

## THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE ANNUAL DINNER LECTURE

GUEST SPEAKER 2005

# RICHARD TOGNETTI

Artistic Director and Lead Violin - Australian Chamber Orchestra

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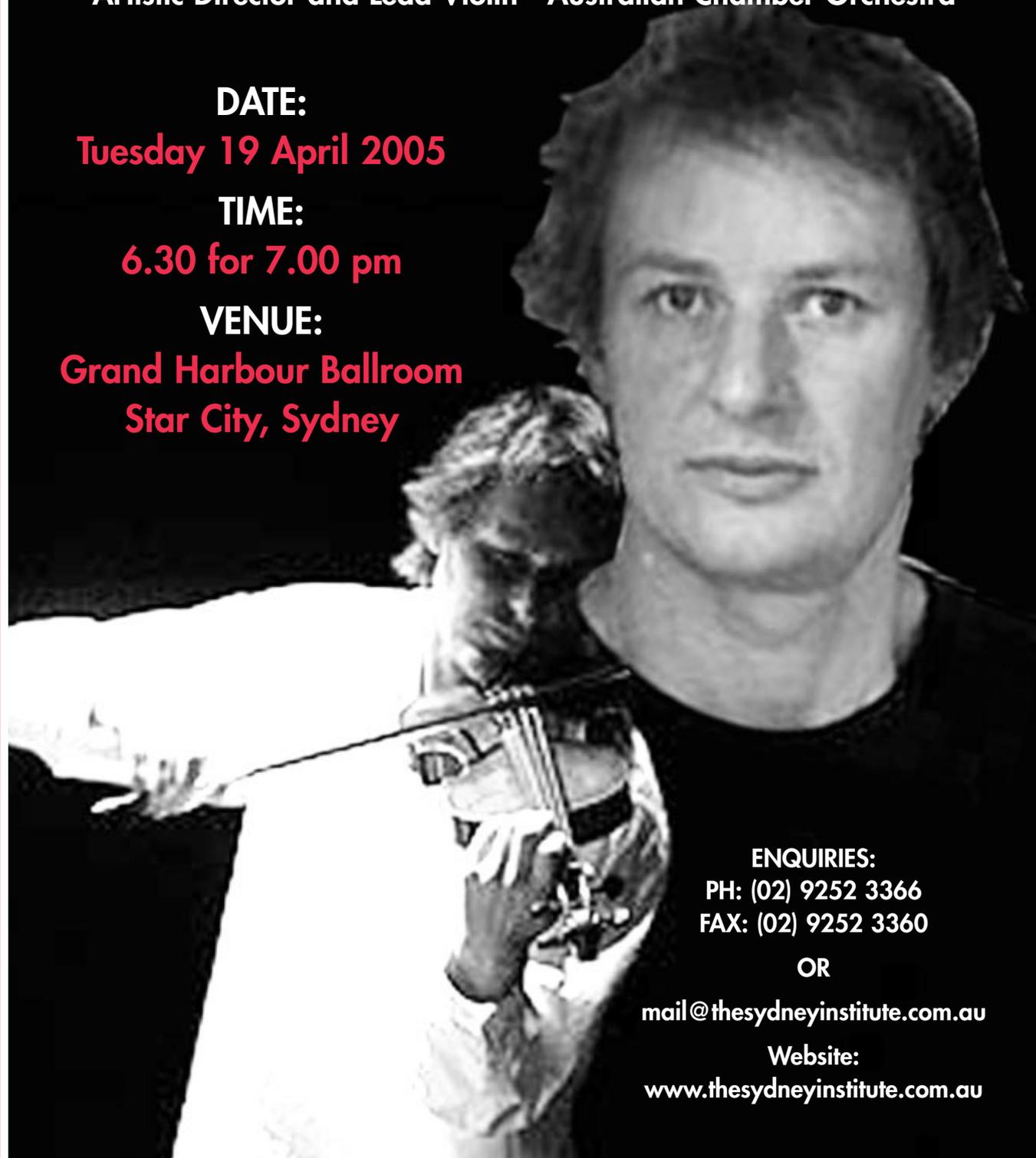
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THE

# Sydney Institute

## QUARTERLY

ISSUE 24, VOL. 8  
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**PAUL KEATING** talks  
on how governments  
still govern

The Australian Media -  
red faces over 2004  
election commentary

**JOHN KUNKEL** and the  
statistics of Whitlamism

**ANNE HENDERSON** on  
women, tactics and  
parliamentary success

**STEPHEN MATCHETT**  
looks at the literature  
of war heroes

George Bush and the  
media

Tony Kevin and Gerard  
Henderson correspond

**MEDIA WATCH** tackles  
Alan Ramsey, David  
Flint, Robert Manne &  
Bob Ellis

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*with Gerard Henderson's*

# *MEDIA WATCH*

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## NO (ABC) BIG IDEA

It's called "Big Ideas". But, at times, the ABC Radio National program – which airs at 5 pm on Sunday – sounds more like "Loud Leftist Barracking". No more than on Sunday 17 October 2004 when Ramona Koval (one of the public broadcaster's many ABC house-leftists and the staff elected delegate on the ABC Board) interviewed Greg Dyke (the former director-general of the BBC). The occasion was the publication of Greg Dyke's *Inside Story* (HarperCollins) – the former BBC director-general's story of his forced resignation following the release of Lord Hutton's report into the BBC's coverage on the Second Gulf War. The summary which appeared before the transcript on the ABC website gave a flavour of what was to follow: "Coming from a very humble background, Greg Dyke was the journalist who rose to take over the helm of the BBC, loved and respected by staff, but lacking the blue-blooded credentials to be a genuine member of Britain's ruling elite". Shucks. The fact is that Greg Dyke was appointed director-general of the BBC by the Blair Government – irrespective of his background. Moreover, the idea that a person has to have "blue-blooded credentials" to be a genuine "member of Britain's ruling elite" is no more than tired Marxism. Neither Tony Blair, nor John Prescott, nor Gordon Brown, nor Margaret Beckett, nor Patricia Hewitt have "blue-blooded credentials" – yet all are senior Cabinet members. And Michael Howard, the leader of the Conservative Opposition, has a background which is both Central European and Jewish. No "blue-blood" there, either.

What was notable about the Koval/Dyke "Big Ideas" interview was that there was no evidence of any big ideas at all – or even small ideas, for that matter. Ramona Koval accepted uncritically Greg Dyke's story as told in *Inside Story*. She led-off the interview with a lengthy editorial-style comment in which she attempted to draw parallels between the controversy over the BBC's handling of the Second Iraq War and Australia: "The experiences of the BBC have enormous relevance to Australia and the way our own ABC negotiates its role with government. We've had our own contretemps over the Iraq War coverage. These incidents go to the larger question of how to protect the independence of the public broadcaster in the face of an increasingly hostile political climate".

There was scant recognition in the interview (from either Ramona Koval or Greg Dyke) that the BBC had made any errors at all in how it covered the Iraq War – and, in particular, Andrew Gilligan's report on BBC Radio's *Today* program which commenced the controversy. The fact is Lord Hutton's report – based on substantial evidence – completely cleared the Blair Government with respect to the unsourced allegations made by Andrew Gilligan on *Today* (see Sally Begbie "The Media After Lord Hutton's Report" *The Sydney Papers*, Volume 16 No 2, Autumn 2004). It was Greg Dyke's inability to handle the Blair Government's complaint – or even to establish the facts involved – that led to his forced resignation. Greg Dyke's departure from the BBC resulted from his managerial incompetence in this instance – it had nothing whatsoever to do with his "very humble background" or with any attempt by the Blair Government to muzzle the public broadcaster.

In her discussion with Greg Dyke, Ramona Koval was not primarily interested in evidence or facts – but only in barracking for a (leftist) cause. A rather predictable ABC "Big Idea".

