stems from the factions battleground of state conference – no union bosses can be accurately blamed or praised for their quality. Just the preferences of local powerbrokers, their henchmen and women – and the other paid up party members living in the relevant electorate.

The system might be broke – but there is no evidence that driving out the unions, or even curtailing their influence, will fix it.

That's not to say there is no problem within union ranks. Far from it. Unions have only just begun to genuinely face up to – and to do something about – their sharply falling membership; to prove to workers that there is still some value in union membership; to prove to bosses and to the anti-union Howard Government that the union movement still deserves to be regarded as the workers' representative.

The proportion of the labour force now in a union is small, only about one in five private sector employees, for example. Barely enough to justify on numerical grounds the weight the unions continue to enjoy within the ALP's decision-making forums. Barely enough, that is, if the party's own rank and file membership were not also in dire trouble.

Privately, ALP MPs scoff at suggestions that the union-party links – including the "60:40 rule" – played any part in the latest electoral defeat. And when Liberal Party federal director Lynton Crosby listed what he said were the factors revealed by market research for Howard's return on 10 November, unions failed to rate a mention.

Those within Labor's ranks who are sceptical about any attempt to blame the unions for Beazley's double failure at the polls are doubtless correct.

But they would be wise to ponder whether the party needs to do something more to bolster its own membership numbers – that some insiders claim have fallen to well under 50,000, or fewer than four out of every thousand voters – at the same time as it also demands that the unions justify the place they enjoy within the party.

A FEW PRECIOUS SECONDS ON THE EVENING TV NEWS

The best joke in the five week-long federal election campaign was cracked just two days before polling day by the Treasury department.

That is, unless your count the nature of the campaign itself – a joke at the expense of most of the nation's media and also most of the public. Because, for days on end, both John Howard and Kim Beazley paid only passing attention to what most commentators would have traditionally regarded as the aim of their campaigns: to address voters.

It has been a common – and accurate – observation of post-election analyses that the campaign was characterised by the prime minister's lack of any serious agenda for a third term of his government and by the Opposition's reliance on changing established programs only at the very margins. There was nothing as challenging as the Coalition's 1998 promise of a broad-based consumption tax, nothing as innovative as the Coalition's first term effort to reform industrial relations. On the Labor side, there was to be only tinkering with the GST and, at least in the short-term, only a relatively small re-ordering of Coalition priorities on education, for example.

What has attracted less attention in the post-election commentary is how rarely the leaders of either side actually met voters, especially in an environment in which the latter were likely to question what they were being told.

Take Beazley's program for the final weekend before polling day as an example, when the Labor leader showed just how desperate he was to get his face and his message onto the TV news bulletins each day – and that virtually nothing more mattered.

On Thursday 1 November – the day after Beazley launched the details of his "knowledge nation" package in Sydney – he was in a TV studio in time to make an appearance on the Nine Network's *Today* Show at 7.10 am. Then, shortly after his 8 am interview on ABC radio's *AM* program, Beazley was on a plane and headed for Adelaide – an 1170 km journey just for the cameras to record him in a school with teachers and young kids.

All he did in public before boarding his Ansett charter late that afternoon for the 2640 km trip to Darwin was to record an interview for ABC TV's *7.30 Report* to broadcast that evening. Nothing new of substance – not even a token effort to meet and greet voters, even though the school was in the Liberal-held seat of Hindmarsh, one of three marginal Coalition-held electorates the ALP hoped to win.

Friday was little different: A quick interview on Darwin radio followed by the announcement of Labor's largely recycled defence and defence personnel policies (and its northern Australia policy) at a RAAF community child care centre located in the new Darwin-based seat of Solomon. The defence personnel policy was said by federal Labor MP for the other new Northern Territory seat of Lingiari, Warren Snowdon, to be so good it would ensure that the ALP picked up Solomon on 10 November. (Solomon was notionally a Coalition seat based on the results of the 1998 election and Lingiari was notionally Labor – both seats were new, having been formed when the NT itself was split into two at a post-1998 boundary change.)

In that environment, one might have thought that Beazley would have campaigned vigorously Darwin's voters. But the real aim of his visit was to give the TV media a fresh picture of the Labor leader for their evening news bulletins, this time with mothers and small children. Beazley met only those few voters who formed the backdrop at the child care centre and those who listened in to the ABC's morning radio show.

Go anywhere for a new TV picture? You bet, because as soon as Beazley's visit to the child care centre was over, he was back on the plane for the 2670 km trip to Perth.

And to two events in his home state: first, a relaunch of Labor's environment policy in the pleasant surrounds of The Spectacles Wetlands, located right in his own electorate of Brand; and second, the relaunch of Labor's federal campaign – this time with a WA tinge – at Caversham House in the new and also notionally Labor (that is, based on the voting figures from three years earlier) seat of Hasluck.

Then is was back again onto the plane for the 3790 km trip to Brisbane and another made-for-TV day: a pre-recorded interview for the Ten Network's *Meet the Press* program and a quick visit to a child care centre in the Labor-held seat of Lilley.

All up, more than 10,000 kms in three days – and all aimed at getting Beazley's face and his "plan" into the nation's living rooms, even if only for a fleeting 30 seconds, and not aimed at getting him to meet or talk with any significant number of voters.

The Caversham House function was attended by maybe several hundred people, but all had been carefully screened in advance for their Labor credentials. None was likely to challenge Beazley; none needed any persuading to vote Labor.

Just change the names, and much the same situation was evident on the other side of the campaign. Day after day, Howard addressed invitation-only audiences, free from any serious possibility of having to win over wavering hearts or minds.

Education, Politics and the Nation

Jenny Macklin MP, Member for Jagajaga and Shadow Education Minister, entered federal politics in 1996. Elected Shadow Minister for Health in her first term, she cut her teeth quickly and made her first parliamentary speech within two days. On a steep learning curve, Macklin made it her business to speak in the House at least once a day to gain experience and confidence. After the 2001 election, Jenny Macklin was elected Deputy Leader of the federal Opposition and became Shadow Minister for Education.

SPEAKER: **JENNY MACKLIN MP (Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Education)**

DATE : **Wednesday 12 June 2002**

TIME **5.30 for 6.00 pm**

VENUE: **Clayton Utz Seminar Room (Lvl 25),
1 O'Connell Street, Sydney**

FREE TO ASSOCIATES/ASSOCIATES' PARTNERS
STUDENTS \$5/OTHERS \$10

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The prime minister's program for his first week on the hustings read like a tourist guide to the Liberal Party in three states. On Sunday 7 October - two days after setting the 10 November polling day - Howard opened the local campaign of incumbent MP for Hughes, Danna Vale, in front of a Liberal crowd of around 200 at Menai. Next day, Howard limited his campaigning to a press conference at which he announced that a phone call from US vice-president Dick Cheney had alerted him to the US decision to proceed immediately with air strikes against the Taliban.

Tuesday, and it was off to launch the Liberals' campaign for the Melbourne eastern suburbs seat of Aston in front of an audience assembled overnight by the party, followed by a visit for the TV and still cameras to the construction site for a new home being built with the help of the government's first home buyers scheme.

On Wednesday, Howard and his entourage bussed it to Ballarat for a school visit followed by another local campaign launch for the Liberals - again, apart from a local radio interview, there were few voters present at Loreto College (around 700 pupils and a handful of teachers) and probably even fewer at the party's campaign office whose votes were not already fully committed to the Liberal candidate. Thursday and Friday of week one Howard spent in Brisbane - at functions to which members of his audience had been invited by the party.

There were no outsiders and barely a handful of protestors during the entire week. The events were public in the limited sense that the public could attend if, and only if, they found out in advance of the location and other important details and if, and only if, they managed to find themselves on an invitation list arranged within the office of either the local Liberal MP or the party itself.

It is true that the prime minister undertook a visit to a suburban shopping centre while in Brisbane, and spoke to maybe a score of shoppers or store workers who had not been vetted by the Liberal Party. But that event scarcely broke the pattern: there was no advance notice of Howard's visit and, therefore, no opportunity for sceptics or critics to engage him.

Michael Stutchbury, the editor of *The Australian*, publicly expressed his frustration at the way both leaders operated during the election campaign, especially to the practice of effectively locking up reporters in planes with either the prime minister or the opposition leader, and thereby hampering their efforts to provide their readers/listeners/viewers with a fuller picture of the election itself. Others no doubt share that frustration and are now wondering how to respond to that prospect at the next federal election.

Until voters decide to rebel against the parties' so far largely successful efforts at limiting public access to their leaders - or until at least one of the parties decides that strategy is contrary to its interests - the election campaign joke will be at the expense of voters.

Treasury's joke? On 5 November, the department received a request from the ALP Opposition - in line with provisions in the Charter of Budget Honesty legislation - for an official costing of Labor's promise to remove the GST from women's sanitary products. Now, the details of that policy had been announced by Beazley some 17 days earlier, but Labor had waited until virtually the last minute to hand over its calculations for Treasury's assessment.

Given that Treasury had a mere five days before the election to cost that promise - and that it was at the same time being given, also at the last minute, other Labor policies and the whole raft of Coalition policies to cost by 10 November - there could have been only the most cursory examination of the plan to make tampons and the like GST-free.

The manipulation by Peter Costello of the release during the election campaign of Treasury's mid-year review of the May Budget fiscal and economic forecasts, combined with the manipulation by both sides of the costing process, ensured that both the updated Budget numbers and the costs of promises made by the Coalition and the Labor Party were tainted.

Nevertheless, Treasury did its best to review by polling day any figuring presented to it. On 8 November, the department publicly released its response to Beazley's request of 5 November for its costing of the ALP's "GST: women's sanitary products" policy. Unsurprisingly, Treasury confirmed the estimates already submitted by Labor's staff economists: the promise would reduce revenues by \$20 million in 2002-03 and by \$24 million each year in the following two years.

So what was the joke? "The costing assumes no behavioural change as a result of the measure," Treasury noted. The boffins had decided - appropriately - to think about whether making tampons cheaper would give rise to either stockpiling or increased use. And they had decided that neither of those potential changes to women's behaviour would take place under Labor's policy.

It was a joke that economists would have chuckled over during their coffee breaks - and that voters might also have enjoyed, had the politicians not ensured that, by 8 November the Charter of Budget Honesty had become merely a sideshow - another casualty - of the 2001 federal election campaign.

Ian Henderson is Political correspondent with The Australian

LEARNING TO LOVE THE WTO

John Kunkel

It was a final, significant act of public service. Bowing out of politics last November, John Fahey, the likeable Finance Minister and ex-Premier of New South Wales, packed his bags to deputise for Trade Minister Mark Vaile at the start of a crucial World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in the Middle Eastern city of Doha.

As Australians went to the polls, Fahey skilfully rallied the Cairns Group – a coalition of 18 agricultural exporting countries put together by Australia in the mid 1980s – as the Europeans tried yet again to avoid genuine cuts in agricultural subsidies and protection.

His mission accomplished, Fahey flew home. Having seen the Howard Government returned to office, Vaile assumed Australia's seat for the final marathon sessions that would launch new global trade negotiations.

With the forces of darkness (i.e. the French) threatening a walkout, in the end a fudge was inserted in the "Doha Declaration" that let the Euro spin doctors claim that not that much had been given away. But for Australian trade officials with long memories, Doha was a victory almost as sweet as that tasted by John Howard in the Wentworth Hotel ballroom in Sydney after winning a third term.

The crowning achievement was the promise of an eventual end to agricultural export subsidies, a chance to finally even up the trade rules that as long ago as 1960 had banned export subsidies on manufactured goods.

DOHA'S PROMISE

The fact that the WTO is back on the map is good news for Australia. On the eve of Doha, an editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* suggested that the WTO meeting "has the potential to launch a process that could have a more lasting effect on this country's future than either the election or the war [on terrorism]". That might be stretching it a bit, but the basic point that we have a vital national interest in a strong, effective WTO is well made.

The Doha commitment to new global trade liberalisation could not have come at a better time, with the world economy slumping and markets on edge after September 11. And following the failure to launch trade talks in Seattle in 1999, a repeat performance would have consigned the WTO to the side-lines of

international trade cooperation as countries (including Australia) look to do more mini-trade deals with individual partners.

Of course, Doha heralded only the start of negotiations, but the potential gains are considerable. Economic analysis done for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade estimates that halving global protection would boost world income by over \$700 billion per year; that is like permanently adding an economy the size of Australia to the global economy.

Negotiations now underway at WTO headquarters in Geneva are the ninth since the global trading system was stitched back together after World War II.

The previous eight "rounds" were conducted under the WTO's predecessor – the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). As Melbourne academic Ann Capling outlines in her book, *Australia and the Global Trading System: From Havana to Seattle* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), Australia was present at the creation of GATT. We were one of only a handful of countries closely involved in reconstructing the global trading system in the late 1940s; one of 23 original GATT signatories.

A lot was accomplished by the GATT. Average tariffs in industrial countries fell from 40 per cent in 1948 to 4 per cent by the mid 1990s. But much remains to be done.

It was only in the last set of negotiations – the Uruguay round (1986-1994) – that agriculture and services trade were addressed for the first time. And the rules are so loose on agriculture that trade-distorting subsidies are now almost at the record levels reached in the mid 1980s.

Indeed, Australia's interest in transparent, predictable global trade rules has never been greater. While our self-image as a trading nation is deeply embedded, we account for only 1 per cent of world exports. Our voice in trade forums is respected, but it is only one among 144 WTO members.

As a relatively open economy, we favour a WTO where the core business is trade liberalisation and where demands for politically-driven regulation of trade are contained. We oppose efforts to link trade with labour standards and environmental regulation. However well-meaning these concerns, they are not what global trade rules are about. Poor countries in particular see them as stalking horses for protectionism.

DON'T BELIEVE THE ANTI-GLOBALISERS

Needless to say, the WTO attracts more than its share of criticism from those who see it as arch-villain in their fight against globalisation. But when you strip away the polemics, the WTO does three basic things: it administers a set of trade agreements, it provides a forum for negotiations, and it helps to settle trade disputes.

The WTO is nothing more than a set of legally binding rights and obligations, including market access commitments to other members that set ceilings on levels of protection. This provides stability and predictability for commercial decisions about trade.

Beyond that, the WTO is a framework for the liberalisation of trade based on what countries are willing to negotiate. Where trade disputes arise, the WTO's dispute settlement process looks to ensure that countries' policies conform with their past commitments.

The WTO also takes account of the special circumstances of developing countries, which make up about three-quarters of the membership. Poor countries receive various forms of technical assistance from the WTO and they are given greater flexibility in implementing their commitments.

The most common misconception about the WTO is that it stops governments from doing things to protect the environment, the rights of workers, consumer safety, and the like. In fact, most WTO agreements make no attempt to guide governments on the content of their laws. What they do is seek to ensure that trading partners are treated fairly so that policies do not discriminate against foreigners, or between foreigners from different countries.

They also hold that trade barriers should be no more restrictive than necessary to achieve the policy objectives set domestically. In the case of quarantine regulations, for example, as long as countries take account of scientific evidence and do not arbitrarily treat foreigners differently, their policies cannot be challenged in the WTO.

Even then, the WTO has no power to force compliance upon governments. The success of the WTO depends on the willingness of members to abide by its rules and decisions and to recognise that certain principles of fairness benefit everyone.

A second complaint that the WTO is undemocratic also misses the mark. WTO rules are set by negotiations among member governments. Agreements are ratified by members' parliaments. Some argue that governments do not adequately represent their citizens, but this is not something that can be rectified in Geneva.

The WTO operates on the principle of consensus with every member in possession of a veto power. Voting has never been used in the WTO. This is both its democratic strength and its weakness.

WTO Director-General and former New Zealand Prime Minister, Mike Moore, likens it to "trying to run a parliament without a speaker, without whips, without parties and without speaking limits". This administrative headache looms as one of the biggest challenges for the current trade talks.

If the politicians are serious about trying to conclude negotiations by January 2005, the goal set at Doha, streamlining WTO decision-making may be unavoidable.

The notion that government services such as health and education are threatened by the WTO is another common misconception.

Under the relevant WTO agreement – the General Agreement on Trade in Services – governments are free to choose what to liberalise and free to regulate foreign suppliers. Nothing requires that services be privatised or liberalised. And there is also a special "carve out" for government services that are not provided commercially or in competition with other suppliers.

GREAT VALUE FOR MONEY

As international organisations go, the WTO is very lean. It has a staff of 500 people and its annual budget is about \$160 million – less than the travel budget of the World Bank. Some of its fiercest critics, including NGOs such as Greenpeace International, have bigger incomes. The World Wildlife Fund is more than three times as big.

For a modest contribution, Australia gets a fantastic deal out of the WTO.