# THE AUSTRALIAN MEDIA AND THE 2004 ELECTION

Gerard Henderson

## POLITICAL JOURNALISM MEANS NOT EVER HAVING TO CONCEDE TO YOUR ERRORS

Remember Love Story? Probably not – it was not that memorable. Yet Erich Segal's famous line in the 1970s film has made it into *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*: "Love means not ever having to say you're sorry".

In the lead-up to the 9 October 2004 Federal election, many members of the Canberra Parliamentary Press Gallery – along with some other journalists and quite a few academics – had a kind of love affair with Labor leader Mark Latham. This lasted up to – and in the case of Kerry O'Brien including – the night of the poll when votes were counted. Then it became evident that Mark Latham (who became ALP leader on 2 December 2003) had led Labor to its lowest primary vote in three-quarters of a century. What's more, the ALP's two-party-preferred vote at 47 per cent (i.e. the total vote after the distribution of preferences) was the seventh worst since the end of World War II – only Bert Evatt (in 1955 and 1958), Arthur Calwell (in 1966), Gough Whitlam (in 1975 and 1977) and Paul Keating (in 1996) presided over a lower total vote than Mark Latham in 2004. Labor's total vote in 2004 was significantly lower than Kim Beazley losing votes in 1998 (51 per cent) and 2001 (49 per cent). Mark Latham is the first Labor leader in the past half century to suffer a net loss of seats in his first election.

So what did the many journalists/commentators/biographers, who had advanced Mark Latham's cause over the previous ten months, say about the fact that virtually none of them anticipated Labor's crushing defeat? Well, not much at all. To paraphrase Erich Segal somewhat: "Political Journalism means not ever having to concede your errors."

## LAURA AND MATT AND MAXINE – AND DENIAL

Journalistic denial was overflowing on the set of the ABC TV *Lateline* program on the second Friday after the election. At the end of most weeks, *Lateline* runs a "Friday Forum" debate where a presenter (usually Maxine McKew) interviews two politicians, two commentators, or some such. The concept envisages that the talent being interviewed will have contrasting views. However, there was scant disagreement on Friday 22 October 2004 when Maxine McKew interviewed Laura Tingle (*the Australian Financial Review's* chief political correspondent) and Matt Price (*The Australian's* political sketch writer). Initially discussion centred on how Mark Latham was re-structuring Labor's front-bench in the wake of the election defeat. Later, the conversation turned on why Labor lost on 9 October.

## LAURA TINGLE AND MEDICARE GOLD

Step forward Laura Tingle. She maintained that Medicare Gold (Labor's proposal to promise free, universal and non means-tested health care to all Australians aged 75 and above) was "one of the things that helped undermine Labor in the last week" of the campaign. Ms Tingle continued:

**What you can certainly say about it [Medicare Gold] was that it was an incredibly bold political initiative which captured everybody's imagination initially, but the follow-through sale was not so good. Labor did not seem ready for the counterpunch on the economics of it and that was where it fell down.**

This is pure mythology. For starters, it is quite false to claim that Medicare Gold "captured everybody's imagination". From the time it was announced, there was concern about the economic implications of the policy – even in the *Australian Financial Review* itself. Medicare Gold was launched on Wednesday 29 September. In his *Australian Financial Review* column the following Saturday, Brian Toohey wrote that "paying universal benefits to the aged is unambiguously bad policy; it is inequitable, economically inefficient and ultimately unaffordable" (*AFR* 2-3 October 2004). The fact is that Labor could not respond to the economic criticisms of Medicare Gold because the policy itself was seriously flawed.

What Laura Tingle did not tell *Lateline* viewers was that she had been an enthusiastic supporter of Medicare Gold. Shortly after the policy release, she told Phillip Adams (on the afternoon edition of the ABC Radio National *Late Night Live* program) that Mark Latham had struck a "devastating" blow at the

electoral prospects of John Howard and the Coalition. Ms Tingle continued the line in her report the following morning:

**One simple, politically devastating policy idea. It's a while since we've seen one in an increasingly noisy political world. Whatever the fine philosophical points of his policy, or the rhetorical flourishes of his speech, Mark Latham's Medicare Gold proposal has shown him to be as wily a tactician as John Howard has ever been. Whatever short odds the betting agencies are giving on the Coalition, and however tight the polls say the election is, yesterday's events suggest Latham can win this election. (AFR, 30 September 2004).**

So, on 30 September, Laura Tingle believed that Medicare Gold was an election winner. However, on 22 October she told *Lateline* viewers that Medicare Gold was an election loser. Maxine McKew did not ask Ms Tingle to explain her evident inconsistency on this issue. And the *Australian Financial Review's* chief political correspondent did not own up to her past poor judgment. It is much the same with Iraq.

## MATT PRICE AND IRAQ

Step forward Matt Price, *Lateline's* second guest on 22 October. He maintained that, within Labor circles, there are "concerns about Latham" and added "there always was" such apprehension. Price then told *Lateline* viewers about the discussion which had taken place in the Labor Party Caucus meeting that day:

**When asked about what Labor did wrong, he [Latham] has come out and says he takes responsibility. But then you ask: "What about the Iraq troops withdrawal comment?" – which I think just about everybody now accepts was a mistake. He [Latham] doesn't accept that's a mistake.**

Hang on a minute. Here is Matt Price telling *Lateline* viewers, *after* the election, that Mark Latham's policy on Iraq – i.e. to withdraw Australian forces from Iraq by Christmas 2004 – was a "mistake". Yet this is not what Mr Price said *before* the election. Indeed, on the eve of the poll, Matt Price expressed the view that Labor would win the election on account of popular support of Latham Labor's policy on Iraq.

On Wednesday 6 October Price appeared on a special edition of the ABC TV *Insiders* program. There he predicted that the Iraq issue could win the election for Labor: "I just don't think it [Iraq] has disappeared out there in the electorate; I've just got a feeling that

it's still irking people". On Friday 8 October Price told Richard Glover on ABC Radio 702 that the Howard Government's support for the Coalition of the Willing in Iraq would be an issue in the outcome for the election and added: "I get a feeling something's happening out there." The implication was clear – namely, that Mark Latham's policy on Iraq would win votes for Labor.

Then, in his column in *The Weekend Australian* (9-10 October 2004) on the morning of the election, Matt Price wrote that "should Howard lose" then Iraq would be one of "three factors" in the Coalition's defeat. He claimed that the Prime Minister's refusal "to be up-front about the war in Iraq has damaged the PM's credibility" and added: "By underplaying the 'pre-deployment' of troops and distorting the case for invasion, Howard betrayed a lack of trust in the judgment and commonsense of ordinary voters." Price concluded his column with the prediction that Labor might win: "Don't be shocked if Latham is the better man up by a couple of seats tonight."

How about that? On 22 October Matt Price told *Lateline* viewers that "just about everybody now accepts" that Mark Latham's Iraq policy "was a mistake". Yet, on the eve of the election, Price predicted that Labor would win the election – and declared that Mark Latham's policy on Iraq would be a positive factor in any such victory. Presenter Maxine McKew did not ask her guest to explain this evident inconsistency. But, then, she had her own little (election) secret.

## MAXINE MCKEW AND THE LATHAM "ASCENSION"

You see, Maxine McKew had made her own (false) prophesy when part of "The Journos' Forum" on Richard Glover's ABC Radio 702 *Drive Time Program* on Thursday 30 September. Along with her journalistic colleagues David Koch and Alex Mitchell, she praised Medicare Gold. According to McKew, Medicare Gold was not only "brilliant politics" but also "potentially, very, very good policy". She told Richard Glover that she had not had the opportunity to discuss the likely election outcome with her "hairdresser". Alas. But she had managed to consult with a "taxidriver" who believed that John Howard would lose on 9 October. How about that? Well, at least Ms McKew had done some research.

Let's go to the audio-tape as Maxine McKew tells Radio 702 listeners about Mark Latham and all that. Her comments were made on 30 September – the day after the launch of Medicare Gold:

**Yesterday, for the first time, I got a real sense of the inevitability of the Latham**

ascension. And I say that as something of a Latham sceptic because I saw him fall in a hole in the middle of the year.... Yesterday, I saw someone who, if he does not make it on October the 9th – and I think he may – but if he doesn't make it on October the 9th *he will make it* [emphasis in original]. And he might make it within six months – it may not be a three year full term that he has to wait. I think it's most interesting.

Well, yes. Most interesting, to be sure. Maxine McKew was claiming that – if Labor lost on 9 October – Mark Latham might still become prime minister by mid April 2005. Just a couple of weeks after April Fool's Day, no less. How frightfully interesting. The logic (for want of a better word) surprised Richard Glover who asked McKew what she had in mind. The follow-up was quite bizarre. Let's go to the audio-tape again:

**RG:** Why do you say that – because of the Senate?

**MM:** Well, I think it could be tight enough, right? And if, if, if Howard departs quickly, Costello comes in, Costello will want his own victory. Costello won't want to stay around for some of the hard times that are probably coming.

**RG:** So, what [Costello] would call another election?

**MM:** [Costello] would call, would call, would, would call an early enough election. So that, before the, before the, bad economic times hit, he's got a good enough story to tell. I think Latham's time could be coming quite soon.

Get it? Maxine McKew declared that Latham "may" win on 9 October. But, if he did not, the Labor leader still "might" be prime minister "within six months". This would come about according to the following scenario. John Howard wins on 9 October but "departs quickly" soon after his victory. Question – why would he do this? Peter Costello takes over as prime minister and calls an "early" election. Question – why would he do this? Mark Latham defeats Peter Costello in an election held some time before mid April 2005. Question: Was Maxine McKew serious? Answer, apparently. Maybe there were too many fumes in the taxi on the way to the Journos' Forum. On reflection, she would have been better advised to talk with her hairdresser instead.

### **GEOFFREY BARKER'S FLIP-FLOP**

During the *Lateline* discussion, Maxine McKew referred to that morning's edition of the *Australian Financial Review* which, she reported, had "carried a

### **SIX WEEKS ON THE ELECTION TRAIL - WITH THE AUSTRALIAN FINANCIAL REVIEW**

The Australian Financial Review assessed each week of the Federal election campaign. How did Laura Tingle (the AFR's chief political correspondent) and her team go? Here's how:

- Week One – "Latham won at the edges but Howard hammered home his economic message." (AFR, 4 September 2004).
- Week Two – The Jakarta Bombing "has made most of the week electoral history" (AFR, 11 September 2004).
- Week Three – "Latham was on the front foot and Howard's campaign was dominated by attacking Labor" (AFR, 18 September 2004).
- Week Four – "Labor wins the week easily as Coalition goes off-message" (AFR, 25 September 2004).
- Week Five – "Howard started strongly but Latham finished in front" (AFR, 2 October 2004).
- Week Six – Laura Tingle provides the overall summary: "Six long weeks. Mark Latham clearly wins the campaign" (AFR, 8 October 2004).

The *Australian Financial Review* has yet to explain how a political party can clearly lose the campaign but clearly win the election.

### **YOU MUST REMEMBER THIS....**

- Mark Latham on Michelle Grattan AO – January 2004

"No journalist has ever been more accurate, more meticulous and more thorough. She is a legend within her own profession and fully deserves such a high honour."

*Mark Latham – Canberra Times, 26 January 2004 (on responding to the news that Michelle Grattan has received the AO gong in the Australia Day Honours List).*

- Mark Latham on Michelle Grattan (without AO) – July 2002

"...the reclusive Michelle Grattan, the Howard Hughes of the Press Gallery, said that I should get out more and visit the supermarket. Michelle herself is getting ready to return home – at age 58, the oldest recruit to Celebrity Big Brother. If the exit polls at Fairfax are any guide, she'll never be voted off again.

*Mark Latham – address to the New South Wales Fabian Society, 3 July 2002.*

devastating critique, authored by Geoffrey Barker, a critique of Latham's leadership". Sure did. Barker's article, titled "The brutal verdict on Latham" commenced with an unequivocal message:

**There is a deep sense of foreboding inside the Labor Party that the personality and performance of Opposition leader Mark Latham are insurmountable obstacles to the party's return to national government. (AFR, 22 October 2004).**

Barker quoted "close observers" criticising the Labor leader on a range of issues – including his personality, the policies he advocated and the election campaign he ran. Barker reported criticisms of Latham Labor's policies on a range of issues – i.e. the Tasmanian forests policy, Medicare Gold, education, tax and family benefits along with economic and foreign policy. Barker concluded his devastating critique with pontificating advice:

**The message for Latham is simple and Darwinian: adapt and change, or resign yourself to political death. The choice, as always, belongs to the leader.**

On *Lateline*, McKew, Tingle and Price all referred to Barker's critique with some reverence. Not one thought it appropriate to mention to *Lateline* viewers that the journalist had dramatically changed his mind on Latham within a couple of weeks. On the morning of the election, the *Australian Financial Review's* front page highlighted its election coverage under the title "Final Showdown". The second story listed was headed "Latham Wins, No Matter What: Geoffrey Barker". Turn to Page 19 and there is the piece by Barker titled "Latham: Evolving Political Star". The article commenced with unequivocal praise for the Labor leader:

**Win or lose, Mark Latham is the future of political Labor. A win will cement his place in Labor history as the man who crashed through to end the long Howard incumbency. A loss will be judged an impressive first tilt at high office yet to be attained.**

As is his wont, Barker proceeded to divulge in some political theory. He latched on to the work of the American political scientist Harold Lasswell (1902-1978). In the 1930s, Lasswell developed what Barker described as a "three-part typology of political actors as either agitators, administrators or theorists". Then Barker declared that Latham "is part agitator, part administrator, part theorist" but wrote that "it remains to be seen which will emerge as the

dominant and decisive type in his political make up or how he will ultimately mould them into a political whole". Gee wiz.

Geoffrey Barker went on to claim that "there is a broad political consensus that Latham, however he is viewed, has won the campaign with a nice blend of toughness..., tenderness..., and wry humour". Barker was not sure whether Latham's "campaign dominance will translate into enough votes for Labor in the right places to oust the Coalition". But he was sure that the campaign "certainly guarantees Latham's future as Labor leader". Barker also declared that the Labor leader succeeded in making "himself the emotional representative of many Australians". In concluding his article, Barker had no doubt that "Latham will be a towering figure in Australian politics of the 21st Century" (*AFR*, 9-10 October 2004).

So there you have it. On Saturday 9 October Geoffrey Barker was predicting that Mark Latham "will be a towering figure in Australian politics of the 21st Century" And on Friday 22 October Geoffrey Barker was warning the Labor leader to "adapt and change" or resign himself "to political death".

Nowhere in the second article did Geoffrey Barker concede that he made a false assessment the first time round. What's more, the *Lateline* panel discussed Barker's views without ever talking about his metamorphosis concerning matters Latham. But, then, Maxine McKew, Laura Tingle and Matt Price had a vested interest in not raising their own pre-election assessments of Mark Latham's personality, policies and prospects. Quite convenient, huh?

## **WISH-FULFILLMENT AND THE IRAQ FACTOR**

So great was this denial that, in his *Weekend Australian* column on 16-17 October 2004, Matt Price described as "eyewash" the claim that the Parliamentary Press Gallery was guilty of "misreading the 2004 election result". He asserted that "practically everyone in Canberra" believed that "the Coalition would do well to maintain its position but might drop a few seats". But what about, er, Matt Price himself who – in the very same column on the morning of the election – suggested that Latham Labor might defeat John Howard's Coalition "by a couple of seats?" (*The Weekend Australian*, 9-10 October 2004). What indeed?