Think about it. We pay less than \$2 million a year to a body that helps to safeguard annual exports currently worth \$160 billion, or around 20 per cent of our economy. Not a bad insurance policy.

There was quite a bit of cynicism around when Australia challenged the United States in the WTO over increased tariffs on our lamb exports. But what happened? As a result of a WTO legal process, politicians in the largest economy in the world – roughly 20 times the size of ours – conceded that the measures violated global trade rules. The high tariffs are now gone.

These days we sneer at the notion that we have "great and powerful friends" in international affairs. In any case, we are not used to seeing institutions in that way.

But imagine our economic fate without the WTO. A set of rules that keeps the big guys from trampling on the small is a friendship worth investing in.

John Kunkel is a former adviser to Trade Ministers Tim Fischer and Mark Vaile. His PhD thesis on "US market access policies towards Japan" will be published shortly by Routledge.



AUSTRALIA - JAPAN: ONE STORY SELDOM HEARD

Anne Henderson

It happened just over a decade after the end of the Pacific War against Japan, the bombing of Darwin and all that, and in some ways truly began a unique relationship. It was the signing of the Australia-Japan Trade Agreement in July 1957.

This year will mark the 45th anniversary of that agreement, won in spite of a lingering suspicion on the part of ordinary Australians towards the Japanese after World War II and a worry at Australia becoming a dumping ground for cheap Japanese goods at a time of high protection. The pact was no small achievement. And its anniversary should be widely celebrated in both Australia and Japan.

In Australia, as we begin the 21st Century, there seem just two topics capable of grabbing media notice when it comes to Japan – firstly there's the story, much repeated over a decade, of the downturn in the Japanese economy. And then, in more recent years, there are the many commemorations we have conducted in memory of fallen and imprisoned Australians more than half a century ago in the war against Japan. There is no reason not to report such stories widely.

But another story in the Australia-Japan relationship is not often heard. It's about success. And while the devil has all the best lines and such positive reflections are not the stuff of sensation, it is something that should engage us.

The Australian-Japan Trade Agreement in July 1957 marked a major turning point in Australia's identity as a trading nation and, nearly half a century later, underpins our continuing good relations with Japan. Even in times of economic downturn, Australian companies still make good profits in Japan.

Roderic Pitty in his chapter "The Postwar Expansion of Trade with East Asia" in *Facing North* (MUP 2001) argues that the 1957 Australia-Japan Trade Agreement began the era when trade "replaced the

legacy of war as the central feature of Australia's relations with Japan".

Yet, in the mid 1950s, there was nothing certain about the Trade Agreement signed between Australia and Japan in 1957. Under the 1932 Ottawa Agreement, Britain's dominions had agreed to imperial preference in their trading arrangements. At the time, Australia's balance of trade with East Asia was generally in Australia's favour. As well, less than one per cent of Australia's exports went to India while some 10 per cent went to Japan.

This imbalance would continue. As did imperial preference in Australia's trading relations. Then in 1956 during trade negotiations with Britain (as Britain moved closer to Europe) there was some modification. At the same time, some in the Menzies Government were beginning to recognise that Australia must seek some sort of trade agreement with Japan or risk losing valuable markets for commodities such as wool and wheat. This was only emphasised when the talks that evolved over a trade agreement stalled late in 1956 after the Japanese Minister for Agriculture, Kono Ichiro, showed a preference for subsidised United States wheat.

Japan's interest in an Agreement centred on the fact that many countries still discriminated against Japanese goods. A successful non-discriminatory trade agreement with Australia would be an important precedent for Japan in economic relations elsewhere. However, there were hurdles not even the Australians realised at the time.

At first, the Japanese had thought the terms offered by Australia were so favourable to them, it must be some kind of trick. This was only revealed two decades later by Ushibo Nobuhiko (leader of the Japanese delegation) to John Menadue, who had been Australian Ambassador to Japan in the late 1970s.

The Agreement of 1957 proved a milestone for Australians culturally still recovering from the effects of World War II. In 1954, a Commerce Agreement between Canada and Japan had set an important example. Yet in 1954 Richard Casey, as Minister for External Affairs, seemed somewhat ahead of the pack when echoing his department's view he argued that Australia "should treat Japan in a more civilised way". As well, Roderic Pitty makes clear in *Facing North*, there were conflicts between Australia's Departments of Trade and Customs, Commerce and Agriculture and Treasury about how to approach any steps to more favourable trading relations with Japan.

When it finally happened, Prime Minister Robert Menzies was not present at the hastily arranged Cabinet committee meeting which approved the terms of the final Agreement in 1957. Pitty suggests

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR A NEW VIEW

Nugent Bull opened the innings at St Joseph's College Sydney in 1926. Stan McCabe batted lower down the order. The latter went on to become one of Australia's greatest ever batsmen. The former created his own small niche in history, but on a different field of endeavour. Nugent Bull was the only Australian to play on the winning team in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39. He was fighting for Franco although he died fighting Hitler in the Battle of Britain. In *Fighting for Franco*, Judith Keene examines the myth that the Nationalist forces in Spain who won the Civil War consisted of patriotic Spaniards. Many groups on the European right were galvanized by the Nationalist cause - European Fascists and conservative Catholics - rallied to the figure of Franco, who appeared to be holding the line against secularism, modernism and Bolshevism. Many saw it as a chance to restage and win the battles for the political causes they feared they were losing at home - White Russians, French rightists, Irish nationalists, those fighting for religious reasons, simple adventurers and professional soldiers. Hear Judith Keene on the volunteers of the 1930s Right who fought with Franco.

SPEAKER: DR JUDITH KEENE (Department of History, University of Sydney & author of *Fighting for Franco*)

TOPIC: *Fighting for Franco - in the Spanish Civil War*

DATE: Tuesday 7 May 2002

TIME: 5.30 for 6.00 pm

VENUE: 41 Phillip Street, Sydney

FREE TO ASSOCIATES/ASSOCIATES' PARTNERS
STUDENTS \$5/OTHERS \$10

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this was designed so that Menzies “could dissociate himself from it [the Agreement] if McEwen’s political judgement proved wrong”. And yet, on 6 July 1957, the “Agreement on Commerce between Australia and Japan” was signed at Hakone in Japan.

Trade and pragmatism has dominated Australia’s relationship with Japan ever since. Which is why, some decades later, a new impulse is needed.

In April 2001, I was one of a select group of Australian and Japanese participants in the Australia-Japan Conference for 21st Century held in April in Sydney. The idea for the conference was initiated after talks between Australia’s Prime John Howard and former Japanese Prime Minister Mori. The intention was to bring together representatives of both countries beyond those experts on Australia and Japan usually present at such meetings at the business or diplomatic level.

The conference went well, set against a backdrop of research papers specially prepared in each country and the two days involved a wide ranging group of non specialist representatives in discussion and exchange.

At the conclusion of the conference, I wrote to Prime Minister John Howard expressing support for the exercise. However, from the outcome of discussions I had taken part in or witnessed at the conference, it was evident this was only a beginning. Conferences come and go and the relationship between our two countries deserved a more enduring manifestation.

It was assumed from the conference that some on-going program would evolve at the political-economic level. However, at the cultural level, I argued in my letter to John Howard “it would be a pity if the money, time and effort put into the concept were to leave both countries with little more than the record of a big event. Hence I am suggesting that with next year’s 45th anniversary of the 1957 ‘Commerce Agreement’ between Australia and Japan, an Australia-Japan Day be inaugurated”. The reply I received from the Prime Minister’s office gave qualified support for the idea. There has also been interest from the Japanese side.

There’s still time to do it.

Australians and Japanese have any number of cultural activities in common. Soccer and fashion are but two we could start with. An annual soccer match, a major fashion event could be organised. Food, movies, art, political and economic exchange also offer many outlets for celebration. And both Japanese and Australians are great lovers of the outdoors and great travellers.

An Australia-Japan Day on the anniversary of the Australia-Japan Trade Agreement could, over time,

become an important focus for any number of shared experiences, events which would involve a mass of ordinary citizens in Japan and Australia - way beyond the select handful who attended the conference in 2001.

February 2002 marked the 60th anniversary of the fall of Singapore. Minister for Veterans Affairs Danna Vale led a 28 strong party of veterans and widows to Singapore and Malaysia to pay tribute to the soldiers lost in the Malayan and Singapore campaigns against the Japanese in 1942. This was a fitting and emotional commemoration of a retreat that saw the loss of some 22,000 young Australian soldiers killed and another 15,000 taken prisoner.

How significant then that, in 1957, Japan and Australia could come together so positively in the Japan-Australian Trade Agreement. A moment in history academic Peter Drysdale, now professor at Australia-Japan Research Centre at the ANU, described in *Papers on Modern Japan* (ANU 1965) as "only fully appreciated when one remembers the serious political difficulties for the Australian Government when undertaking the negotiation of the Treaty ... most importantly, perhaps, the argument that Japanese imports were likely to displace those suppliers to whom Australia was bound by ties of traditional sympathy and long-standing trading relations". One of the most successful aspects of the treaty, Peter Drysdale pointed out, was "the provisions for emergency action exercised on both sides ... [and] in only five cases was emergency action recommended".

Yet some of that success has dwindled over the decades. The Australia-Japan Conference for 21st Century opened with much media attention, but also a message that it was being conducted at a time when an important bi-lateral trading relationship, between Japan and Australia, had become like a boring marriage. That the two countries had reached a point of taking each other for granted. An analogy that was a bit exaggerated but one that attracted some agreement.

It is certainly time for Australia and Japan to reappraise this relationship, so positively set in motion in 1957 in spite of historical negatives. It's time also to reinvest in the ways each country can appreciate the other. An Australia-Japan Day set around the 1957 Trade Agreement is, in my mind, worth planning for.

Anne Henderson is editor of The Sydney Papers



BOOK REVIEWS

John McConnell

EXASPERATING CALCULATORS: THE RAGE OVER ECONOMIC RATIONALISM AND THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST AUSTRALIAN ECONOMISTS

**By William Coleman and Alf Hagger
Macleay Press, pb 2001, rrp \$24.20
ISBN 1 876492 03 1**

The term "economic rationalism" pops up in all manner of debates and discussions. No matter that it lacks precise meaning. One time the target may be mean-spirited cost-cutting accountant types. Then it might encompass high-income directors intent on downsizing their company. Another time, the label may be directed at seekers of difficult economic reforms.

Anyone deciding in favour of market competition over government regulation and provision seems to qualify too. Supporting lower tariffs or privatising a government enterprise is sufficient to earn the "economic rationalist" tag. On other occasions, mainstream economics per se fits the bill.

Economic rationalism is associated with a variety of meanings. Invariably though, there is a common theme in the eyes of beholders of economic rationalism and that is opposition to some policy decision or practice. How did it happen, that this label gained such widespread currency in Australia as a term of abuse?

Modern usage of "economic rationalism" began just over a decade ago with the 1991 release of Michael Pusey's book *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: A Nation-Building State Changes Its Mind*. Dr Pusey, you will recall, is the sociologist who revealed that there were economic rationalists among Senior Executive Service personnel in the Commonwealth public service.

It didn't seem to matter that Michael Pusey omitted to define economic rationalism in this book. The point was that economic rationalists were there. Yes, there were strong advocates of "the dogma" in key positions within the public service.

Various commentators quickly expressed support for Dr Pusey's position. Many academic economists, meanwhile, seemed puzzled by all the fuss. While

Michael Pusey enjoyed celebrity status at a 1993 Melbourne University conference on economic rationalism, for example, many economists appeared to be struggling to understand the nature of the challenge.

In some cases they apologised. Just in case. It seemed the decent thing to do at the time.

A decade has now passed. Dr Pusey enjoys high academic status, while economics and economists may well have descended some distance down the respectability scale.

Enter William Coleman and Alf Hagger with their *Exasperating Calculators* book. The authors examine Dr Pusey's contribution to the economic rationalism campaign.

Their conclusion? At best, Michael Pusey's contribution is zero, they say. At worst, substantially negative. Dr Pusey, they allege, exhibits "a most unscholarly lack of concern about factual correctness". They criticise aspects of Pusey's methodology and disagree with some of his interpretations.

Coleman and Hagger admit, however, that they operate under a limitation. They do not have access to all of Dr Pusey's data. Murky territory therefore extends beyond the lack of definitional precision.

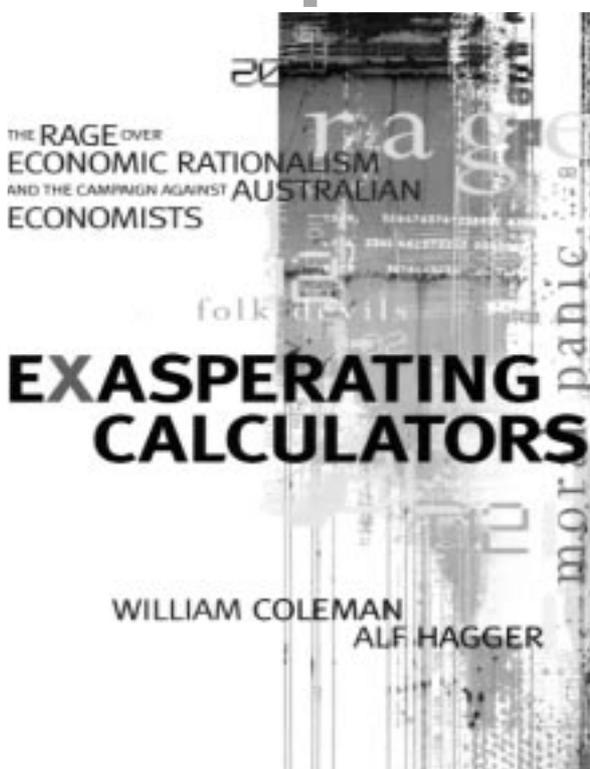
However, Dr Pusey did provide definitions subsequently. One was so extreme that presumably all of the so-called economic rationalists in the public service might have fitted easily into the proverbial phone box ("the dogma which says that markets and money can always do everything better than governments, bureaucracies and the law"). So it is that Coleman and Hagger systematically examine the "economic rationalism" phenomenon in *Exasperating Calculators*.

Part one provides background. Part two considers what the opponents of economic rationalism have said. Coleman and Hagger refer to this group as economic irrationalists. What economists have said constitutes part three. In part four, William Coleman and Alf Hagger adopt optimistic mode. There, they consider what economists might still say.

The authors argue that the economic irrationalists ran a campaign characterised by intellectual worthlessness. The campaign demonstrated ignorance of the economy and of economics while exhibiting the very dogmatism said to be the speciality of "economic rationalists".

Coleman and Hagger dissect statements made by those on the right and left of the political spectrum. They apply the microscope to a host of writers including Hugh Stretton, Eva Cox, Clive Hamilton, John Quiggin, Mark Latham, Anthony Giddens, Fred Argy, Robert Manne, John Carroll and Bob Santamaria. Along the way, they are not reticent in applying the scalpel.

All of this leads them to conclude that the campaign against the policy of economic rationalism has been "predominantly unsuccessful". However, the campaign against the economics profession, they believe, has been far more successful. "The end result," they decide, "has been to reduce the authority of economists, to reduce the respect for research and specialism in the public mind." Economists, they argue, should have realised that the campaign amounted to an assault on economics per se. Too many economists failed to see this. They are now paying the price.



Exasperating Calculators provides a valuable critique of the economic rationalism campaign. The authors stress the significance placed on the economic freedom of the individual by those commonly accused of being economic rationalists. They emphasise the importance of economic freedom to the public interest.

Economic rationalists/economists are often accused of promoting selfish behaviour. Yet more often than not, it is the supporters of economic reforms who are challenging vested interests and promoting competition in order to lower prices and improve services to consumers. It is the defenders of the status quo or others motivated by a vision of a protectionist Australia in the past whose actions help to retain or restore privilege and reward market power.

Coleman and Hagger therefore label “economic irrationalists” a conservative movement. They also spell out conventional economic approaches to the role of government. It is surprising how seldom these economic justifications for government intervention surfaced in the economic rationalism debate. There are moments when the authors could be accused of being pedantic. And in exposing opponents’ mistakes, they appear to harbour the assumption that such exposure will convince many readers that whole arguments are thereby destroyed. It may not be as simple as that.

However, when you consider the loopholes in the attack on economic rationalism and the feeble responses to it, it does not convey a sense of confidence about what passed for academic debate in the context of the economic rationalism campaign in this country.

**A LIFE OF EXTREMES:
JOURNEYS AND
ENCOUNTERS**
By Jeff McMullen
HarperCollins
Publishers, pb 2001, ARP
\$29.95
ISBN 0 73 227 0537

Jeff McMullen reflects on his years as a travelling storyteller in *A Life of Extremes: Journeys and Encounters*. Jeff McMullen, of course, is the former ABC *Foreign Correspondent*, *Four Corners* and *60 Minutes* reporter. It is just as well that he has a love of travel.

Jeff McMullen has travelled far and wide. Just as well, too, that he possesses an apparent ability to live close to danger. He has reported on many of the conflicts that have plagued the modern world. Many times while on assignment, he ventured into dangerous locations.

In *A Life of Extremes*, McMullen places great stress on knowing when to draw the line between going on and turning back. His chapters on reporting wars illustrate the hazards involved. Danger to life and limb can arise suddenly. Unpredictably.

Then, there is the danger of becoming a pawn in someone else’s war game.

Jeff McMullen’s stories begin with his childhood years in Penang where his father served in the RAAF. Boyhood experiences in a fascinating foreign environment were to translate into a travelling adult storyteller. His stories include war zones, celebrities, sports stars, politics, science and environmental issues. He covers civil conflict in Nicaragua and El Salvador, war between India and Pakistan, South America tribes, Vietnam moratorium days, Watergate, Charles Manson, the Antarctic, Mozambique, and a British traitor living in Moscow.

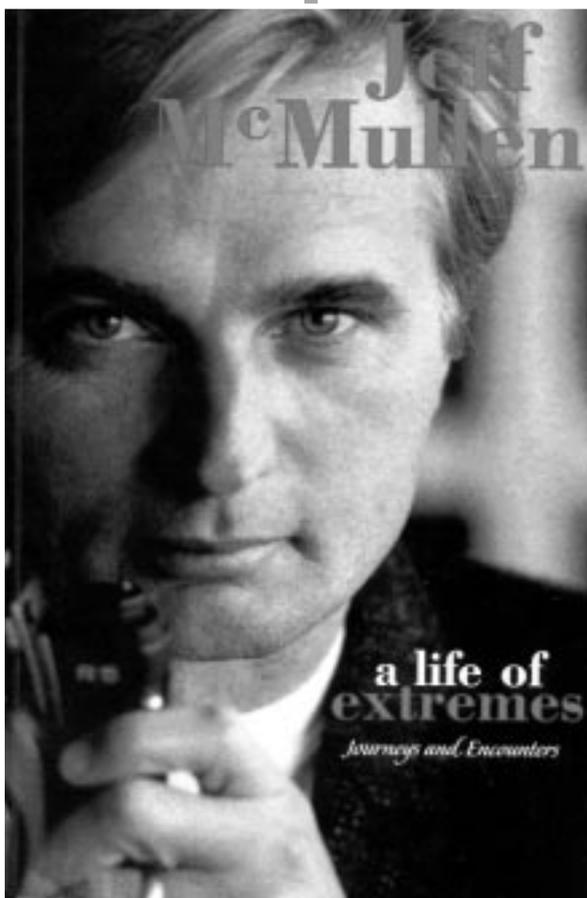
Chapters develop in interesting and unpredictable directions. “The Forbidden Cities” chapter, for example, discusses Genghis Khan, nomads in modern day Mongolia, nuclear explosions in the former Soviet Union and events surrounding one of the crew being bitten by a wild dog.

At the personal level, Jeff McMullen writes movingly of his mother and father. He also refers to how he was known in the White House during the Reagan years as that Australian correspondent that Kim Hoggard (then a White House staffer) married. He believes that his contribution to television reporting “was to put a new stress on authenticity, to catch things as they really

were, and to remove my ‘fingerprints’ from the film, letting the images have the maximum impact.”

Towards the end of the book, he is calling for a New Man and a New Woman on a higher evolutionary plane where minds will not surrender to violence, ignorance or superstition, where human beings will live in harmony with nature and each other. A nice thought, undoubtedly. Regrettably, 11 September provides just one signpost to the distance and difficulties that separate human beings from that desirable destination.

John McConnell is the author of several senior textbooks



THE KOKODA TRAIL - 1942 and cinematographer Damien Parer

Born in Melbourne, Damien Parer was an outstanding cinematographer, famous for dramatic footage of Australian soldiers in the Middle East and New Guinea during World War II. Parer trained as a still photographer, working with leading Australian still photographer Max Dupain, before transferring to moving photography.

Parer became renowned for his work as official film cameraman during World War II. He was sent to the Middle East in 1940, where he worked with Frank Hurley, another legendary Australian cinematographer. In 1942 Parer went to New Guinea, as the war intensified in that region. Parer's bravery and sixth sense often sent him to places where he obtained unique footage. He brought back the film of the Kokoda trail himself. Collaborating with Ken G. Hall and the Cinesound team, the footage was made into an Academy Award winning Cinesound Review newsreel: Kokoda Front Line. He once wrote to Ken Hall: "I want to get the look in a soldier's eyes as he goes forward towards the enemy, very probably towards his death..."

SPEAKER: NEIL McDONALD (Author and Historian)

TOPIC: *On the Kokoda Trail, 1942 – with Damien Parer, Osmar White and Chester Wilmot*

DATE: Tuesday 23 April 2002

TIME: 5.00 for 5.30 pm

VENUE: BT Training Room (Room 401)
Level 4, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney

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STUDENTS \$5/OTHERS \$10

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REVIEW OF THE REVIEWERS

Stephen Matchett

Men Who Would be Kings: Stephen Matchett looks at six recent biographies of Australian politicians

The history of Australian politics is a dull and conventional tale of government by people self-disciplined to the point of political bondage and who were very careful to never do much original thinking - which was pretty much the way the electorate liked it.

That at least is one message from six recent biographies of past and present politicians, Tracey Aubin, *Peter Costello: A Biography* (HarperCollins 1999), Shaun Carney, *Peter Costello: The New Liberal* (Allen & Unwin 2001), Christopher Cunneen, *William John McKell, Boilermaker, Premier, Governor-General*, (UNSW Press, 2000), David Day, *Chifley* (HarperCollins 2001), Peter Rees, *The Boy From Boree Creek: The Tim Fischer Story* (Allen & Unwin 2001) and Tony Parkinson, *Jeff: The Rise and Fall of a Political Phenomenon* (Penguin 2000).

For readers who like grandeur in their political history, most of these studies are dull going indeed. That they are published at all is a testament to the optimism of publishers that an audience exists for biographies of men whose achievements extended little beyond the exercise of personal ambition.

In fact, most of the colour and movement in the practice of twentieth century politics as portrayed in these books, came from squabbles over the spoils of office. While ideologues fulminated in distant outhouses, conversations in the corridors of political power generally had more to do with projecting administrative competence and an ability to generate wealth with an approximation of equity than with implementing great schemes of reform.

This is the most interesting thing about most of these books - their collective value lies less in what they tell us about their subjects as the milieu they worked in. From McKell to Costello, there is a remarkable consistency in the practice of Australian politics.

On the whole, these are biographies of very ordinary men doing very ordinary things. Only readers who can discover the divine in the average will find an

epiphany in the lives of Bill McKell or Tim Fischer. Only those who believe that over-weening vanity is the superior qualification for political life will be assured by biographies of Jeff Kennett and Peter Costello. Those who yearn for secular saints in politics will warm to the first study in a generation of Ben Chifley while others rendered suspicious by these sadly cynical times will wonder whether David Day has rendered his character as just too good to be true.

But while none of these men lived particularly interesting lives their biographies set out the golden rules for Australian political success. Work hard, watch your back and never frighten the electors with proposals for reform that they think might cost them money or which provide specific assistance to people disadvantaged by culture or ethnicity.

The ideal of communism in a nation of real and aspiring property owners ensured there was never a serious challenge to McKell or Chifley from the anti-democratic left. That Australians do not easily accept appeals to either equity or the national interest and will only adopt major structural reform when they are convinced that it will not hinder their individual well-being is the key lesson in Peter Costello's career to date. That an utter absence of policy thinking will do a politician prepared to work hard absolutely no harm should make Tim Fischer's career a model for every local government aspirant to higher office. The fate that awaits every politician once the electorate feels taken for granted is the one lesson that will be drawn from Jeff Kennett's career long after his repair of Victoria's economic crisis in the 1990s is forgotten.

The chattering classes are loud in their horror at the relentless will to prosper of the great majority of Australians and their distaste for those who obdurately refuse to do so. Sadly it was ever thus and the electorate has always viewed with caution populists who claim they have the solution to the nation's ills. The eternal bleat of the commentariat that Australia's politicians are bereft of programs to

create a just society is smothered by the electorate's absolute disinterest in innovation and profound suspicion of politicians with grand plans.

Even in the depths of the Depression, the voters assiduously eschewed the blandishments of the right and left and have always been suspicious about conferring unfettered power. While the Curtin Government was elected with a decisive majority in 1943, the electors declined to grant it sweeping economic regulatory powers in the following year's referendum.

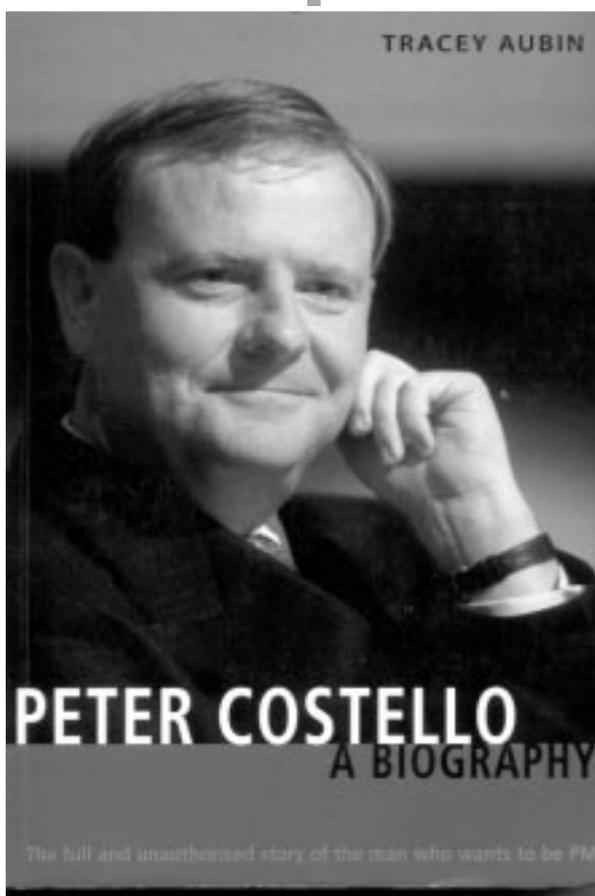
The will of an ambitious people intent on personal prosperity and caring little for causes that did not improve their individual circumstances have shaped leaders to the task. As Paul Keating and Jeff Kennett could attest, politics is a high risk game for people of restless spirit impelled to address crises which politicians more inclined to the safety of administration decline to confront.

While this may account for the paucity of grand drama in the norm of Australian politics, life is short and it takes a writer of extraordinary talents to make the biography of your average politician worth reading. In the case of most of these books, the sheer banality of the circumstances and characters of their subjects overwhelmed the authors.

This is particularly so in the case of Dr. Cunneen's biography of NSW Premier and Governor General,

William McKell. This is a worthy book, well researched and comprehensive, that sets out the circumstances of McKell's career and the achievements that made him an icon among conservatives in the New South Wales ALP. McKell established the dogma that continues to serve Labor well in New South Wales. He focused on discipline in government, never went beyond what the electorate would accept, built a rural base for the Party and most importantly, established the core orthodoxy that being in government was the only way that Labor could assist ordinary Australians.

Certainly Cunneen sets out how McKell created the modern Labor Party, but while the detail is there, the



drama of McKell's political life is missing. Without a collection of personal papers to draw on, the lack of a sense of the sheer rat cunning and ambition that helped him dominate one of the most bloody decades in the history of this most sanguine of organisations is understandable. However, beyond his love of sport, his interest in making a quid and his ability to get and hold the numbers, there is not much of a sense of the sort of bloke Bill McKell was.

But the absence of material on the private McKell does not excuse Cunneen from at least confronting a range of issues that would have made his a bigger book.

McKell did not enlist in World War One, which Cunneen explains was consistent with his opposition to conscription but this is far from an adequate discussion of his reasons. The book rejects the accusations of corruption occasionally levelled against McKell but there is no treatment of his apparently remorseless acquisition of property throughout his career.

Cunneen discusses McKell's conventional "nation building" political philosophy which was based on massive public works and government regulation but does not address how he differed from his opponents, notably Jack Lang.

Most important is the complete absence of any discussion of what made Bill McKell run. Cunneen chronicles his subject's remorseless rise through the ranks of the union movement and then the Labor Party as back-bencher, minister and premier without criticism or even acknowledging that there were alternative courses that perhaps were taken by men of greater principle or less political nous.

McKell was the definitive professional politician. He did not stand up to Lang in the brutal struggle for control of the NSW party in the 1930s and kept his head down when it did not suit him to get involved in factional brawls that might delay his remorseless climb towards the office of premier. This might have been because he believed that the only proper task for the Labor Party was to win and hold office and

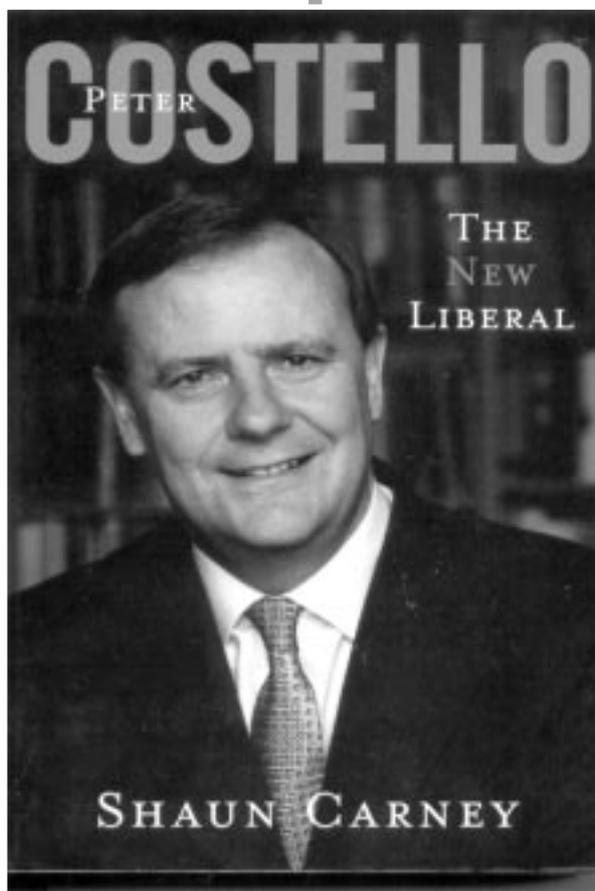
that he was convinced of his ability to lead it. But perhaps this most practical of politicians liked the life and income that high office provided. Certainly the boilermaker from Redfern grew prosperous in public life and was happy to end his public career as a knighted Governor-General.

The book's blurb claims that Cunneen "provides a vivid portrait of the development of this important and in some ways enigmatic Labor figure". In fact it does not and could not do any such thing in the absence of a comprehensive study of McKell's internal life and political thinking. Bill McKell would recognise Tim Fischer and Peter Costello as men like him, disciplined, ambitious, career politicians focused on winning. Certainly the biographies of these two senior Coalition leaders deal with the life of politics which is little changed in its essence since McKell led NSW Labor 50 years ago. But McKell would probably be amazed that anybody would have bothered to write their biographies, particularly in the case of Costello whose active career probably has a fair way to run. Costello authorised neither of the two books on him, and they are not campaign biographies in the American fashion but their greatest value for many readers will be as guides to how he might behave as prime minister.

In terms of structure, style and even content there is little to pick between them, with Carney having the marginal advantage of two extra years of Costello as treasurer to cover. Both books portray a man of enormous ambition and self-

regard with an acute sense of his own interest and belief that it is his manifest destiny to lead. Both cover his flirtation with left of center politics and while Aubin makes the case more strongly that Costello had some Labor sympathies in his youth, Carney certainly does not portray him as an ordained Liberal warrior from boyhood. Both books strive very hard to be fair and whatever Aubin and Carney's private views of Costello may be, they do not intrude.

The problem for both of them is that Costello is simply not that interesting, at least not for anyone who lacks the obsession with the minutiae of the



trade craft of politics that journalists and politicians and their staffers mistake for the fundamentals of public life. And Carney and Aubin are both reporters. They focus on distilling their story and communicating its essence rather than taking a discursive approach and exploring the bigger picture. For the political-tragics, there is a lot of detail on plots but little on policy. Costello's achievements in forcing labour law reform are discussed more for their political than social and economic impact and the GST is considered in an electoral rather than policy context.

The real interest in both lies in what they tell us about the state and status of politics in Australian life in the 30 years from the election of the Whitlam Government. Peter Costello grew up in an era when the ALP was the party of reform and both books demonstrate that he was close to Labor as well as Liberal people at university. But by the middle 1980s the old verities of government command over the economy and the necessity of strong unions to protect an industrial working class were no longer relevant and as the debate moved to the right so did Costello.