Matt Price's election prediction was, in fact, an exercise in wish-fulfillment. He wanted to believe that Iraq would be a factor in the 2004 election campaign and that this would work against John Howard. It was not – and it did not. Earlier (*The Weekend*

*Australian*, 25-26 September 2004) Price maintained that Mark Latham was “giving the ill-prepared Coalition a frightful shock”. He wasn’t – and he didn’t. It was a case of projection replacing analysis.

Despite the Coalition’s protestations at the time, the Howard Government did not experience a generally critical media from its election victory in March 1996 up to some months before the November 2001 election. However, attitudes began to change significantly when the Howard Government committed the Australian Defence Force to the Coalition of the Willing (the United States, Britain, Australia and Poland) in Iraq. The fact that the overwhelming majority of members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery opposed the Howard Government’s Iraq policy did affect the way national politics was reported in 2003 and 2004.

## ALAN RAMSEY, MARILYN MANSON AND MACK THE TRUCK

In his apologia for his colleagues in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, Matt Price claimed that *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist Alan Ramsey “is routinely cited as evidence of the Press Gallery’s evil”. However, according to Price, Ramsey “is a one-off”. He added: “Declaring Ramsey’s glorious tirades to be typical of the Gallery is akin to comparing Marilyn Manson with a Salvation Army marching band.” Price provided no evidence to support his proposition that Gallery critics “routinely” cite Ramsey as “evidence” for, or “typical” of, anything at all. Yet Ramsey’s views are worthy of reporting – if only because he has the main opinion column in the *Sydney Morning Herald* each Saturday along with a smaller piece every Wednesday.

It is true that Ramsey looked forward obsessively to John Howard’s defeat (he had a not dissimilar negative obsession with Labor prime minister Paul Keating a decade or so ago). But it is also true that – as in 1993 when the *Sydney Morning Herald’s* lead Saturday columnist (falsely) predicted a Labor defeat – your man Ramsey did not have a good election campaign, principally because he projected his own views about Iraq on to the Australian electorate. Put simply, Ramsey hoped that Labor’s new leader Mark Latham would defeat and discredit John Howard and end Australia’s commitment in Iraq.

- **20 December 2003.** Following the election of Mark Latham as Labor leader, AR declares that “John Howard now has the fight of his life on his hands”.
- **31 January 2004.** AR believes that Mark Latham’s stance opposing the Australian commitment in Iraq should benefit Labor: “We’ll now

see who the majority of voters believe when it comes to call the Government to account”. He concludes: “What a year we’re all in for”. What, indeed.

- **7 February 2004.** After pontificating about matters Iraq, AR depicts the Labor leader as a weapon of mass destruction targeted on John Howard: “What a year...Drink your tea Prime Minister and think about Labor’s very own WMD coming to get you.”

- **14 February 2004.** AR urges his readers not to “underestimate how vulnerable he [Howard] is to the opponent he never saw coming [i.e. Mark Latham].

- **28 February 2004.** It’s Mark Latham’s 43rd birthday. AR reflects that “in truth every day has been Labor’s birthday since Latham got the leadership 89 days ago.” Wow.

- **6 March 2004.** AR concludes his column with yet another prediction: “Thank you and good night John Howard.”

- **24 March 2004.** AR ends up with a reflection: “The truth is Howard has no idea other than to spend like a madman and trust Latham will cock it up. Really.” Really.

- **20 March 2004.** AR depicts John Howard as “a political leader coming apart under the remorseless mental pressure of evolving defeat” whose career is “in crisis”.

- **3 April 2004.** AR looks back in happiness on the past seven days: “What we saw this week, above all else, is why Howard is losing. And I think losing badly. And I do mean losing the election”. AR declares that there is a “Mack truck coming” for John Howard.

- **22 May 2004.** AR virtually hands over his column to ANOP pollster Rod Cameron who he describes as “one of the most perceptive and least self-deluding political analysts in the country”. So much so, it seems, that AR is prepared to give RC some 21 paragraphs out a possible 24 paras to fill his column.

So, what does RC think? Well, RC believes that the Coalition “has to do five things” to win the election. Just five, apparently. It has to do something on (i) income tax cuts for middle income earners, (ii) health and education, (iii) Peter Costello (he’s “deeply unpopular”), (iv) the “vision thing” (it needs to be developed) and (v) Mark Latham (it must establish that he is untrustworthy). Rocket science, eh?

And what “things” must Labor do. Well, according to RC, Mark Latham (i) has “got to stay serious”,

“ignore the inner-city latte set” and “do something about the \$ 40,000 to \$ 50,000 income earners”, (ii) revisit the values debate – you know, “reading to kids” and so on and (iii) not move too far to the left on national security – “bringing the troops home [from Iraq] is OK” but remember that “middle Australia still wants the security of the US as a firm ally”. In conclusion, RC depicts John Howard as “the house guest you never really liked and who has overstayed his welcome”.

Flashback to 15 March 2003. This was another occasion where Alan Ramsey devoted almost his entire column to a VERY LONG QUOTATION from Rod Cameron. Like a clear majority of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, Ramsey opposed the Howard Government’s decision to deploy the Australian Defence Force in Iraq. On the eve of the Second Gulf War, AR commenced his column by declaring that “for the first time” John Howard “has grievously misjudged Australian sentiment”. After reporting that “ANOP’s Rod Cameron, a pollster with 35 years experience of the Australian electorate, thinks Howard is doing himself in”, AR effectively handed over his column to RC.

According to Rod Cameron – as told to Alan Ramsey circa March 2003 – John Howard’s Iraq commitment was causing the Coalition huge political problems. RC declared: “I’ve been saying since January [2003] I think the fundamentals of politics in Australia are changing. I think that John Howard’s vice-like grip on the swinging voter has loosened. Really, he’s no longer in tune with the majority of voters. I think he’s made a serious misjudgement to become some overtly aligned with the US...”. RC went on to state that John Howard was “now making significant political misjudgements”. AR concluded his (or was it Rod Cameron’s?) column with the missive: “Happy war games, John Howard.”

So in March 2003 Rod Cameron said that it was a serious misjudgment for Australia to become overtly aligned with the US. And in May 2004 he declared that middle Australia wanted the US as a firm ally. Both comments were reported at considerable length by Alan Ramsey.

- **5 June 2004.** AR quotes, at great length, from the media conference given by George W. Bush and John Howard in the White House Rose Garden. Quotes from the Bush/Howard transcript are broken by AR’s very own thoughts – as in (i) “and on, and on, and on”, (ii) “and on, and on, and on”, (iii) “unadulterated, puking twaddle”, (iv) “and on, and on, and on”, (v) “and on, and on, and on” along with – wait for it – (vi) “more dishonest, puking twaddle”. Which raises the point – if the comments by the President and the Prime Minister were so boring and/or puking, why quote them at such length in the

first place? – except as column filler material. AR concludes with a warning to John Howard: “The Mack truck is still coming.”

- **16 June 2004.** AR reflects that “Howard knows he could well have fatally misjudged in deciding last July not to retire undefeated while he still had the chance”.

- **23 June 2004.** It’s time to view the opinion polls according to AR’s very own interpretation. They show that Labor’s primary vote “has gained between four and five percentage points since the last election, while the Government has gained nothing”. AR urges his readers: “Think hard about that; you can bet the Prime Minister does.”

- **18 September 2004.** AR refers to the National Party leader in the following terms: “The hapless John Anderson, a nice Catholic family man clueless about politics.” A cursory glance at either *Who’s Who in Australia* or the *Commonwealth Parliamentary Handbook* would reveal that John Anderson, who was educated at The King’s School, is an Anglican. This particular howler is never corrected. AR also advises that he went “to lunch on Wednesday (minced chicken and potato salad, lettuce, celery, avocado, red capsicum, a bread roll on each plate, chopped pineapple and ice cream to follow) at the Cowra Show Society”. Fancy that.