Aubin suggests that beneath the brutalities of daily politics there is not a great deal to distinguish Liberals like Costello from conservative ALP leaders. Costello is a 'New Liberal' one of the coming generation of conservative leader which,

... holds the old-style Liberal ways of privilege and patronage in contempt and believes in preferment through ability. Their origins are suburban middle-class, their backgrounds neither wealthy nor privileged. ... They are new-wave rationalist on economics and post-60s socially progressive. (292)

Carney agrees:

Costello's political approach is of a new type, built on ideas and competency and notions of merit. ... It is the approach of a New Liberal, a product of the Whitlam era of free university tuition, of a generation that is fiscally conservative but socially liberal, of a political conscience fashioned by the last years of the Cold War – and who draws self-assurance from being on the side that triumphed in that economic and intellectual battle (xxii)

Of course Labor supporters might argue that it was Paul Keating who made the hard yards in economic reform and fostered social change. Not everybody will be convinced by Carney and Aubin's arguments that Costello is any different from generations of middle class men who have prospered in conservative politics.

The test will come in a decade when Carney and Aubin's books will join the various Keating biographies as being of historical rather than contemporary political interest. Perhaps the Keating biographies will be in print, perhaps they will be forgotten while updated versions of these two lives of Costello will still be read. Given the speed at which past politicians are erased from the nation's political memory, there is a fair chance all of them will have disappeared.

Which is certainly the fate that will befall Peter Rees' quirky biography of Tim Fischer. Written when Fischer was out of the ministry and shortly to retire from parliament, it is far more the complete history of his political career than the Costello studies can be. But it is none the more informative or interesting for it and adds little to the record of Australian political history beyond chronicling the achievements of a man who some readers may find engagingly brave and others as incapable of distinguishing his own from the national interest.

Like the Costello studies, Rees' is not an authorised biography but there is a strong sense that the author found much that is sympathetic in Tim Fischer. The book's enduring theme is that unremitting self-discipline, boundless energy and an absolute self-belief can make pretty much anything possible.

Rees is careful to present Fischer as a working politician who made mistakes, such as his silence on Bjelke-Petersen's destabilisation of the Coalition in 1986-87, his criticisms of the High Court and his populist stance on indigenous issues. But he also points to his courage in staring down the gun lobby, defying One Nation and trying to maintain order amongst his extraordinarily self-righteous and self-interested colleagues in the National Party. Above all, Rees admires the way Fischer forced himself to meet his ambitions and overcame his innate reserve and his less than disciplined mode of expression. Much of the book reads like a tract designed to inspire those who doubt their own abilities by demonstrating what Fischer has achieved against the odds.

Since schooldays there has been a recurring theme in Fischer's life of overcoming obstacles and detractors. He has drawn on reserves of grit and determination and has achieved quietly, often to the amazement of those around him. (318)

Of course whether wanting to succeed is sufficient qualification for cabinet office is another thing and to Fischer's credit he told Rees of a crisis of confidence as he was sworn in as a member of the first Howard Government (pp245-246).

Tim Fischer was a retail politician, focused less on making policy as ensuring that people heard the summary version of why the Nationals knew best. He was a remorseless networker and tireless spruiker and because people believed that he was genuine his style of intensely personal politics worked. He was also a media tart, pursuing, and often manufacturing opportunities to get his voice on radio, his picture in the papers and his image on television.

Those who admire men who fight above their weight and leave the political ring undefeated will find delight and take comfort in the story of Fischer's public life. But Rees' greatest achievement is the description the book provides on the practice of politics in twentieth century Australia. Rather than just a biography this is a manual on how to survive in the political bear pit and to build a career based on little more than ambition and energy.

Bill McKell would have understood Tim Fischer's practice of politics far better than that of Peter Costello whose biographers portray operating at a far loftier level. McKell would probably have also recognised that Fischer had the much tougher task in trying to keep control of his Party when they could not see that the National's traditional task of keeping the subsidy trough brimming was no longer viable. His greatest achievement was containing the Hansonite terror throughout regional Australia in the 1998 election.

Like McKell, Tim Fischer understood that Australian politics is always more about the numbers than policy abstractions.

That Australians are not comfortable with conviction politicians is demonstrated by the fate of the subjects of the two best of this crop of recent biographies, Tony Parkinson on Jeff Kennett and David Day on Ben Chifley. Parkinson's is a marvellous book, transcending the mechanical reportage of most contemporary political biographies. Like Aubin, Carney and Rees, Parkinson relied on personal conversations and the press for his material. Like the others, he obviously talked at length to his subject and with them it is not an authorised biography.

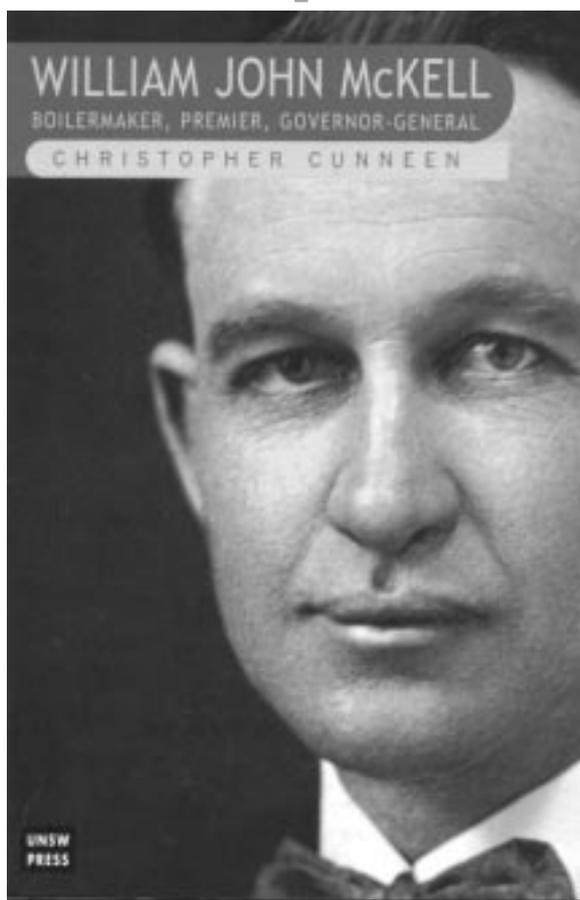
The distinction with some of the other books is that Parkinson understands the craft of political biography and has not merely chronicled Kennett's career but evoked the temper of the times. This is a book that communicates both the character of its subject and the circumstances that shaped his values and informed his decisions.

But like Aubin, Carney and Rees, Parkinson is exceedingly scrupulous in his desire to be fair to his subject. There are no scandals in the book and Kennett probably gets off lightly in Parkinson's treatment of many of the controversial decisions of his premiership which are attributed to his dislike of anybody whom he believed stood in the way of necessary change.

The Kennett version of his brawls with Liberal grandees Michael Kroger and Peter Costello are presented uncritically, and unsourced verbatim records, such as a transcript of a May 1994 argument between Kennett and Kroger (p 289), may better reflect the former's memory of the conversation rather than the latter's. In fact, Parkinson's strength in producing such a readable book is also his greatest

failing. While the book is not overwhelmed by the mechanics of scholarship, he expects his readers to take him on trust for the mass of quotations and assertions that are presented unsourced.

Of course, Kennett's career-long flamboyance makes him an easier subject than the forgotten McKell or the less than sparkling Costello. The fact that Fischer, for all his eccentricities was a constantly calculating political operator who spent his career talking a great deal but giving little away denied Reece the mass of extraordinary stories that Parkinson could have access to in writing about Kennett. But, even with the advantage of his author's celebrated lack of reserve, Parkinson still exercised the ability to make the most of material that in lesser hands could still have been a pedestrian account of a provincial leader brought down by too much energy and too little judgement.



The book's achievement is to replace the caricature of Kennett as a reactionary bully with the portrait of a complex man of enormous political courage who stuck to his guns in the face of withering contempt, variously from his own party, the media and the left-opinion elite and ultimately from the electorate.

Parkinson demonstrates that Kennett was a conviction politician, who acted on his own beliefs and experience rather than on coherent policy thinking. He was a man far more comfortable with a crisis to solve than finessing party support or keeping the electorate relaxed and comfortable. Parkinson demonstrates that Kennett had little capacity to adapt to changing circumstances or to make his case by argument. He fought his enemies with no regard to the consequences and did not distinguish between those he disliked personally like Michael Kroger and Peter Costello and those whose politics he deplored like Pauline Hanson.

Kennett was the Liberal for the times in 1992 when he took office from an incompetent and discredited Labor government and he revelled in the atmosphere of economic crisis as he set about slashing spending and chasing investment to repair the State's finances. The problem was that as Victoria's condition and the electorate's mood, particularly in the bush, changed, Kennett didn't. His extra-ordinary defeat in the 1999 election, followed by his inability to stitch together a deal with the independents who won the balance of power in the lower house, demonstrated that Kennett was a man who knew he was right and would not change.

Parkinson defines Kennett as a conviction politician, a man whose beliefs were shaped by his own experience rather than ideological reflection, but a politician who would always act with little regard for the consequences.

Jeff's strategy in politics had always been to confront his critics head on. Nobody was left guessing if they caused him displeasure or irritation. But in the aftermath of the 1996 election Kennett turned on his critics and tormentors with

unusual belligerence. The premier had a few scores to settle, notably with the opinion elites in the media, academia and the law. Those who called for constraint in his leadership style were ignored – they'd been proved wrong at the election and he would aim to prove them wrong again. In what had become his trademark style, Kennett simply upped the ante. The privatisation push was thrown into top gear, his drive to lock in budget surpluses was unrelenting, and his impatience for reform continued unabated. (242)

Jeff Kennett may have been a professional politician but he was never a political professional – intent on winning and holding office as an end in itself.

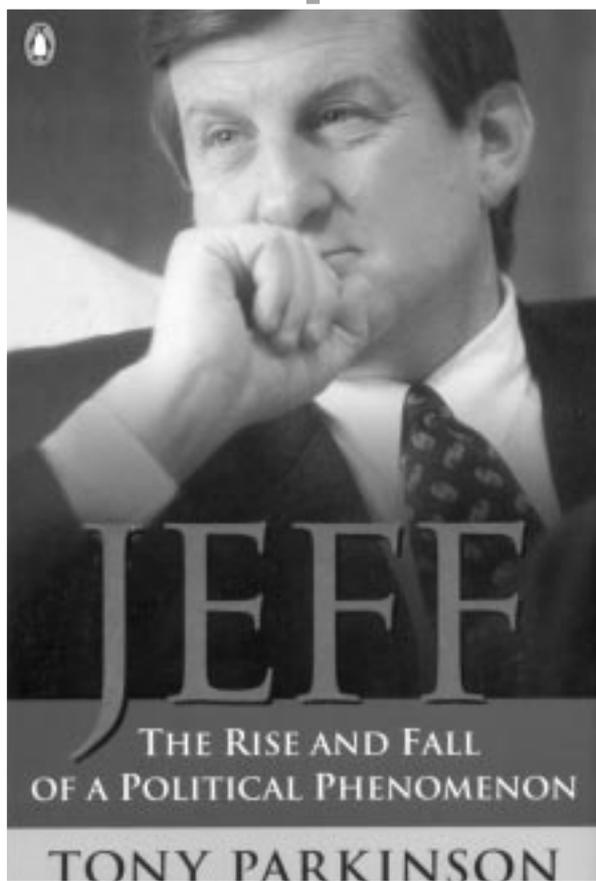
Neither was Ben Chifley, probably Australia's greatest conviction politician. David Day's biography, produced

in quick time after his 1999 life of John Curtin, chronicles an extraordinarily principled life in politics. Chifley had all the characteristics that made McKell such a success; he was a brilliant administrator, a shrewd judge of character and an extraordinarily hard worker. He also understood the importance of image and was always consistent in appearing as a modest man living a life without luxury or display.

Most of all, Day presents him as a man of great rectitude who was always prepared to put his policy beliefs before political place and paid the price throughout his life. Thus Day records how Chifley stuck to his railway union in the great strike of 1917 and how he never compromised in the struggle with Jack Lang, although his refusal

to treat kept him out of parliament for years. Most significantly, but presented in insufficient detail, he sets out how Chifley greatly contributed to the defeat of his government in 1949 when he refused to moderate an economic policy still based on wartime austerity.

The other great cause of that defeat, his decision to nationalise the banks was based on his Depression-born belief that control of economic policy was properly a function of the national government.



But whatever the sense of his political thinking, Chifley's timing was not good and he fell victim to an electoral suspicion of the power of regulatory central government. Re-imposing petrol rationing during the campaign probably did not help much either. As Day puts it, it seems that in the 1949 campaign Chifley had a political death wish (497).

Despite his lack of formal education, Chifley was a genuine policy intellectual with a coherent plan for national development. While much of his thinking based on the nation-building role of the Commonwealth is obsolete, his belief that the states were an unnecessary bureaucratic burden still resonates. In Day's presentation, Chifley defines all that is admirable in the last generation of Anglo-Irish Australia. He was brave, self-effacing and never lost sight that his job was to serve the people, be it as treasurer, prime minister or on the Abercrombie Shire Council of which he continued a member to 1947. If Chifley had not been born, Frank Capra would have had to create him.

Yet, even with the extraordinary character he had to work with, Day's task was difficult. Like McKell, Chifley left no collection of private papers and in trying to construct the private as well as the public man Day was forced to rely on marginal sources - and it shows. Far too much of the book is a history of Bathurst rather than a study of Chifley and far too little concerns his years as treasurer, prime minister and leader of the opposition.

Day similarly suffers in trying to reconstruct Chifley's personal life. He has no information on why Chifley did not enlist in World War One and very little on Chifley's childless marriage. He strives to demonstrate the length and complexity of his relationships with ladies not his wife but with precious little hard evidence. Beyond the public persona, Day has little to work on in trying to capture Chifley but the dimension of his achievement is apparent by comparing Cunneen's pedestrian study of the similarly silent.

While Chifley's ideal of state involvement in the economy seems extraordinary 50 years on, he was

very much a moderate in the left of centre politics of his age. He was a pragmatist who lost enough close campaigns to understand just how far he could cajole the electorate to surrender more power to Canberra. As Day describes the belief that shaped his career,

... he had a deep-rooted passion to improve the lives of his fellow Australians and he had the political skills to often achieve his aims. He managed to balance his principles with a practical appreciation of the political compromises and ruses that were necessary for success. As he advised Fred Daly: "You want to be scrupulously honest but there's nothing to stop you being a bit bloody foxy." (530)

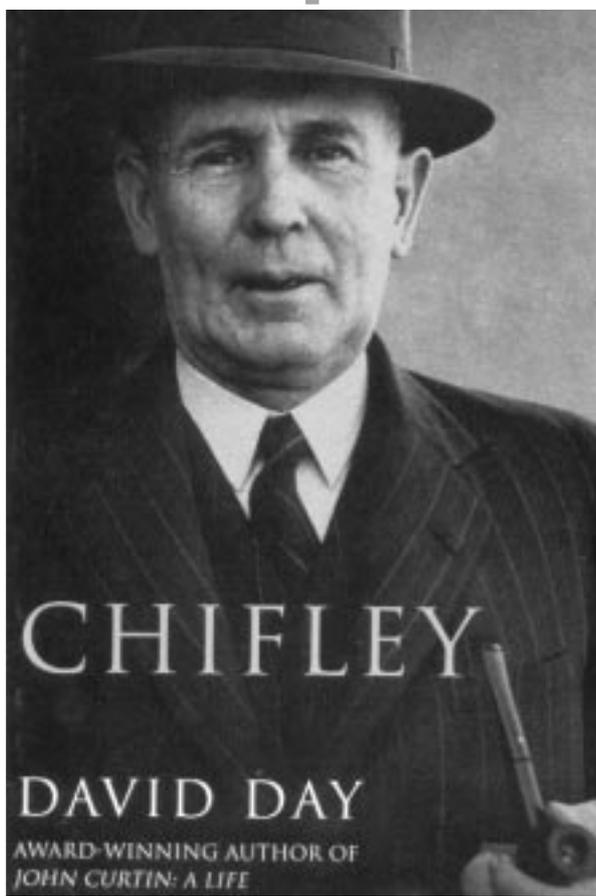
Like Kennett he failed only when he could not see that the time of crisis, in Chifley's case World War 2, had passed and that the electorate would no longer accept privation. The reserved Chifley would probably have thought the brash Kennett a mug, but while Ben would have deplored Jeff's disinterest in process and his tory-populism, he probably would have recognised a politician testing the extremity of what reforms the electorate would allow.

REVIEWS

These two biographies have much more useful to say than the mass of commentary on the failure of imagination of the political class with which academic ideologues regularly belabour us in the broadsheet press. But the insight into Australian politics, past and present found in this crop of biographies, did not particularly interest the nation's literary editors and the reviews were sparse.

And those that did appear were generally less than enthusiastic. Richard Krever, writing on Cunneen's book in the *Law Society Journal* (2001) 39 (4) LSJ 87 was not impressed:

His failure to discriminate between important facts and those that add little to the narrative leave the reader too often drowning in trivial details ... The result makes for an often terribly dry read of a life through very exciting times.



Writing in the new and estimable on-line *Journal of Australian Studies Review of Books* (September 2001), Jim Hagan could find little positive to write about in Cunneen's book "... (it) never gets inside the man, and we learn nothing more than what the printed sources already tell us about what made him tick" before damming it with faint praise:

... this is a useful book. Scholars will find it a valuable guide to sources, and lay readers a well-written story that is often absorbing.

The late Graham Little played the man not the ball in his discussion of Aubin's biography of Peter Costello (*Age*, 11 December 1999). He criticised Costello for his politics and Aubin for not realising that her subject was just another political opportunist:

Aubin has him a candidate for some "third way", convinced that what looks like opportunism and outright self-contradiction are really signs of his embrace of diversity.

Carney's biography received more media attention, possibly because it appeared closer to the last election, than Aubin's and probably because up until the last three months the smart money was on Costello replacing John Howard.

This was certainly what Sally Loane thought: "There are fascinating parallels between Peter Costello and Kim Beazley ... their head-to-head clash, as party leaders, will be worth watching." (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 July 2001). Beyond providing her usual acute political judgement, Loane confined herself to a light, bright chat about those aspects of Costello's life that interested her, "as someone of about the same age".

John Button (*Australian Book Review*, September 2001) indulged himself in an elder statesman's jeremiad on the parlous state of politics and ignored the book beyond describing it as "well written and thoroughly researched". What most concerned Button was the absence of new ideas in politics, or at least ideas that he approved of. And of course, the Australian people agree with him:

All the signs, surveys, focus groups, radio talk-back, flirtations with maverick independents show that Australians are looking for something better from Canberra.

Except for those Australian people who don't:

Followship is more in vogue than leadership. Political parties veer a little to the Left and a little to the Right according to the staccato command of opinion polls.

It was a bit steep for Button to criticise a practising politician for keeping instep with public opinion,

particularly when Costello shares his views on Reconciliation and the Republic. And it was even steeper for Button to ignore Carney's book and use his space to pontificate instead.

Christine Wallace produced a far more intelligent piece (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 September 2001) which argued that two biographies of Peter Costello was a civic benefit: "... contemporary political biography is one antidote to the dumbing down of Australian political reporting." Wallace praised Carney's neutrality in not producing the "whitewash" of unnamed "observers" who expected his access to Costello suggested that the book offered no greater insight into the Treasurer than Aubin provided:

What strikes the reader is the consistency of their accounts of Costello's sliced-white-loaf life, albeit one wrapped in the gold foil of early recognition and publicity rather than a plastic bag.

Like Wallace, Tony Wright (*Bulletin*, 14 August, 2001) thought Carney's book would make good reading for people anxious to learn about the supposed Liberal prime minister in waiting: "The book will become an important resource for the those who wish to explore the paths that have taken Costello to the doorstep of the prime minister's office." As for the book's silence on the contradictions in Costello's political past, his apparent flirtation with Labor, his marriage in an Anglican Church despite his devoutly Baptist background, Wright believed the fault lay with subject rather than author:

He appears to have so successfully compartmentalised his life that he allowed some doors to open but kept the one to his heart firmly shut.

Inevitably, biographies of a life where the best, or at least most important, times might yet be to come must inevitably fail to satisfy. A point well made by Mike Steketee in a piece that focused on Costello rather than Carney's book until the conclusion, (*Australian*, 8 September 2001).

This is a well crafted journalist's account. It is generally well researched, but suffers from some superficial analysis of political events and lapses at times into not much more than a chronology of events under the Howard Government. But it offers real insights into a person yet to reach the climax of his political career.

The treatment of Rees' biography of Tim Fischer was much the same, focusing on the man not the book. Jean Ferguson (*Illawarra Mercury*, 2 June 2001) appeared to think that the former validated the latter:

Following a spate of boring political biographies comes the thoroughly enjoyable and readable story of the one Australian politician admired and respected by members of all parties as well as the electorate."

Jeremy Fenton was equally tough-minded (*Northern Rivers Echo*, 4 January 2002).

Rees' book is an appropriate work to go down on the public record regarding what made Tim Fischer the man he is ... generally recognised as a politician of rare worth in his integrity and connection to everyday Australians.

The late Buzz Kennedy produced the silliest exercise in this genre (*Townsville Bulletin*, 26 May 2001). "Nobody in any part of politics or among the public dislikes Tim Fischer ... in the public mind and in private life a down-to-earth decent bloke." And on and on it went with the only reference to the book being to call it, "a workmanlike job". It ended with the suggestion that Mr Fischer should be the first president of the Australian Republic.

Ward O'Neill (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 June 2001) did not gush but did devote most of his space to discussing Fischer's career rather than the book and suggested that while he might be a good bloke his time had past.

Caught by the non-politically correct agenda setters of the Liberal Party and tormented by the hydra-like Hanson, Fischer as National party leader was trapped like Laocoon and struggled to get free. The agenda of the good old days of the Country Party was dead and buried with Jack McEwen, Akubra hats and R.M. Williams outfits not withstanding.

Shaun Carney (*Australian Review of Books*, June 2001) also focused on Fischer's career but placed it in the broad context of the Australian way in politics that rewards the obsessive plodder:

Depending on how you want to approach the Tim Fischer story, it is either a lesson in the wonders of our democracy or a cautionary tale demonstrating the mediocrity of our public figures.

Carney disputed Rees' sympathetic treatment of Fischer's handling of the One Nation challenge and argued that the book's own evidence demonstrated that Fischer was playing the populist card in the Bush on Mabo and engagement with Asia before Pauline Hanson appeared. This mild criticism of author and subject was mollified by the generosity of Carney's concluding judgement where he described the biography as,

... probably the first rough draft of the course of the Howard government and its trials with the gun lobby, globalisation, One Nation and the GST. ... Especially intriguing are Fischer's 1998 campaign diary notes, published here in detail. It is a credit to Fischer's generosity that he has made them available and to Rees' skill as a journalist that he has made them so readable.

There was far less affection for Jeff Kennett in the surprisingly sparse coverage of Tony Parkinson's biography. Writing in the *Age* (14 August 2000) Nick Economou dismissed it "as a careful chronicle of political and, sometimes, personal events" which did not provide anything new. Parkinson's portrait of Kennett as a reformer battling entrenched interest was wrong because there was no organised opposition for most of his premiership:

Community groups were effectively marginalised. Private interests could hardly wait to get their hands on privatised public infrastructure ... Constantly cheered on by economic commentators and the business community for its practical application of neo-classic liberal ideology, the Kennett government faced few barriers.

Except that Kennett kept driving his own reform agenda long after the sense of a crisis in the state economy had passed and as the electorate grew increasingly uneasy about his zeal for change. Economou missed the whole point of Parkinson's book - how a man so lacking in conventional political skills managed to win office almost in spite of himself and hold it for two terms.

Mike Steketee (*Australian* 22 July 2000) was also less than impressed with Parkinson. While it was "a good reporter's book" Parkinson "too readily accepted" that Victoria was in a state of economic crisis when Kennett was elected. Steketee also dismissed the argument that it was an extraordinary achievement for Kennett to win a second term because "Labor was beyond the political pale". Yet Steketee did not dispute the core of Parkinson's argument, that Kennett would not budge when he thought he was right and was focused on policy rather than political reality:

Kennett's fiscal puritanism earned him plenty of cheers from the business community, ratings agencies and commentators. However, he came to see it as a virtue in itself rather for what it could deliver.

It was not, Steketee argued, a blueprint for political survival with an electorate very willing to dismiss leaders who have outlived their usefulness in protecting or restoring suburban prosperity:

Voters in recent times seldom have used their vote to reward politicians for a job well done. Rather they have made judgements on how they have been affected by particular decisions or whether leaders have become too big for their boots.

Steketee's political obituary for Kennett could also have served for Chifley who stuck to his own ideas in defiance of the voters. But this was not a theme that received the attention it merited in the lamentably few treatments of Day's biography. In its stead was a pointless debate over sex.

Day very much brought this on himself through his interest in Chifley's relationships with women. Of course this is an entirely legitimate subject. A biographer that ignored his subject's sex life would not be doing the job of presenting their subject in full. The problem is that Day's repeated inferences that Chifley had long term affairs throughout his marriage is not supported by anything beyond circumstantial evidence and hearsay. The result was that Day was caught up in an argument over his evidence on Chifley's sex life which took up media space better devoted to a discussion of the first modern scholarly biography of possibly Australia's greatest political leader.

Tony Stephens (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 November 2001) produced his usual balanced news report of the debate and quoted one descendant of Mrs Chifley as suggesting that whether Chifley had mistresses or not hardly mattered. Which was not the view of Ben's grandnephew Ephraem Chifley, (*Age*, 3 December 2001), who thought it mattered very much indeed:

Day's speculations on Chifley's intimate life amount to an attempt to recruit Labor's most famous icon to the cause of sexual

libertarianism. ... (he) has tried to make of the Light of the Hill a strobe light in a girlie bar.

Just as Day was convinced that Chifley had a sex life outside his marriage, Ephraem Chifley was convinced that he didn't but not unreasonably suggested that it was up to Day to make the case. And the sting was in the tail - "In the overcrowded marketplace of Australian history it is understandable that Day wants to find his niche. It is a pity that history itself has been the casualty."

Day responded (*Age*, 6 December) that Chifley's long adulterous relationships hardly detract from his political achievements. He argued that he was trying to find the whole life of the man rather than his brief ten years of political power:

... it was not that I had a prurient interest in Chifley's sex life. It was just that in writing - as with my earlier biography of John Curtin, I have sought to get away from the conventional top-heavy political biographies.

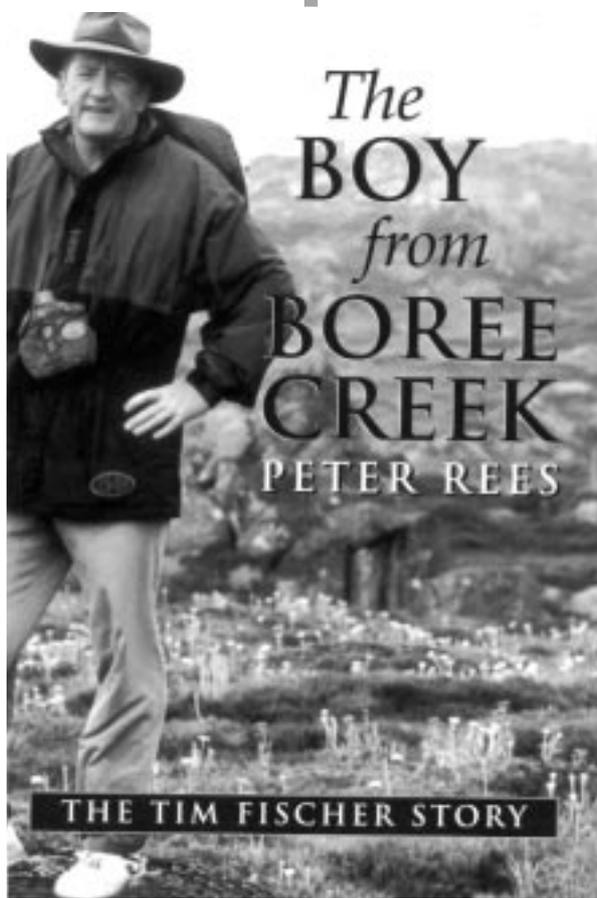
Which did not address Ephraem's charge that Day had "no compelling evidence to support his allegations".

The only serious reviews expressed regret for what should have been a bigger book. Gideon Haigh (*Bulletin*, 4 December 2001) did not like the "turgid and repetitive style" and argued that Day ran his

own "dated" lefty agenda throughout the book:

The stereotypes are entirely predictable. Bosses are beasts, conservatives who express anxiety about communism are red baiting populists and bank nationalisation was not an ideological *idee fixe* but inspired by Chifley's "deep-rooted passion to improve the likes of his fellow Australians".

According to Haigh, the biography failed to analyse either what Chifley stood for or why he stood for it: "... (it) might have been redeemed by a thoughtful critique of the subject's creed. ... the nobility of his motivations shouldn't prevent their analysis." And it



failed to capture the man. Day produced “a documentary chronology of exhausting length ... but Chifley's inner life is as obscure at the end of the book as its beginning”.

A view shared by John Edwards (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December 2001) in a review that was all the tougher for its generosity. Although Edwards concluded that Day “does not have it in him to write a bad book” much of his space explained in detail why this was a very ordinary one. In particular Edwards contrasted the extraordinary portion of the book Day devoted to Chifley's early life and never ending concern with the parish pump politics of his native Bathurst and the inadequate coverage of his years as treasurer and prime minister:

The narrative of Chifley's shire comes at the expense of a fuller discussion of Australia's position in the negotiations to create the IMF, the World Bank and the GATT, the conflict between the war effort and the preparations for peace (and) the development of full employment as the central postwar policy goal ...

Like Haigh, Edwards' substantive criticism was that Day had not captured the private man and that the relentless plainness of the public Chifley made for dull reading. As Edwards put it,

There is not really much sense, in the end, of why we want to read about Chifley at all. For all the vitality of his sex life, the ferment of his times and the greatness of his achievements, the cultivated ordinariness of Chifley is the most enduring note.

Given the absence of private papers it is hard to see what alternative Day had to writing this life of the public man, but for readers too cynical to accept the presentation of Chifley as secular saint the book is inevitably disappointing. But while it may not be a rattling good read, Day's portrait of Chifley captures the Australian political tradition. While Chifley might have been an avuncular old stick-in-the-mud, as Gideon Haigh puts it, he understood that political reform in Australia was best achieved when taken very slowly and only when the electorate was comfortable. His political MO was to argue a case exhaustively and never assume that the voters were either too stupid or apathetic to follow a policy debate. Chifley only failed when he could no longer convince the electorate of the need for change - but at least he died trying.



THE BLAME GAME - 11 SEPTEMBER AND ALL THAT

The terrorist attacks in Washington and New York on 11 September 2001 year shocked us all but there was nothing surprising in the response of some media chatterers, according to Stephen Matchett.

The conservatives rattled their sabres, wrapped themselves in the bloody shirt of outrage and harrumphed at what they alleged was the liberals' orthodoxy of appeasement. The liberals wrung their hands damply and in some cases stopped just short of claiming that the United States had brought the terrorist attacks on itself.

The conservative columnists did most of the name calling and claimed that they spoke for the higher commonsense of support for the United States which was accepted by all right-thinking Australians and rejected by all sorts of wrong-thinking ones, generally employed in universities and the ABC.