- **25 September 2004.** It’s back to prophecy as AR predicts: “I mean, think: the Government could lose and Howard too.” This is no fantasy, AR opines: “Improbable perhaps. But fantasy, no. You only have to look – and I mean, really look – at what’s been happening in Howard’s inner-Sydney seat of Bennelong, to know that the threat is real, in the right circumstances”. And what about Liberal Party candidate Malcolm Turnbull’s chances in the seat of Wentworth? According to AR, Wentworth in 2004 “is there to be won by just about anyone except Turnbull.”

- **2 October 2004.** AR supports the allegation advanced by Tony Jones on the ABC TV *Lateline* program on 30 September 2004 that Health Minister Tony Abbott saw Cardinal George Pell “quite recently” and “ten days ago”. The implication was that the Minister spoke with the Cardinal urging the publication of a joint statement by the Catholic and Anglican Hierarchy in Sydney and Melbourne criticising Labor’s schools funding policy. Initially during the interview, Tony Abbott could not remember any such get together – but then recalled that there was a meeting, albeit on a private matter. AR does not believe Abbott (who he terms the “Mad Monk”) and declares: “I mean, talk about ‘Gotcha’... Abbott went down like a stone.” It is subsequently

revealed that Tony Jones was wrong. The Abbott/Pell meeting actually took place on 31 August 2004 – i.e. some weeks *before* Mark Latham released Labor’s schools policy. AR does not make a correction to this particular conspiracy theory.

• **9 October 2004.** At last, it’s election day. Page One of the *Sydney Morning Herald* reports the latest AC Nielsen poll which has the Coalition’s total vote ahead of Labor – by 54 per cent to 46 per cent. On Page One Louise Dodson writes that “John Howard is poised to win a historic fourth term” and Peter Hartcher comments that “every piece of available

objective evidence points to the same conclusion; John Howard will win today’s election”.

Turn to the Opinion Page. Alan Ramsey is not too concerned about available, objective evidence. Rather, AR is sticking by his belief that the Coalition will lose the election – and that John Howard might even be defeated in Bennelong. But, now, AR concedes that Malcolm Turnbull will win Wentworth. AR concludes:

**And Latham? I think he can get there. At the very least Labor will eat into the Government’s majority. People are sick**

## WHY THE ELECTORATE GOT IT WRONG

- As Michael McKinley told Alan Ramsey

**...the moral character of national politics has just taken a hammering from which it will probably take several political generations to recover, though my instinct is matters will get worse instead....We have just witnessed an historical, catastrophic collapse in the moral polity of the country.**

*Academic and commentator Michael McKinley – approvingly quoted by Alan Ramsey (who else?) in the Sydney Morning Herald, 16 October 2004.*

☆☆☆☆☆

- Mike Secombe – Before the Australian election

**Howard’s style hardly changes; he focuses on past achievement and uncertain future. Heavy on fear, light on vision. Then, having frightened the apathetic into voting for him, he uses his special skill for putting them back to sleep for another three years.**

*Mike Secombe – Sydney Morning Herald, 8 October 2004*

- Mike Secombe – After the American election – alleging that Americans have embraced “the values of prejudice and bigotry and crusading”.

**I mean, this morning I was watching BBC World and there was a – I think he was a colonel – who was about to lead the troops into Fallujah who was saying “We are fighting a faceless enemy and his name is Satan and we’re going there to defeat him.” Now this is not rational thought. These are not people who are**

**thinking rationally about politics and where their interest lies. These are people who are being misled basically on the basis of their stupidity. As, you know, J.K. Galbraith once said: “Not all conservatives are stupid; but most stupid people are conservative.” I mean, this is what’s happened in America. A lot of people have been misled...**

*Mike Secombe, ABC TV Insiders, 7 November 2004.*

☆☆☆☆☆

- Terry Lane – Alienation 101

**The voter is incorrigibly self-centred, self-regarding and just plain selfish. Is it any wonder that we have developed a form of democracy based on three self-evident truths – negative gearing is sacred, income tax is evil and votes are for sale.**

*ABC Radio National presenter Terry Lane in The Sunday Age, 3 October 2004.*

☆☆☆☆☆

- Clive Hamilton – Creeping Affluenza

**And that is where we have got to in Australia after 20 years of creeping affluenza, an era in which materialism and the attendant self-absorption have invaded the daily consciousness of most Australians. So the Coalition victory reflects nothing more than the narrow-mindedness and preoccupation with self that characterises modern Australia after two decades of market ideology and sustained growth.**

*Clive Hamilton (director, Australia Institute) – The Independent Weekly, 17 October 2004.*

☆☆☆☆☆

**and tired of Howard and many of us detest him for his duplicity, his divisiveness and his gross mendacity. It's simply a question of whether the undecideds in the marginals think Latham is ready. They just might.**

• **11 October 2004.** In a special post-election comment, AR made no apology for having misread the mood of the Australian electorate for so long. Nor was there any reference to his prediction that Labor would win the election and that the likes of John Howard and Malcolm Turnbull might be defeated in Bennelong and Wentworth respectively. Rather, AR bagged Australians for their (alleged) "gullibility", "ignorance" and "greedy self-interest" and attributed the Coalition's success to the support it received from "the thick and the avaricious". In short, AR criticised the electorate for not agreeing with him:

**This time the people's will has got it dreadfully wrong. Now we all have to pay for the comfortable idiocy of the manipulated ....Still Latham's time will come. Believe it.**

So there you have it. A majority of Australians, who voted contrary to Ramsey's wishes, are mere manipulated idiots. AR also railed: "I apologise for nothing." What's new?

## **CRAIG MCGREGOR'S "AUSTRALIAN SON"**

Alan Ramsey was not the only Latham barracker who refrained from apologising to his readers for incorrectly reading the mood in the electorate in the lead-up to the election. In his column on 24 July 2004, Ramsey quoted at length from Craig McGregor's *Australian Son: Inside Mark Latham* (Pluto Press) which was to be released the following week. This was the first of four biographical studies of the Labor leader published before the election – there is another one (by journalist Bernard Lagan) due for publication after the election.

McGregor, an author and journalism academic, became very much the leader of the Latham Fan Club – from the time he wrote a most favourable profile of the Member for Werriwa in the *Good Weekend* in 1997 (see "The anointed one", *Good Weekend*, 13 September 1997) in which he predicted that Latham would become prime minister. McGregor is also a fully paid up member of the Howard-Haters Club. Writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 22 December 2003, he placed John Howard as Number 10 in his "The 10 Most Important Australians" list. It was a case of praising with loud damns. According to McGregor: "Whatever you think of him [Howard], one thing must

be admitted: he brings out the worst in Australians". Get the picture?

Shortly before Mark Latham became Labor leader, McGregor wrote that "no one doubts that under him the ALP would regain the distinctive identity it has lacked from years of squishy me-tooism" (*The Age*, 1 December 2003). On the day after Mark Latham defeated Kim Beazley in the Labor leadership ballot, McGregor commented that "nearly everyone who meets Latham is immediately impressed by him". He also predicted that "Latham is going to change the tone and direction of Australian politics. According to McGregor, "there is an innate core of belief in Latham that is very close to what the Australian electorate has for years been searching for: integrity. (*Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, 3 December 2004).

There was much more praise for the Labor leader in *Australian Son*. McGregor claimed that Latham's "parallel" was "not with Paul Keating but with Gough Whitlam, who years ago anointed Latham as a future prime minister". McGregor simply overlooked the fact that in 1975 and 1977, after the Australian electorate had experienced three years of Whitlamism in practice, Gough Whitlam led Labor to two of its worst-ever defeats. McGregor concluded his tome with an expression of hope: "I'm convinced that Latham will become prime minister of Australia; the people will decide. But at least he has reintroduced to a nation that badly needs it the politics of hope."