For example, Andrew Bolt provided brief quotes that he claimed demonstrated that a range of broadcasters and academics shared views in common with Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein:

Just as we saw during the Cold War, many left-wing commentators and academics are giving us the usual defeatist advice - don't hit back, America is just as bad, give in. (*Herald Sun*, 29 September 2001)

And in case anybody missed his point he went on to denounce aspects of the ABC's coverage of the crisis as un-Australian:

The tragedy in the United States has - in a much, much smaller way - been a tragedy for the ABC too. It has ruthlessly exposed “our” ABC's greatest flaw - its overwhelming, dated and myopic left-wing bias. It is a bias that is eating at the ABC's entire credibility. How can Australians believe the broadcaster they fund represents their interests when on this crunch issue - protecting our civilisation

from terrorism - so many ABC staff seem so wildly out of touch. (*Herald Sun*, 4 October 2001)

P.P. McGuinness similarly denounced unspecified purveyors of a leftism that is,

... a strange mix of anti-Americanism and admiration for dictatorial regimes professing to be of the Left. ... terrorism is condoned when directed against regimes that govern with the consent of their people as being the fault of those regimes (a classic case of blaming the victim). (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 October 2001)

There was more of the same from Miranda Devine:

Most letter writers to both Australian tabloids and broadsheets spoke with one voice. So, too those who are paid for their opinion. They were united against the Great Satan, the US, the purveyor of globalism and inequity, which should have seen what was coming and which brought its fortune on itself, the inevitable result of the haves having more than the have-nots (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 September 2001)

It is hard to find a reputable commentator who is guilty as charged in arguing that the United States government had brought the attack on itself by ignoring the legitimate grievances of the oppressed, but some came close. Like Kenneth Davidson, who explained that decades of US policy in the Muslim world "created Bin Laden" - in particular by stationing forces in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War and by training the Afghan resistance in its war against the USSR:

Terrorism will thrive while the West refuses to face up to and deal with the issues that provide fertile ground for recruiting terrorists. Every society - Western as well as Islamic - has its quota of madmen who in abnormal times are capable of fomenting terrorism. (*The Age*, 5 November 2001)

Robert Manne produced a tough-minded version of the same argument. He accepted that the West had to respond with a "global counter-terrorist campaign" to prevent more terrorism. However, he agreed with Davidson that the West, specifically the United States had created a fertile environment for "terrorists" with "a medieval mindset":

The contemporary politics of Western self-absorption, the belief that we will be able

to continue in comfort while much of the world struggles to survive is not only immoral but also unlikely to succeed. It is not true that the clear and present danger of terrorism can be overcome by a long-term change of attitude with regard to Third World needs. It is, however, true that indifference to these needs does provide the ideological soil in which anti-Western and anti-American fanaticism and hatred take root. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 September 2001)

Then were those who dusted off the old moral equivalence argument. Thus Dr. Robert Wolfram:

This conflict is not about eradicating terrorism, it is about saving American face. Bin Laden is not international enemy No.1 (sic) because he is a billionaire sponsor of terror (in a way that nation-states are not), but because he has insulted the United States with surprise and evil imagination (and the last people to try that were nuked). ... Pacifists may be dreamers, but militarists are nightmare-bearers. Their propagandists (on both sides) are taking us to the edge of a global psychic meltdown. (*The Age*, 23 October 2001)

The most extraordinary exercise in blaming the United States, for pretty much everything was by Philip Adams (*Australian*, 16 October 2001):

Let us not share the madness with a nation that, instead of understanding its history, believes its own publicity. Confusing itself with the sanitised representations in Disney theme parks, the US fails to see that it has always been among the most violent nations on earth.

Adams then produced a selective list of infamy over two centuries to make his point that the United States (variously government and people) was consistently racist and violent and generally complicit in state terrorism.

The US never stopped playing footsies with Christian fascism, with governments that slaughtered, disappeared, tortured and abused their hapless opponents. The US has, for decades, provided terrorist regimes with weapons, training and financial support

Adams did not explain what the United States should do in response to September 11, but Australia's

responsibilities were clear: "We must try to rein them in, not urge them on. The United States has to learn that its worst enemy is the United States."

Pat O'Shane produced the most explicit version of this argument in a letter to the *Bulletin* (26 September 2001) comparing the use of nuclear weapons against Hiroshima and Nagasaki, "every bit as cowardly and despicable" with the events of 11 September:

No, the US is not an innocent victim. For at least 50 years the CIA has engaged in terrorist activity across the world; and thousands, if not millions, have died (sic) on their cross. ... No decent person can condone what happened, but unless we face some realities that have been growing for a long time - unless we demand peace, justice and equity in the world in place of greed, aggression, and hate - then we are doomed to continue the cycle of destruction.

The letters pages were redolent with the same argument - at times even more hysterically expressed. There was the gentleman who thought the attack on the Twin Towers was too convenient for the US Government and suggested similarities between bin Laden and Lee Harvey Oswald. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 September 2001). And there were numerous suggestions that the United States, variously by being wealthy or for conducting a foreign policy in its national interest had brought the attacks on itself, such as this gem, quoted in full:

Nobody is saying we are glad those poor people died, nobody is rejoicing against the Americans or patting the terrorists on the back. We are simply saying that the US cannot afford to sit back and cry innocent victim. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 September).

To which sort of argument Miranda Devine replied:

It shouldn't be surprising the Blame-the-Victim, Excuse the Perpetrator mentality employed by some liberal intellectuals so handily when it comes to crime should prove so adaptable. But it's hard to understand the depth of anti-American feeling here, in a country which in the last world war was being bombed by the Japanese and was only saved from a terrible fate by the Americans. The US also saved Europe from Hitler, defeated communism in the Soviet Union, saved

Kuwait from Saddam Hussein and stopped Milosevic's slaughter in the Balkans. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 September 2001)

Sadly, having posed the question she did not bother to provide to answer. It was an unedifying dispute in which many the participants argued from prejudice rather than reasoned analysis and debate. But that's exactly as it should be according to Catharine Lumby, who provided an incredibly prescient justification for both sides in this sad brawl in a piece which was published on 12 September, but probably written some days prior. She criticised Immigration Minister Ruddock for dismissing a television program on the migration detention centres as "biased":

This concept of media bias relies on an extremely simplistic notion of objectivity and balance. It assumes that every media story has at least two sides and that truth emerges from a ping-pong style exchange between them. It ignores the value that expertise or personal experience brings to some points of view - that all opinions are not, in fact, equal. (*Bulletin* 12 September)

And that facts mean whatever we want them to mean.



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LES CARLYON'S "THEY"

Step forward Carlyon Mark I. This embodies the considered work of journalist and author Les Carlyon. A winner of the Walkley Award (1971) and the Graham Perkin Australian Journalist of the Year Award (1993), Carlyon has held the positions of editor of *The Age* and editor-in-chief of Herald and Weekly Times group. The work of Carlyon Mark I can be found in his recent book *Gallipoli* (Macmillan, 2001). Researched in Australia, Britain, New Zealand and at the Dardanelles itself, this is an example of journalistic history at its finest. Les Carlyon tells the story of the Allies (Australian, British, French and New Zealand) who fought on the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915 – along with that of the Turkish defenders. It is a first-rate study. The text is clear and the language is lively but restrained. Moreover, quotes are sourced and assertions are supported by evidence.

Now, step forward Carlyon Mark II. Same journalist; manifestly different style. Les Carlyon's "*Bulletin* Essay" – written in the wake of the November 2001 Federal election – created considerable interest (it was published in *The Bulletin* in the issue dated 4 December 2001). The Carlyon piece is a criticism of John Howard's media critics. It was welcomed by some of the Prime Minister's opponents and supporters alike. Alan Ramsey is in the former camp. Writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (1 December 2001), he described Carlyon's *Bulletin* article as "the political essay of the year, about the politician of the year that will surely enrage 'the chattering classes' of this and every other year". *Sunday Herald Sun* columnist Michael Barnard is one of the Prime Minister's media barrackers. He praised Carlyon's *Bulletin* Essay which he described as propounding a "simple truth" (*Sunday Herald Sun*, 16 December, 2001).

This overlooks the fact that there is more than one category of truth. There is revealed truth – usually of the theological kind – which people believe what they want to believe. And then there is the truth which is built on fact established by evidence. The essential problem with Les Carlyon's *Bulletin* Essay is that it sought to establish a case without reference to facts or evidence.

THE SONG OF "THEY"

Les Carlyon set out to discredit "the song" about John Howard which he maintains "has been playing on the op-ed pages of our broadsheets for years now". According to Carlyon, the singers follow a score which maintains that John Howard "is an interloper" whereas Paul Keating "had greatness in him". The song, according to Carlyon, continues:

Howard sees postcards and [Paul] Keating painted great frescoes in our minds. Howard is mean-spirited and Keating is about kindness and goodness. Howard is suburban and Keating had a large mind.

Elsewhere in the *Bulletin* Essay – other attempts were made to summarise the position taken by the Prime Minister's critics:

- **It's all right to say Howard is short, although it was not all right to say Bob Hawke was short. It is also all right to liken Howard to Hitler, Attila and Vlad the Impaler and to say that he is evil and unscrupulous. It is all right to say that this man has just about single-handedly made Australia fearful, nervous, insular, racist, backward-looking, heartless and intolerant. Some of the critics write books about the barren years and the failure of leadership and these sell in their hundreds.**
- **The trouble with the anti-Howard brigade is that they keep delivering the same twee sermon. Why we should all feel guilty. This is not the Australia I love. How can I tell my children what Howard did to [tick box] Aborigines/republicans/refugees/the broad-faced potoroo? Broadsheets have changed and readers, we are told, want different things, but do they really want the same sermon over and over? No light, no shade, no analysis, no humour – just Johnny did it. The tabloid editors have more sense.**

Les Carlyon's essay was a great polemical piece of writing. That's why it created such interest. The author argued that "few Australian politicians have been attacked so well and so often as Howard". It is true that John Howard's social agenda (on the republic, reconciliation, and treatment of asylum seekers) has been widely criticised in the media. But it is also a matter of record that his economic reform agenda (moving the budget to surplus, privatisation, labour market deregulation and the tax reform) has been widely supported by both working journalists and editors. In his *Bulletin* Essay, Carlyon

POLITICS AND THE YOUNG VOTE

Nicola Roxan MP (Labor, Member for Gellibrand) and Christopher Pyne MP (Liberal, Member for Sturt) are two of the younger faces in federal parliament. Both are among a group of new younger MPs providing fresh views. Nicola Roxon, after only one parliamentary term, is now Shadow Minister for Child Care, Family Support and Youth. Christopher Pyne, a former State President of the Young Liberals, has a personal website – "PYNEONLINE".

Both major political parties are witnessing a drop in the number of young voters interested in mainstream politics. The success of independents and smaller, issues dominated parties in recent elections has also drained votes from the major parties. Is politics being refashioned? Why the alienation among the young in regard to the major parties? How can both the Coalition and Labor win over the coming generations? Hear what it will take from two MPs who started young.

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acknowledged that "there are lots of right-wing commentators on the op-ed pages too" and commented that "often their faith in market economies and globalisation is as simple-minded as the other side's hatred of Howard".

JOHN HOWARD'S MEDIA FRIENDS

In a sense this understates the reality of the contemporary Australian media. The fact is that previous Liberal prime ministers – including Robert Menzies and Malcolm Fraser – had very little support among journalists, commentators and editors. Not only does John Howard's economic agenda engender widescale backing. More importantly, his social agenda has support in the media. The barrackers for John Howard – who are also critics of Howard's critics – make up quite a significant group. Including working journalists (Piers Akerman, Amanda Devine, Tim Blair, Frank Devine, Paul Sheehan, P.P. McGuinness, Angela Shanahan, Alan Jones, Stan Zemanek) and commentators (Christopher Pearson, John Stone, Andrew Field, Ron Brunton, Michael Barnard, Bettina Arndt, Giles Auty, David Flint, Geoffrey Blainey) alike.

LOOK READER - NO FACTS

The essential problem with Les Carlyon's *Bulletin* Essay is that he did not identify even one journalist/commentator who fitted into his scenario. He refrained from using the now fashionable put-down whereby individuals with whom you disagree are labelled as "elites". However, he used not dissimilar cliches. The targets of the *Bulletin* Essay critique were variously labelled as "they" (nine references) or members of the "chattering classes" (eight references). There are also suggestions that the (unnamed) "theys" who belonged to the "chattering classes" were also "public intellectuals", members of the "intelligentsia" and "self-appointed intellectuals", would-be "cultural commissars" and the like. But no names were named. And no labels were defined.

Nor were any sources sourced. It is true that, once upon a time - circa the mid 1980s - there were dismissive references in the media about John Howard's height. But who has said this in recent years? There are no answers in the *Bulletin* Essay. Nor are there any references to support the assertion that John Howard has been likened to "Attila and Vlad the Impaler" or that he has been said to be "evil" and so on. Here some supporting evidence would have added weight to Carlyon's case – if only by demonstrating the hyperbole of some – but not many - of Howard's critics.

It's much the same with Les Carlyon's references to the anti-Howard brigade. If, as the *Bulletin* Essay states, this "they" keeps "delivering the same twee sermon" – then, it should be relatively easy to name a few names. It is true that some critics of John Howard's social policies have expressed embarrassment about his stance on what Christopher Pearson has termed "the three Rs – reconciliation, refugees and a republic" (see his *Age* column of 14 January 2002). But, once again, Les Carlyon's case would have been more substantial had he identified what he had in mind.

Indeed, there has only been one hint as to who might not belong to the *Bulletin* Essay's categories of "they", "chattering classes" and so on. We know of one exclusion. Writing in *The Age* on 4 December 2002, Tim Colebatch outed himself:

In the whole election campaign, my research has found just one article on any op-ed page contrasting Keating the visionary to Howard. That was my column on this page on November 6, which praised Keating and Jeff Kennett for having given Australia "a sense of direction" by setting out to transform this country into an exporter of high-tech goods and services, especially to Asia's growing markets.

The following day a reply appeared on *The Age* letters page. No – declared Les Carlyon – he did not have this particular column in mind when writing in the *Bulletin*. There was more, but not much:

I have never read Colebatch's article. I was unaware it existed until yesterday. Nor was my article an attack on the Canberra press gallery, which contains many people I admire.

As Michael Barnard has pointed out (*Herald Sun*, 16 December 2001), Les Carlyon "went so far as to offer a statutory declaration" to support his claim that he had not read the Colebatch article. Well, this eliminated one of the suspects. But no more than that. Four months after the *Bulletin* Essay, Les Carlyon has still not revealed precisely who his targets are. He seems intent on not doing so.

AT LAST, SOME NAMES

Oddly, the only key figure in the debate who has named names is John Howard himself. Interviewed by Paul Kelly for the *Weekend Australian* (27-28 October 2001), the Prime Minister used the "E" word. Declaring that: "A lot of the reason why I am scorned by the elites and held in such disdain is that I won't shift on those sorts of things". The "sorts of

things" he had in mind were his initial response to Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, reconciliation, the republic, Australia's role in the Asian region, the asylum seeker issue and so on. The Prime Minister acknowledged that there were "people" who believed that he had "no world view" and was a "cheap opportunist". Naming two names, he declared: "And I don't just mean Phillip Adams and Robert Manne". Well, that's a help.

Phillip Adams is one of Australia's few extant serial leftists. In his *Weekend Australian* column he continually lambastes John Howard – similar views are stated on his ABC Radio National *Late Night Live* program. Robert Manne is also a continuing critic of John Howard – his critique of the Prime Minister is stated, and re-stated, ad nauseum in his recently published *The Barren Years: John Howard and Australian Political Culture* (Text, 2001). It seems that Les Carlyon had Robert Manne and Donald Horne specifically in mind when he referred to "critics" of the Prime Minister who "write books about the barren years and the failure of leadership". On the eve of the 2001 Federal election Donald Horne's *Looking for Leadership: Australia in the Howard Years* (Viking) was published.

It's true that Robert Manne is a continuing critic of John Howard's social and economic agenda. So is Donald Horne. Yet Robert Manne is on record as stating that he voted for John Howard – and against Paul Keating – at the 1996 Federal election. And Donald Horne was a strong critic of Paul Keating during his period as prime minister.

Phillip Adams and Robert Manne have their fan clubs. So do such Howard barrackers as Piers Akerman and Alan Jones. In the 2001 Federal election campaign, Akerman and Jones were as dismissive of Labor leader Kim Beazley as Adams and Manne were of John Howard. Perhaps more so.

In his *Bulletin* Essay, Les Carlyon conceded that John Howard did have supporters in the media – beyond those critics who make up the "they" and the "chattering classes". Even so, this acknowledgement raises questions. Not only with the label "they" – which is broad enough to encompass anyone and everything. The problem also lies with the term "chattering classes". If, for example, Phillip Adams and Robert Manne are members of the chattering classes – then, presumably, so are Alan Jones and Piers Akerman. And so is the author of the *Bulletin* Essay. This suggests that Les Carlyon's opposition is not to chattering in itself. But, rather, to the content of a particular chatterer's individual chatter.

Interviewed by Julie-Anne Davies (*The Age*, 19 January 2002) Sydney University academic and

media commentator Catharine Lumby referred to a debate which she had with Newcastle University academic and media commentator Imre Saluzinsky on the ABC Radio National Breakfast program last December. Recalled Lumby:

Whenever I made a remark, Imre would say: “Oh yeah, you would think that, you’re an elite”. The thing is, we’re both academics, both come from similar socio-economic backgrounds, we both write columns for broadsheet newspapers, yet I’m an elitist and he is not.

ELITISTS, CLEVER PEOPLE, BILE REPUBLICANS, ETC

It’s much the same with others in the media who have sought to use words as weapons in the contemporary political debate. Here “elite” as in “elite opinion” or “the elites” - appears to be the most favoured pejorative. Les Carlyon consciously avoided using this term – preferring “they”, “chattering classes” and the like. However, the introduction in his *Bulletin* Essay did include the label. Readers were introduced to Les Carlyon’s piece as follows: “The idea that our politicians should be messiah-like visionaries has become a mantra of the so-called elite. In this *Bulletin* Essay Les Carlyon looks at the lessons of John Howard’s victory over the chattering classes”. What are the “chattering classes” to Les Carlyon are “elites” to others – or different labels to still others.