So what did Craig McGregor do after the people decided not to make Mark Latham prime minister, for three years at least. He went into denial, that's what. Writing in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 11 October, McGregor claimed that the Labor leader had "run a very good campaign" – but, like many a journalist, he did not say how a political leader can run a good campaign and still lose votes and seats. McGregor asserted that, "like his mentor" Whitlam, "Latham represents an energetic new force in Australian politics" and took particular comfort from this: "There is an opinion among some in the national press gallery that the parallel year is 1969, when Gough Whitlam failed to win power from a longstanding Liberal government, not 1972, when he won the prime ministership, and instituted a radical program and transformed the country".

To arrive at this conclusion, McGregor had to overlook the facts. In 1969, under Whitlam's leadership, Labor obtained a swing of 7.1 per cent and won 18 seats from the Coalition. In 2004, under Latham's leadership, Labor suffered a swing against it of 2.2 per cent along with a net loss of three seats. In short, there is no comparison between Whitlam Labor in 1969 and Latham Labor in 2004 – unless, of course, a condition of denial exists.

In his election post-mortem, McGregor made it clear that he supported Latham Labor's "broad range of policies" – with particular emphasis on Iraq but conceded that "the electorate was clearly not ready for him". According to McGregor, Mark Latham "needs to be better known" and assumed that, once he is better known, he "will be prime minister of Australia". McGregor simply dismissed the possibility that a majority of Australians may have got to know the Labor leader and may have decided that he is not prime minister material.

### **BARRY DONOVAN'S "CIRCUITBREAKER"**

A similar theme – of presenting the Labor leader as a man destined to become prime minister – ran through Barry Donovan's *Mark Latham: The Circuitbreaker* (The Five Mile Press). Donovan, formerly a Melbourne based journalist and Labor staffer who became a media consultant, described his subject as a "circuit-breaker extraordinaire". By this he meant someone who would break a circuit in favour of the Labor Party and Australia. In his introduction, Donovan revealed where the concept of the title came from. Donovan, you see, is married to Megan Stoyles (also a former journalist and Labor staffer). In early 2004 Stoyles phoned her former boss Gough Whitlam to ask about Mark Latham – and put the following proposition to Whitlam viz: "He's a circuitbreaker, isn't he?" To which Labor's self-anointed icon responded: "Yes, he's definitely a political circuitbreaker." Gough Whitlam continued: "As leader of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party Mark Latham will defeat a reactionary Coalition at the next Federal elections....". So there you have it. Or not.

In his concluding chapter, Donovan quoted Professor Christopher Lloyd (with approval) as arguing that "many members of the socially motivated and well-educated middle class who rose out of the regions and suburbs of disadvantage, thanks in part to Whitlamesque social democracy, yearn for social justice and the saving or rebuilding of cultural richness, social civility, equality, environmental amelioration, and social cohesion". Donovan also expressed his belief or, rather, hope that the Mark Latham story would work: "His Green Valley to Canberra story, his ladder of opportunity, his support for workers and not slackers, his concentration on family values and mentors for young people, his reading programs for kids, all struck strong emotional cords with people around the country."

What Donovan overlooked was the fact that there is not much support for Whitlamism in Australia's outer suburbs and regional centres – and that voters in

marginal seats were unlikely to be swayed to support a political leader simply because he/she had a background in public housing and advocated reading programs for children.

### **MICHAEL DUFFY'S "FINEST"**

Journalist and publisher Michael Duffy was the next Latham biographer to publish an assessment of the new Labor leader – except that he decided to do a joint profile of Mark Latham and Liberal Party Cabinet minister Tony Abbott. *Latham and Abbott* (Random House) was subtitled: "The lives and rivalry of the two finest politicians of their generation". This was a big call. For starters, Duffy excluded Peter Costello – who is of the same generation as Mark Latham and Tony Abbott. Also, it was somewhat heroic to define an Opposition leader as the "finest" Labor politician of his generation when the person so described had yet to contest an election as the leader of his party. Likewise, it is somewhat heroic to describe Tony Abbott as the "finest" Liberal of his generation when he has yet to ever seek the leadership of his party.

Duffy had the sense not to predict a Labor victory. He concluded *Latham and Abbott* by stating that both men "possess many of the qualities of leadership required in the first decade of the twenty-first generation". However, in promoting his book, Duffy was not so constrained. Interviewed on the ABC TV *7.30 Report* (4 August 2004), Duffy maintained that Latham and Abbott had "a superb range of political skills". This may prove to be the case. But certainly Mark Latham did not demonstrate such talent in his first election as Labor leader.

### **AT DINNER WITH MARGARET SIMONS**

The final Latham pre-election biography was published in late August 2004. In *Latham's World: The New Politics of the Outsiders* (Quarterly Essay, Issue 15, 2004), journalist Margaret Simons revealed that she had been captured by the Latham persona. Early on in her monograph, she told how, at a "dinner party" she had "halted a political argument by reading aloud the first few pages of Latham's most recent book, *From the Suburbs*". She did not indicate what was the reaction of fellow dinner party guests to this impromptu reading from *The Thought of Latham*. Clearly Simons is a barracker for the Labor leader – as she made abundantly clear early in her monograph where she wrote:

**If Latham ascends to power, then it will be a signal of succession to our generation [Margaret Simons was born in 1960; Mark Latham in 1961]. We will be in our prime.**

**It will be our turn to run the place, and I am sure things will be different.**

Like McGregor and Donovan, Simons acknowledged that “Latham’s roots are not in the Hawke and Keating years but in an earlier phase of Australian Labor Party history; in both a literal and broader sense, he is Gough Whitlam’s heir”. Like McGregor and Donovan, Simons did not understand that being “Whitlam’s heir” in 2004 did not necessarily win votes in the marginal seats in suburban and regional Australia.

Simons believed that she knew Mark Latham well. Despite failing to obtain an interview for her profile – this is referred to on many occasions in *Latham’s World* – she felt that she understood the Labor leader because “it is all there in the books”. Yes, it is. The problem is that Mark Latham’s views are frequently contradictory – a fact denied by Simons. She referred to Mark Latham as “surely one of the most penetrating analytical thinkers of recent Australian history...” and formed the view that some of the penetrating analytical policies in his books would be implemented in government.

The Kaldor tax, for example – which is advocated by Mark Latham in his 1998 book *Civilising Global Capital: New Thinking for Australian Labor* (Allen & Unwin). Based on the theory of the British economist Nicholas Kaldor, the Kaldor tax envisages that taxes would be based on consumption – not income – and that taxpayers with the highest level of consumption would pay the highest proportion of tax. Interviewed on the ABC Radio *AM* program on the morning of Labor’s tax policy release, Simons predicted that Mark Latham might take a Kaldor tax scheme to the electorate in 2004. He did not. Which is hardly unexpected – since such a scheme has never been implemented anywhere. Yet, apparently, Simons was surprised that the Labor leader had abandoned one of his analytical policies which had been spelt out “in the [Latham] books”.

Margaret Simons ended her essay with the familiar Mark-Latham-has-changed-the-future theme. She overlooked the fact that Australia’s immediate political future would be determined after, not before, the 2004 Federal election. According to Simons’ concluding remarks:

**Mark Latham’s arrival on the political scene has brought to an end the fictions that have dominated politics for the last ten years. Whatever lies ahead – and whether or not Mark Latham wins government – we have at last arrived in our present.**

If Mark Latham had led Labor to victory at the election, this may have been the case. Even if Latham Labor had lost on 51 per cent, 50 per cent or 49 per

cent of the total vote – it would be possible to argue that, consequent upon the 2004 election, Australia’s “present” would be affected. However, Latham Labor’s low vote (at 47 per cent) cannot be regarded as affecting Australia’s present. Margaret Simons’ conclusion was yet another Latham supporting overstatement by yet another enthusiastic Latham biographer.