- Broadcaster Alan Jones likes to identify with what he terms “Struggle Street” – where suburban based Australians on medium incomes with a couple of children battle to pay the mortgage/rent, educate their children, put food on the table while keeping a car on the road and so on. A single, middle-aged man, Jones has never married and has no children. Moreover, he is a multi-millionaire who has properties in the inner-city. In short, Mr Jones resides a long way from the Struggle Street with which he identifies and which he maintains contains the homes of many of John Howard’s battlers.
- Columnist Michael Barnard uses the term “Clever People” – with a capital “c” and a capital “p” – to encompass a group which he also describes as “chattering elites”. See his *Sunday Herald-Sun* article of 16 December 2001 in which he does not manage to name the names of even one of the so-called Clever People. It’s difficult to criticise the Barnard approach because it is not clear who his targets are. Clever, eh?
- *Herald Sun* columnist Andrew Bolt has latched on to the term “our cultural elite”. By definition this includes anyone who opposes John Howard on any social issue. So if you read books/watch films and

vote Coalition (like Andrew Bolt circa 2002) then you are not part of any “cultural elite”. However if you read books, watch films and vote Labor, then you are part of “our cultural elite”. It’s all explained (if this is the correct word usage) in Andrew Bolt’s *Herald Sun* column of 12 November 2002.

- In the *Sydney Morning Herald* (31 October 2001), Paul Sheehan referred to “the political punditocracy” who, he claimed, inhabit “the Republic of Bile”. No names were named – but the (anonymous) pundits were said to favour republican Paul Keating as their “spiritual muse”. It was as vague as that.
 - *Daily Telegraph* and *Courier Mail* columnist Michael Duffy prefers a re-worked version of the old “new class” term. Writing in the *Daily Telegraph* on 16 December 2000, he cited an article in the United States conservative magazine *National Review* by John Derbyshire to define what he means by “new class”. According to the Derbyshire/Duffy view, members of the new class are, variously, “out of touch...liars” who “loath the nation” in which they live. They are also “hedonists” who are “full of moral vanity” and who “hate the past” and “hate masculinity”. Really. Once again, no names were named – either in the US or Australia.
- In the late 2001, Michael Duffy decided it was time to update his definition of what he now termed the “moral elite”. This time he declared that “most” members of this “moral elite” have “four-wheel drives”. (*Daily Telegraph*, 22 December 2001). Really. Once again, no names were named.
- Writing in the *Daily Telegraph* on 13 November 2001, Piers Akerman (who has a regular spot on the ABC TV *Insiders* program) also attempted to offer a definition of elites. He maintained that “in political terms” the word elite “has principally been used to describe the clique of left-of-centre broadsheet and radio commentators”. But he conceded that “occasionally attempts are made to broaden the definition to include the handful of middle-of-the-road writers (such as this columnist) whose views accord more closely with those of mainstream Australia”. Yes – it was as confusing as that. Akerman named two names belonging to the former category. Robert Manne and Phillip Adams. That’s all. Piers Akerman also refers to this group as “members of the commentariat” (*Daily Telegraph*, 19 February 2002). Overlooking the fact that, as a newspaper columnist, he is a well paid commentator. And, presumably, must be a member of this very same “commentariat”. Very confusing, to be sure.
 - In the December 2001 issue of *The Adelaide Review* (edited by Christopher Pearson), former ALP senator and occasional columnist Peter Walsh took

on the task of defining the term elite. He acknowledged that “the ‘elite’ are rarely, if ever, objectively identified”. However, he argued that members of the elite “embody most if not all” of a series of “attributes”. It was a long list. According to Walsh, members of the elite are:

- university educated – note this would exclude the likes of Phillip Adams and Paul Keating.
- “well-heeled, selfish and vain” – note Robert Manne may fit the latter category but he is not particularly wealthy.
- opposed to “foreign involvement and free trade” – note this implies that no supporters of economic reform should be classified as members of the elite, irrespective of their support for reconciliation, the republic, refugees etc.

And so on. Once again, Peter Walsh did not name any names.

- And, so, back to the ubiquitous THEY. In an article published in *The Australian* on 14 November 2001, Boston based academic Ross Terrill pointed the finger as “Left gatekeepers” whom he also classified as “They”. Unlike Carlyon, Terrill, actually named a few “theys” – David Marr, Hugh Mackay and Phillip Adams who, he alleged, were constant critics of John Howard. That’s all. The reformed leftist Terrill also declared:

If the Left gatekeepers were not comic, they would be frightening. Forced to choose, I would rather have public policy decided by 50 people found at random in the phone book than by 50 from the ABC or corridors of the Australian National University.

Come to think of it, Dr Terrill’s got it right here. Remember when Ross Terrill was a so-called “China expert” academic who was frequently heard and watched on the ABC and who proclaimed his views on miscellaneous campuses? It was around this time that he looked sympathetically on the appalling Cultural Revolution in China and wrote favourably about totalitarian Mao Zedong and his communist henchmen and women. Certainly, at the time, the views on China of fifty men and women “found at random” could not have been less valuable than Terrill’s (flawed) analysis. But, now Terrill is no longer a leftist. Now he’s a political conservative.

A CONFEDERACY OF EX-LEFTISTS

And that’s one of the problems in the contemporary political debate in Australia. So many of the few political conservatives in Australia are former leftists (Piers Akerman, Ron Brunton, Michael Duffy, David

Flint, P. P. McGuinness, Christopher Pearson, Imre Salusinszky, Max Teichmann) or social democrats (Ross Terrill, Andrew Bolt, Peter Walsh, Bettina Arndt). In other words, former leftists who are born again political conservatives have brought their left argumentative baggage with them.

In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, it was the left which branded its political opponents as part of an amorphous “elite” – sometimes termed “the power elite”. The term made little sense then. If only because many anti-communists who opposed the left belonged to middle level income groups or were members of the working class. At the time, the slogan “elite” or “elitist” was a term of abuse used by the left. Today it is a term of abuse used increasingly by political conservatives.

It’s much the same with the label “fascist”. Before and after World War II, this was a term of abuse used by communist and other extreme leftists to discredit social democrats and political conservatives alike. It is still used today, on occasions, by what is left of the left. However, it is also used by ex-leftists cum political conservatives to criticise members of the so-called “elites” and “chattering classes”. For example, writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 8 November 2001, P. P. McGuinness proclaimed:

There have been frequent expressions of disgust with detestation of the Australian people by those who purport to know what is best for them, while any genuine engagement in arguments about what our policy towards the increasing flow of would-be arrivals trying to enter Australia without visa or other authority, some without any traceable credentials, has been dismissed as incompatible with compassion, humanity and morality. It has been an unedifying orgy of moral vanity on the part of the elites. The writers and the self-described intellectuals have been the worst – and in the process they are beginning to spell out the fundamentally fascist underpinnings of their view of the nature and purpose of politics.

WORD USAGE – AND ABUSAGE

Used in this sense, the word fascist means someone with whom you disagree or whom you do not like. Perhaps both. As such, it is all but meaningless.

It’s much the same with “elites” and “chattering classes”. According to the current word usage, Australia’s most wealthy men and women who happen to support the Prime Minister’s social agenda in Australia – and the Queen’s continuation as

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Australia's head of state – are not part of the elite. But a republican supporting librarian with a B.A. and a Dip. Ed. on say, \$35,000 a year, is one of the elites. Likewise someone like, say, Piers Akerman, who earns his living in the print and electronic media is not a member of the “chattering classes”. But the likes of Catharine Lumby – who chats no more than Piers Akerman – presumably is. Just because she is a republican who supports reconciliation and is sympathetic to genuine asylum seekers.

Certainly there are some (but not many) leftist commentators in Australia today who are alienated and who are all too willing to invoke memories of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich in support of their cause and to bandy about such terms as “racist” without either background or qualification. If Les Carlyon had focused on such individuals, with supporting evidence, his case would have had merit. As it stands it is hyperbolic – and, as such, exhibits some of the very flaws which he detects in the criticisms of John Howard's critics.

Of course, some media critics of John Howard oppose his views on the republic, reconciliation and refugees. But these are not uniquely left-wing causes. Liberal deputy leader Peter Costello is a republican. John Howard himself has spoken about the need for reconciliation. And Dr George Pell, the socially conservative Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, has called for greater compassion to be exhibited towards refugees/asylum seekers. So, by definition, any or all of these positions cannot be taken as comprising the exclusive positions of elites/the chattering classes/clever people/new class/Republic of Bile and so on. Not unless words no longer have consistent meaning.

Come to think of it, perhaps they don't. Take *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist Alan Ramsey, for example. On 1 December 2001 he described Les Carlyon's *Bulletin* piece as “the political essay of the year” about John Howard whom he described as “the politician of the year”. Ramsey concluded by referring to John Howard as “one of the most accomplished politicians we've seen in a while”. That was on 1 December last year. On 23 February 2002 Ramsey reverted to type – declaring that: “You really have to wonder if it is Howard's fitness to stay in office that should be most under question rather than his Governor-General's”. Surely cause for another *Bulletin* Essay. This time – with names.



GERARD HENDERSON'S MEDIA WATCH

BOB ELLIS - AND A (\$500) FAILED PROPHECY

However 2001 is remembered, it will not go down as the Year of the Seer. Not for your Seer Bob Ellis, that's for sure. In fact, when it came to prophesy, your man Ellis put in a real shocker. It commenced badly and then rapidly deteriorated. So much so that, by late 2001, the Seer Ellis could not even correctly predict the past. And then it got worse. Really.

Flash back to April 2001. That month's edition of *HQ* magazine carried an article by Bob Ellis in which he revealed a \$500 wager he had made concerning the forthcoming Federal election. Some time in the previous year, Ellis bet Gerard Henderson (no less) that John Howard "would lose his own seat" of Bennelong at the forthcoming Federal election. The Seer was so confident about this particular piece of crystal-ball gazing that he wrote all about it in *HQ*. While on the (prophesy) job, Ellis also predicted that Liberal MPs Bronwyn Bishop, Alexander Downer, Peter Reith and Philip Ruddock would lose their seats. There was more. Much more. Ellis also declared that, after the 2001 Federal election, the Coalition "would command no more than 18 seats in the Federal parliament of 2002" and that Kim Beazley "would have 10 years" as prime minister.

Flash forward a year. John Howard, Bronwyn Bishop, Alexander Downer and Philip Ruddock all retained their seats and Peter Reith's seat was also held by the Coalition (Reith did not re-contest the 2001 election). Also the Coalition holds 82 seats in the 2002 parliament – some 43 per cent more than Ellis predicted. Good one, Bob.

For the record Bob Ellis has yet to settle his \$500 betting debt (re Bennelong and all that) with Gerard Henderson. Shame, Bob, Shame.

On the eve of the 2001 federal election, Bob Ellis gave crystal-ball gazing yet another nudge. However, on this occasion, he was unable to correctly foresee the past. Writing in the *Canberra Times* on 12 September 2001 he predicted, once again, that John Howard "will" lose "his seat this year after 14,000 Chinese in his electorate vote against him". Ellis also used his *Canberra Times* article to look back on the

past. Among the Seer's "discoveries" were the following non-facts:

- According to Ellis, John Howard ran for the Liberal leadership against Andrew Peacock in 1984 (Not so – in fact in 1984 Peacock regained the Liberal leadership uncontested).
- According to Ellis, in 1986 Howard "was disloyal to his leader [Andrew Peacock] who tried to remove him". (In fact, Howard became Liberal leader in September 1985 – so in 1986 he *was* Liberal leader).
- According to Ellis, in 1988 Howard "sacked his deputy Peacock". (Not so. Howard had dropped Peacock from his shadow ministry team in 1987; at the time Neil Brown was Liberal deputy leader.)
- According to Ellis, when Peacock resigned in 1990 Howard "stood against Hewson...and was defeated". (He didn't and, consequently, wasn't).

Clearly, the Seer's crystal ball is somewhat blurred when in "back-to-the-future" mode. On the morning of the November 2001 election, Bob Ellis looked forward again. Having examined his crystal-ball, and having liked what he saw, he committed his prophecies to print in the *Canberra Times* on Saturday 10 November 2001. The Seer foresaw that:

- "Labor will win government tonight with 54.6 per cent to 56.6 per cent of the vote". (Had the prophesy come to pass, the ALP would have recorded the greatest winning vote – after distribution of preferences – in the history of Australian federal politics; in fact, Labor scored around 49 per cent of the two-party preferred vote.)
- "Tony Abbott will lose Warringah and Stuart St Clair will lose New England. John Anderson (I suspect) will lose Gwydir, Larry Anderson Richmond and Gary Nairn Eden-Monaro". He also predicted that Bob Horne (ALP), Cheryl Kernot (ALP) and Jackie Kelly (Liberal) would hold their seats. (He was correct about St Clair (who lost to an Independent) and Kelly – but that was it).
- "Howard's era has a few hours to go". (John Howard's era as Prime Minister has certainly outlasted Bob Ellis' gig as a monthly poet – re which see below).

The Seer concluded his prophetic rave with a challenge: "If Howard wins, of course, the talent will

leave. And that will be that. Prove that I lie". Well, just where do you start?

But, wait, there is some good news on the Ellis Front. At (long) last *The Sunday Age* has dropped the Seer's rambling rhyming doggerel – re which see *Sydney Institute Quarterly* August 2000, October 2000 and December 2000. Bob's last turgid poetic ramble was published on 15 July 2001. "Media Watch" extends a (rhyming) farewell, of the doggerel genre:

**So farewell, then, Failed Seer
The Prophet of rhyming slang
2001 was not a good year
For members of the Ellis gang.
Your crystal-balls have faded
Which explains those failed bets
As a prophet, you are jaded
It's time to settle your debts.**

PIERS AKERMAN – FROM THE TAXI DRIVER'S MOUTH

If Bob Ellis led the barracking for Kim Beazley and Labor in the lead-up to the 2001 Federal election, Piers Akerman filled a similar role for John Howard and the Opposition. Indeed the election campaign had only just commenced when Piers A. went into full pompous mode and instructed his *Daily Telegraph* readers how to vote:

This election is the first in more than 55 years to be fought during a time of major international conflict. For that reason, several points must be made now and kept in mind throughout the election campaign. The Coalition Government holds power by dint of the slimmest of margins in half a dozen electorates. It could be unseated in a blink.

If the international situation reinforces the demand for domestic stability and certainty of policy then continuity of government is desirable. This is not the election to flirt with the notion of casting a protest vote on the assumption that the current government is a shoo-in, nor is it the election to cast a vote based upon some parochial, parish-pump issue.

So there. From then on Piers A went in as hard as possible in his *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* columns – and his regular gig on the ABC TV *Insiders* program – to run a line which supported the Coalition. Indeed the Akerman campaign commenced even before John Howard announced the election date. But why did P.A. bother? From the time John Howard put the SAS on to the *Tampa*, and refused to allow the asylum seekers on board to enter

Australian territory, the election outcome was all but determined. All the more so after the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 – which assisted the fortunes of all incumbent governments in the Western democracies.

But P.A. felt the need to do his bit before the election to get out the vote for the Coalition – and to rationalise the result after the votes were counted. Let's go to the newspaper and electronic libraries.

- **13 September 2001** P.A. uses the terrorist murders in the United States to justify the Howard government's tough line on asylum seekers. Declaring that "in light of these horrific events the limited actions Australia has taken to prevent the unauthorised entry of illegal migrants seems minimal in the extreme". He also asks whether "Muslim residents in Australia differ in their views from those of the Taliban or others capable of ordering these atrocities". P.A. asserts – without evidence, of course – that there is an "Islamic viewpoint". Just one, apparently.

- **25 September 2001** In full hyperbolic mode P.A. declares: "In a disinformation campaign that would make former Soviet intelligence operatives blush, a group of local commentators has been attempting to smear the Howard government with the false accusation that has linked the illegal immigrant issue with world terrorism". Forgetting, for the moment at least, that Akerman himself linked asylum seekers with terrorism – see 13 September 2001, above. Convenient, eh?

P.A. also accuses those (unnamed) commentators - who wondered whether terrorist organisations would choose to send highly trained operatives to Australia in leaky boats where, on arrival, they faced mandatory detention - as comprising a "fifth column". He seems unaware that the term "fifth column" was used to describe potential traitors who were aligned with a nation's enemies – i.e. under-cover communists living in Western democracies during the Cold War who privately supported Stalin and the Soviet Union.

- **11 October 2001** P.A. asserts that "America's culture is reviled by any number of the ABC's regular commentators though even those who hate the US most rabidly find it difficult to find anything in the fanatical fundamentalism espoused by Sammy [sic] bin Laden and his psychotic followers". Once again, no names are named. P.A. refrains from mentioning that, once upon a time, he railed about what he termed the "cesspool of American imperial politics". In his famous advertisement in *The Review* – re which see below – when our Piers was busy reviling American culture and all that.