## DICKANGULATION

Margaret Simons – like many an observer of Lathamism – was much impressed by the fact that the Labor leader is a follower of the American political activist/commentator Dick Morris. Writing about Dick Morris’ book *The New Prince* (Renaissance Books, 1999), Mark Latham commented that “Morris is the Machiavelli of our time”. He added that “his success as a political consultant in the United States is now matched by his dazzling insights and advice in printed form; he makes the rest of us look like film-flam on the atlas of public life” (Mark Latham “Politicians, take heed of new Machiavelli”, *Australian Financial Review*, 30 August 1999).

This was a significant overstatement. If Morris had such “dazzling insights” into life, it is unclear why he would have been forced to resign from Bill Clinton’s administration after being photographed in the presence of a prostitute. It turned out that the lady in question had listened in to a phone conversation between her client and the President. It is difficult to imagine Niccolio Machiavelli (1469-1527) getting himself into such a predicament. In any event, Morris has a number of followers in Australia – including Mark Latham – who regard him as a political genius. As Margaret Simons put it in *Latham’s World*:

**Latham is heavily influenced by Clinton’s adviser, Dick Morris, who coined the ugly word “triangulation” – the notion that left and right are extremes on a flat plane, with the Third Way sitting both between and above them, like the apex of a triangle. Latham believes in cutting through ideology to arrive at fresh, pragmatic solutions. One of the recurring phrases in his books is: “it is time to rethink things from first principles.”**

Margaret Simons was not the only Australian journalist to be impressed by the Latham-Morris connection. In *Latham and Abbott*, Michael Duffy wrote that Morris’s book *The New Prince* “implicitly validated Latham as the policy hero of modern Australian Labor”. In *Mark Latham: The Circuitbreaker*, Barry Donovan commented, approvingly, that “the themes that Latham had

pursued such as the ladder of opportunity, reading for children and the Green Valley story (Bill Clinton told coming from a town called Hope) are themes that Dick Morris as a political strategist has recommended in the American political environment". Donovan was one of many journalists who were impressed by Mark Latham's (much told) personal story from his time living in public housing in Sydney's outer suburban Green Valley.

Shortly after Mark Latham won the Labor leadership, the ABC Radio AM program reporter in Washington – John Shovelan – interviewed Morris. Shovelan reported that Morris "gives Mr Latham a strong chance of becoming prime minister" (ABC Radio AM, 4 December 2004). But Shovelan overlooked the fact that Morris knew little about Australian politics – having made only one visit to Australia to attend the 2000 Sydney Writer's Festival. Morris told Shovelan that "Howard is like a fixed piece of artillery that's planted in the ground" and "if you walk into the field of fire you get hurt". However, "if instead, you play a mobile game" – Howard can be "confused". Such a scenario "makes it possible for" Latham "to win" because "he's not the enemy" the Coalition is "prepared to face". Easy, it seems.

In 5 December 2003, *The Australian* carried an article by Morris in which he welcomed Latham's election as Labor leader as a means of avoiding "the ritual suicide it has practised in past elections". He concluded with the advice that Latham was "headed for great things; take it from a Yank". On 2 June 2004 *The Australian* ran another piece by Morris in which he declared that "Latham is on the right track" and that "Latham can beat Howard; he's running a great campaign".

Morris had a similar message when interviewed by Michael Duffy on his ABC Radio National *Counterpoint* program on 9 August 2004. Morris told Duffy that Mark Latham "really understands that the Labor Party can't deal with the traditional issues of employment and jobs and that stuff because everybody understands that those are multinational decisions". Morris praised the Labor leader for having "really zeroed in on the quality of life issues" and predicted that "he's probably going to win". Interviewed by Tony Jones on the ABC TV *Lateline* program in the final week of the campaign (6 October 2004), Morris praised Latham for "revising the traditional agenda of the Labor Party in the same way that Clinton called himself a 'New Democrat'". Tony Jones did not appear to appreciate the futility of seeking an "expert" assessment on the likely outcome of the election from an American commentator who had only spent a few days in

Australia. Clearly Dick Morris has a reputation in Australia which exceeds by far his standing in the United States.

## PAUL KELLY ON "THE GREATEST CONTEST IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICS"

There is little doubt that the Morris endorsement of Latham influenced even the most thoughtful journalistic commentators. *The Australian's* Paul Kelly and *The Age's* Michelle Grattan for example. The day after the Labor leadership change, Kelly made the following assessment:

**Mark Latham has the ability to force a realignment within Australian politics as distinct from the anti-Howard instrumentalism that has been the Labor way since 1996. Latham has the potential in his style and content to hold the Labor base, yet win back the non-unionised working class and the frustrated middle class, the Howard battlers (*The Australian*, 3 December 2003).**

A few days later, Kelly was at it again. This time claiming: "The battle for the Mark Latham story has begun – it will be the greatest contest in Australian politics." (*The Weekend Australian*, 6-7 December 2003). At the time of writing, Mark Latham had been Labor leader for only four days.

In a lengthy profile of Latham, published in *The Weekend Australian* on 13-14 December 2003, Kelly commented favourably on the Labor leader's "use of his personal life as a temple of what Labor believes". He concluded his piece with a specific reference to Dick Morris:

**Latham is a fan of Bill Clinton's political adviser Dick Morris. He wants to remove himself from Howard's line of fire by adopting the Morris technique of triangulation – you create a new position altogether...The media has done lots of work on Latham's silly ideas and contradictions. But it has missed the main point. Latham wants to alter the established political parameters. He's coming from outside the circle – from outside the narrow lens, closed mind and tactical obsession that defines most of our political coverage. His core ideas have been on the public record for years, but most of his media critics are still clueless about them. They are, however, right about one thing – implementation is Latham's daunting challenge.**

The likes of Paul Kelly were initially overwhelmed by the Latham presence – primarily because he was both fresh and different. This excitement was evident in Paul Kelly’s coverage of Mark Latham’s speech at the ALP National Conference in January 2004:

**Mark Latham is turning into the sort of leader that almost nobody in politics expected just two months ago – his strength is media image, communications position and a type of “new generation” chemistry. If the Howard Government is starting to get alarmed (and it should be) most of the Labor Party is just agog. It can hardly believe its luck, so far. It took a gamble on Latham and its senior MPs are rubbing their eyes in astonishment. The ALP today is a case study in what a dose of hope can do to a lost cause. Latham’s speech to the ALP national conference and its media coverage confirms the bad news for John Howard. The PM must have choked at the stunning page one coverage in his favourite paper, *The Daily Telegraph*, let alone what it signifies – that the media is becoming fascinated with the Latham phenomenon.**

**The further bad news for the Coalition is that the old Mark Latham seems to have disappeared. Gone, vanished, out of sight. You might remember him, the foul-mouthed ranter who seemed to be unhinged and whose speeches offered Howard a litany of material. Don’t worry. You’ll see the old Latham again in the Coalition’s TV election ads later this year, but that will be an exercise in nostalgia. Latham is starting to define a “new generation” leadership essentially by being himself. And if that works it’s really scary for Howard.**

Paul Kelly’s continuing excitement with Mark Latham was evident in his initial responses to the Labor leader’s policy announcements. Take Iraq and Medicare Gold, for example.

Kelly praised Latham’s address to the Lowy Institute on 7 April 2004, where the Labor leader distanced the ALP from the Howard Government on the Australian-American Alliance and confirmed that a Latham Government would withdraw Australian Defence Force personnel from Iraq by Christmas. According to Kelly, this was a “conviction speech” (*The Australian*, 8 April 2004). Subsequently, Mark Latham moderated his stance on both the Australian-American Alliance and Australia’s role in Iraq. Addressing the Australian Institute of International Affairs on 12 July 2004, the Labor leader was more

positive about the Australian-American Alliance and more conciliatory about Australia’s role in Iraq. Kelly declared that this “was a very significant speech” and welcomed the fact that Mark Latham had been “quite sympathetic towards the United States” and had “tried to reframe Labor’s Iraq policy” (*ABC TV Insiders*, 18 July 2004). In other words, Paul Kelly responded favourably to two quite different Latham speeches on Australian foreign policy.