- **14 October 2001** P. A. declares that, yes, “some illegal immigrants pushed, or threw, their children into the Indian Ocean last Sunday”. He deplores this “child-tossing protest”. And then re-states a familiar line: “At these critical times, however, who could reasonably argue for a change in government”. Implying that anyone thinking about voting Labor was acting unreasonably. In the event, some 49 per cent of Australians preferred Labor to Coalition. Indicating that, according to the P.A. calculator, just under half of the Australian voting population voted contrary to reason. Fancy that.

- **21 October 2001** P.A. reveals on *Insiders* his evidence for the proposition that Australians should not “underestimate the presence here of people who are bin Laden sympathisers”. And what’s the evidence for the claim that bin Laden has support among “the Muslim population” in Australia? Well it is, er, the opinion of “a taxi driver in Melbourne last night” who was “adamant” about this. So it’s clear, then.

- **8 November 2001** P.A. commences by bagging “the commentariat” (forgetting, for the moment that he himself is a commentator), the “elitist chattering classes” (this from an elite chatterer) and so on. Once again, he tells his readers to vote for John Howard – opining that “Mr Beazley’s performance does not warrant a term as prime minister”. Just what would *Daily Telegraph* readers do without P.A. telling them how to vote?

- **14 February 2002** P.A. returns to some pre-election themes. This time he alleges – without evidence, of course – that asylum seekers in detention are committing child abuse by sewing their children’s lips together. Ironically the page one story in that very day’s *Daily Telegraph*, under the heading “IT NEVER HAPPENED” reveals that no asylum seekers threw their children into the water. But why let the Page One news distract from a forceful comment on the Opinion Page?

- **17 February 2002** P.A. maintains that “the revelations” that the children-overboard accusations “were subsequently found to be wrong won’t have much impact”. According to Akerman: “The fact that no-one tossed their children into the sea is negated in the public mind by other incidents”. So it is all okay, then. Stand by for a similar rationalisation now that it has been revealed that there is no evidence that asylum seekers had sewn their children’s lips together.

But, then, Piers Akerman is accomplished at rationalisation. Consider how P.A. continually attempts to evade the issue that in November 1971 – when anti-US leftism was all the rage within sections

of the journalistic profession – he labelled members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) serving in Vietnam as “mercenaries”. Even today, Piers Akerman still declines to concede that he once bagged ADF members as mercenaries. Despite the fact that the petition which he signed – along with some communists and many serial leftists – can be found in *The Review*, 27 November 1971.

ALAN JONES – ONCE A BARRACKER, ALWAYS...

Piers Akerman was not alone in barracking for John Howard and the Coalition in the lead-up to the 2001 Federal election. So did Sydney Radio talk-back host Alan Jones – then on 2UE, now on 2GB. Alan Jones had one interview with Labor leader Kim Beazley during the campaign – on 9 October 2001. It ended up in a real (verbal) punch up. No matter, really. Except that the transcript reveals how, when it suits him, Jones is ready to re-state positions in order to attain a desired outcome.

The row commenced when Alan Jones alleged that, contrary to Kim Beazley’s claims, Labor’s policies were not on the ALP website. In Jones’s words: “But now on your website, those policies aren’t there. Why have they been archived?...why have they been taken off the website?” This threw Beazley somewhat. He replied: “Well, to my knowledge, they are there”. To which Jones responded: “I am very sorry, but they are not”. Here A.J. used the term “I’m sorry” to mean “I’m not really sorry at all because you are wrong” – or something like that.

Later in the interview, a minder sent a message to Beazley that the policies were still on the ALP website. On this occasion, however, Jones denied that he had ever said that the ALP policies had been removed from the website:

Beazley: ...I’ve just got a fib from you. So I will deal with your fib in a minute

Jones: What’s the fib? Go on, away you go...He’s got something stuck in front of him by one of his minders, so this will be worthwhile listening to.

Beazley: ...let me deal with the statement that you made that our policies are not available. The full list of policies from before the election are effectively one click away on our website. You can access all those policies with an extra click. Alan, that is...

Jones: Is that as it was when the election was called?... Has it changed since the election was called?

Beazley: The policies are on the website.

Jones: Has the way of accessing them changed since the election has been called?

Beazley: Alan, that's not the point. You came in here and you said to me there was a blank.

Jones: I asked you a question.

Beazley: Alan, you have got to start being honest... You took a point, Alan, with me.

Jones: I asked you a question.

Beazley: ...You took me by surprise, I must admit, because you said our policies had been removed from our website. And you lied. This is a very bad piece of behaviour on your part.

And so it went on. In the course of a few minutes, Alan Jones went from asserting that the ALP policies were not on its website to claiming that he had not made any claim of any kind – but only “asked...a question”. A significant U-turn to be sure. Among the many.

GREAT U-TURNS OF OUR TIME (Contd.)

On 25 February the author of *Among the Barbarians* expounded at length on why Peter Hollingworth should resign as Governor-General:

- **Paul Sheehan On Why Peter Hollingworth Should Go**

When the Prime Minister chose a prominent member of the clergy as head of state, he engaged in a social experiment and [Peter] Hollingworth was the laboratory subject. The experiment has failed. Hollingworth was sworn in on June 29 last year and has four and a half years of his term to run. But the Anglican Church's problems over the sexual abuse of minors will drag out indefinitely. It therefore cannot be long before he takes the only honourable course and resigns...It's too late to save the Governor-General.

- *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 February 2002.

- **Paul Sheehan On Why Peter Hollingworth Should Not Go**

On 4 March the author of *Among the Barbarians* expounded at length on why Peter Hollingworth should not be pressured to resign as Governor-General:

The Inquisition is starting to set fire to itself. So much accusation and hysteria have poured forth since February 16, when *The Australian* set the competing inquisitors loose with a front-page story under the headline “Hollingworth fears plot to undermine his office” that the saga seems to have been running for months, not three weeks. This story has moved quickly in the past week and the Governor-General's opponents have overplayed their hand. The Prime Minister now has no choice but to stand by the Governor-General unless or until the Anglican Church self-immolates to the point where Dr Peter Hollingworth has to step down. On February 21, surrounded by baying dogs, John Howard declined to throw Hollingworth to the pack: “I would be succumbing to the clamour of the mob as expressed through the media if I acted as I've been asked to do by the Leader of the Opposition.” He [Howard] sounds even more right now than he did then.

Sydney Morning Herald, 4 March 2002

So how about that? On Paul Sheehan's very own analysis he was a member of the anti-Hollingworth “Inquisition” on 25 February. And, just a week later, he was a member of the pro-Hollingworth “Anti-Inquisition”. Such a metamorphosis – in just seven days.

MORE GREAT U-TURNS OF OUR TIME (Contd.)

- **Tom Dusevic on John Howard as an Aussie Populist Hero**

Often caricatured as a dull man of conviction, Howard is rarely given his due as a populist genius. With aplomb, he put pre-election dollars in the right pockets, appeased the tax moaners, trusted his reading of the nation's heart – and waited for a stroke of luck. In a year when fear trumped hope and the complacent were vanquished, wily Howard was the man for the moment.

Tom Dusevic, *Time*, 31 December 2001

- **Tim Dusevic on John Howard as a South Pacific Autocrat**

...after almost six years of stable and reformist government, [John] Howard and his henchmen are beginning to resemble the autocrats of the South Pacific with their disdain for national institutions,

looseness with the truth, hostility to the weak, bullying of bureaucrats and paranoia about the free flow of information.

Tom Dusevic, *Time*, 25 February 2002

So, according to *Time's* reporter on matters Australian, John Howard has gone from being the man of the moment to an autocrat of the South Pacific. In just a couple of weeks.

THE GREAT AUNT BETTINA

Another U-turner of note is Bettina Arndt. Once upon a time, the libertarian editor of the libertarian *Forum* magazine, in middle age Ms Arndt has become a socially conservative commentator. These days in her *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Age* columns she advises us mere mortals not to do precisely what she said we should do when *Forum* editor over two decades ago. So, who else to turn to when there is need for some moral advice about whether or not Pat Rafter should marry his (pregnant) partner or when advice is needed about who is really at fault in the Wayne Carey/Sally Carey/Anthony Stevens/Kelli Stevens marital hoo-haa that has so concerned followers of the North Melbourne Australian Football League team? Aunt Bettina, of course.

So tennis champion and 2002 Australian of the Year Pat Rafter is about to become a father. And his partner Lara Feltham is about to become a mother. So what does Aunt Bettina believe? Turn to her column in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Age* of 31 January 2001. According to Aunt Bettina, they should marry. Now. Here's why:

In the short space of about 30 years our society has shifted from a culture where a man who found himself in these circumstances would have been soundly condemned (let alone named Australian of the Year), to a climate where it is seen as wrong to do anything but celebrate his good fortune. To ask about marriage is to suggest that unmarried paternity is less than ideal – a moral stance that has become distinctly unfashionable.

So, how to explain the evident decline in public morality highlighted by Ms Arndt? *Media Watch's* view is that the current generation of twenty and thirty somethings have been overwhelmingly influenced by the copies of *Forum* which were left around their parents' homes when they were learning to read. In other words, it's all Ms Arndt's fault.

And, who is to blame for the evident decline in private morality which led to Mr Carey (the North Melbourne captain) tangling with Mrs Stevens (the

FIJI-

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Susan Boyd is Australia's High Commissioner to Fiji. On a return visit to Australia in April, Ms Boyd will give an update on the political situation in Fiji following political and social upheaval and failure of the Speight coup.

SPEAKER: SUSAN BOYD (Australian High Commissioner - Fiji)
TOPIC: *Fiji: Social and Political Upheaval*
DATE: Tuesday 30 April 2002
TIME: 5.30 for 6.00 pm
VENUE: 41 Phillip Street, Sydney
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RALSTON SAUL WITH MALOUF

In association with the Sydney Writers' Festival, The Sydney Institute will host a dialogue between Canada's John Ralston Saul and Australia's David Malouf on Canada and Australia's differences. Seats are limited and there will be no bookings. So be there early to ensure you get in.

SPEAKERS: JOHN RALSTON SAUL -
IN CONVERSATION WITH -
DAVID MALOUF

TOPIC: Canada and Australia:
The Differences

DATE: Sunday 2 June 2002

TIME: 12.30 for 1.00 pm

VENUE: Bangarra Performance Theatre,
Wharf 4/5, Hickson Rd, Sydney



wife of North Melbourne's vice-captain)?. Well, according to Aunt Bettina, the woman should not escape blame. In other words, it's not all our Wayne's fault. As Ms Arndt told the ABC TV *7.30 Report* on 14 March 2002:

If he's [Wayne Carey] getting attacked for the damage it's doing to the team, surely the wife of the vice-captain also has some responsibility towards the team and should be aware of the fact that she too was jeopardising the careers of her husband and of her lover.

So there. Indeed it seems that, according to Aunt Bettina, Kelli Stevens is double trouble. Mr Carey has jeopardised his own career. But Mrs Stevens has adversely affected the careers of both "her husband and her lover". Such are the responsibilities of "the wife of the vice-captain", apparently. All this on the ABC TV's *7.30 Report*, which is supposed to be Australia's premier daily current affairs program. Then, in modern word usage, it probably is.

LEUNIG, LOVE AND CHRISTOPHER'S LIVER

It was Christmas Eve in Melbourne. And there was little but good will – and peace on earth – on the opinion page of the *Melbourne Age*.

First up, on the top of the page, was leftist *Age* cartoonist Michael Leunig's article headed "We should try to love bin Laden, for Christ's sake". Leunig offered his readers "as a Christmas gift" a translation by Stephen Mitchell of a passage from Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*. This he described as "an ideal gift for the man who has everything, or thinks he does". And, presumably, for a poetically inclined chap who does not like spending real money on Christmas presents. The poem ran for some 20 lines – commencing with the refrain: "Weapons are the tools of violence/all decent men detest them." Mr Leunig did not bother to explain how decent chaps could have stopped the Nazi regime without weapons. But, then, it was Christmas Eve. Rather, the piece rambled on. And on. Until this (Leunig) gem:

Mercy, forgiveness, compassion. These are great treasures. If you don't use them you lose them. Sooner or later we all need to give and receive these precious gifts. Might we, can we, find a place in our heart for the humanity of Osama bin Laden and those others? On Christmas Day can we consider their suffering, their children and the possibility that they too have their goodness? It is a family day, and Osama is our relative.

This Leunig lesson endeth with another quote. This time from a poem the cartoonist discovered on a wall of the London underground a decade ago by a certain Sheenagh Pugh. The poet Pugh encompassed the possibility that “a people sometimes will step back from war”. It was, of course, written before bin Laden’s al-Qaeda commenced its terrorist war on Western democracies.

Then, down the page – just south of Michael Leunig’s column – was Christopher Pearson’s weekly offering. This Christmas Eve, the editor of *The Adelaide Review* wrote about his liver. Fancy that. You see, C.P. has been advised to lay-off the grape for a minimum of ten days in order to give “the bag” a bit of a reprieve. Among the scoops in C.P.’s piece were the following BIG STORIES:

- C. P.’s physician has canvassed with him “the possibility of some time slipping beyond the point of no return and an unpleasant death” if your man does not ease off the juice a bit. How about that?
- C. P. was “abstemious for almost a year in 1975”. Big news, this. Or is it? In his essay published in Peter Coleman’s collection *Double Take* (Mandarin, 1996), Christopher Pearson actually recorded his activities on one day in April 1975. Members of his Adelaide University course “learned at a tutorial that the Khmer Rouge had taken Phnom Penh”. Thereafter “we adjourned to the Staff Club and toasted them in Great Western Champagne”. Certainly not abstemious behaviour – and one day that, according to C.P., later became “an occasion of continuing shame”.
- C. P., in his late thirties, gave up alcohol “for a few months”. Very bad news for South Australian wine growers at the time, to be sure.
- C. P. will become a “United Nations Man” and henceforth confine himself to “four standard drinks a day”. Gee wiz.
- But C. P. will “feel a monstrous injustice if the four standard drinks line turns out to be mere fashion or a crazy, Puritan policy to lengthen life at the expense of its quality”.

Well, that’s it.

THE (RAMSEY) LAND OF THE LONG QUOTE

Sure, like all of us, Christopher Pearson may have to adopt a fresh approach to overcoming the “writer’s bloc” phenomenon by writing about drink, the bag and all that. *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist Alan Ramsey adopts a different tactic, from time to time.

Take, for example, the pre-election Alan Ramsey column (27 October 2001) on Labor and Kim Beazley. A. R. started off by (correctly) predicting an ALP loss

- and gave his reasons. Fair enough. This took about seven paras. What to do now? There were, you see, some 25 paras to go to fill the main column piece – before he got to the side column. A. R. decided on a somewhat familiar tactic. The VERY LONG QUOTE, to wit. A. R. proceeded to quote from a person whom he referred to as “somebody” who, according to A. R., “explained it like this”. There followed a VERY LONG QUOTE of some 1150 words – out of a total of 1650 words. In short, this certain “somebody” contributed some 70 per cent of the Ramsey column. Without consideration, it seems.

Then there was the post-election column (23 February 2002) when Alan Ramsey focussed on the appointment of Peter Hollingworth as Governor-General - and its aftermath. A. R. commenced by predicting (falsely, as it turned out) that there would be “angry demonstrators” protesting against Mr Hollingworth when the Queen visited Queensland for the March 2002 CHOGM meeting. All this took about four paras. What to do with the remaining 15 paras or so? Well, why not quote John Howard? At length. At considerable length, in fact.

The Ramsey column was his Saturday regular piece. It so happened that, two days earlier on 21 February 2002, the Prime Minister had given a lengthy media conference where he canvassed the issues surrounding the Governor-General. Why not quote this? At length. But first, some abuse. A. R. declared that John Howard performed at this media conference “with all the gravity of language and pomposity of an overripe judge after a long lunch”. But, still, words are words. And words occupy space. So why not quote this “overripe” prime ministerial judgment at (considerable) length? There followed para after para of direct quotes from John Howard. Some 1000 words out of a total of 1600 – or some 63 per cent of the total column. Then, after such a VERY LONG QUOTE, Alan Ramsey went back to abusing the Prime Minister:

A more slippery, highly qualified, something-for-everybody piece of political reasoning, full of hyperbole and generalisations, is hard to imagine. You really have to wonder if it is Howard’s fitness to stay in office that should be most [sic] under question rather than this Governor-General’s.

This from the very same Alan Ramsey who, in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 1 December 2001, criticised fellow journalists for continuing “to deride Howard for what they think he is, not for what he’s achieved in an unforgiving business”. He concluded this particular column by calling on his colleagues to “give” the Prime Minister “his due”. Really.