Later still, during the midst of the election campaign, Kelly described Medicare Gold policy initiative as “pure Whitlamism” – without using that reference in a critical sense (*The Australian*, 30 September 2004).

On the eve of the election, however, Kelly acknowledged that: “In a time of uncertainty, Howard’s mantra is ‘trust me more’ and if this dreambeat resonates then Howard will win.” (*The Australian*, 8 October 2004). Earlier on, following a lengthy interview with the Labor leader, Kelly acknowledged that “Latham is a teeming mass of contradictions, a conundrum and a constantly changing presence” (*The Weekend Australian*, 25-26 September 2004). But, then, he always was – even though this was not always understood by journalists.

In his post-election analysis (*The Australian*, 13 October 2004), Kelly wrote that “Latham seems infatuated by too many ideas, from Dick Morris’ triangulation to the politics of the outsider, yet lacks the discernment to know what works and when”. He added that the Labor leader “seemed arrogant enough to think he had invented a new politics yet the public’s priorities remained the economy, security and living standards. The joke was on Latham”. Maybe. But the joke was also on those journalists – including Kelly himself – who, for a while at least, believed that Dick Morris’ triangulation theory might work in Australia and who maintained that Mark Latham’s political style and unpredictable policies might appeal to a majority of voters in Australia’s suburbs and regional centres.

### **MICHELLE GRATTAN ON LATHAM’S “HONED GUERRILLA SKILLS”**

Michelle Grattan was another senior journalist who seemed initially enthralled by the Latham phenomenon – both in her comments in *The Age* and the *Sun-Herald* and during his almost daily appearances on the ABC Radio National Breakfast program. Following his election as Labor leader, Grattan believed that Latham could win the election:

**With Latham’s election, Labor has finally moved decisively beyond the Hawke-Keating years...Latham is – and has been**

## PAUL BONGIORNO - FOUR OUT OF 10

Like a number of members of the Canberra Parliamentary Press Gallery, Paul Bongiorno began to exhibit disappointment with the Howard Government following the Prime Minister's tough line on border protection – which became evident at the time of the *MV Tampa* incident in August 2001. It was understandable why Paul Bongiorno (who is sometimes referred to as Bonge) disagreed with the Coalition's hard line on border protection/mandatory detention. The problem turned on the impression that his private views were affecting his public comments as head of the Network 10 bureau in Canberra. Subsequently it became evident that Bongiorno was also disillusioned with the Howard Government's decision to commit the Australian Defence Force to Iraq.

Paul Bongiorno's disillusionment with the Howard Government over recent years was obvious in his occasional chats with Phillip Adams on the ABC Radio National *Late Night Live* program. However it was also apparent in his (much briefer) comments on Network 10 News. So much so that Bonge did not have a good election campaign. Network 10's election coverage was overwhelmingly friendly to Labor and largely critical of the Coalition. A few examples illustrate the point:

- **7 September.** Bonge maintains that John Howard “needed a circuit breaker to get the discussion off whether he lies or not”.
- **8 September.** Bonge dismisses John Howard's argument that interest rates would be higher under a Labor government by asserting that the Reserve Bank of Australia has signalled that interest rates will rise, irrespective of which party wins the election. He does not source his assertion and provides no evidence that the RBA has said that interest rates will rise.
- **14 September.** Bonge reminds viewers that 70 per cent of children attend government schools which stand to get a massive boost from a Labor government. This is not evident from a reading of the ALP education policy.
- **15 September.** Bonge refers to the Coalition's attack on the 43 year old Mark Latham's (alleged) inexperience and advances the Labor leader's cause. He says that neither Peter Costello nor Paul Keating had run a business before becoming Treasurer in their forties (both men became treasurer in their late thirties). Costello was a self-employed barrister before becoming an MP.
- **23 September.** Bonge bags the Coalition's line on interest rates declaring “all the experts agree” that “there will be a rise” in interest rates after “polling date”. He does not provide any

evidence for his assertion. By the way, when was the last time that all economic experts agreed on anything?

- **28 September.** Bonge nails his colours to the Labor mast by supporting the ALP schools funding policy and criticising the Catholic and Anglican archbishops of Sydney and Melbourne who had criticised it. Spoke Bonge: “It certainly gives something for John Howard to beat Mark Latham over the head with. But I've got to say the spectre of church leaders making such a partisan political intervention this late in the election campaign on behalf of elite schools against the majority of other ones isn't a good look. It only goes to underline what Labor's really all about.”

- **1 October.** Bonge declares that “Health Minister Tony Abbott took a pounding when he was caught out not remembering a meeting only ten days earlier”. Here Bonge re-runs the allegations made by Tony Jones on the ABC TV *Lateline* program on 30 September that Abbott had met with Cardinal George Pell “quite recently” and “ten days ago” (i.e. circa 20 September) with a view to encouraging the Cardinal to put out a statement criticising Labor's school funding policy. In fact the meeting took place on 31 August – some two weeks before Mark Latham released Labor's school funding policy – and neither man discussed the issue of funding for private schools. It appears that Bonge did not bother to check details of the meeting with either Abbott or Pell.

- **8 October.** Bonge predicts that the Howard Government will lose seats, resulting in a “hung parliament”. He predicts the following outcome: Coalition - 74; Labor - 73; Independents - 3, with two of the Independents supporting the Coalition. Bonge did no better with the US election. On the eve of the election he told Sally Loane that George W. Bush was in “desperate trouble” (ABC Radio 702, 3 November 2004).

*Postscript:* According to Channel 10 news reporter Murray McCloskey, Mark Latham's aggressive hand shake with John Howard (on the morning of Friday 8 October) was “a rare moment of goodwill in what's been a gruelling campaign”. Network 10 was on its own here. David Turnbull (Channel 9) said that Mark Latham's handshake “looked like an act of intimidation”, Craig McMurtrie (ABC News) presented the event as an encounter which was “up close and personal”, Laurie Oakes (Channel 9) referred to the “aggressive handshake” while Mark Riley (Channel 7) described the incident as a “facing off” and Jim Middleton (ABC News) referred to the incident as “certainly up close and very personal”.

The evidence suggests that, in reporting the 2004 election, Network 10 saw what it wanted to see. So, on this occasion, Bonge gets a mere four out of 10.

**chosen as – a generational change. But he is also deeply rooted in modern Labor history, steeped in the experience and values of Whitlamism, which came to power 31 years ago yesterday. Not only is Latham Whitlam’s protégé and former staffer, but he pitches his political message to the suburbs Whitlam successfully wooed all those years ago (The Age, 3 December 2003).**

In her evident excitement, Michelle Grattan overlooked the fact that Whitlamism was decisively rejected by suburban voters in 1975 and again in 1977. This kind of political reporting was of no value to the Labor Party in that it created a false sense of electoral support. By the middle of 2004, Grattan was convinced that Latham’s advocacy of Dick Morris’ “values politics” (with emphasis on renouncing “tobacco money” for political donations, attacking “plastic bags” and so on) could work. Grattan maintained “that Dick, Mark and the ordinary voter might all be in accord about aspects of the ‘new politics’” (*The Age*, 9 June 2004). She was right about Morris and Latham – but not, alas, about the ordinary voter living in the suburbs and regional centres.

In early August, Grattan was extolling Mark Latham’s “honed guerilla skills” (*The Age*, 8 August 2004) and on the day the election was called she described John Howard as “looking uncomfortable against an opponent who has electoral appeal” (*Sun-Herald*, 29 August 2004). She added that “Howard finds himself in the extraordinary situation that whatever he does, he seems to hand ammunition to Latham.

In a pre-election comment, Grattan concluded that “if Mark Latham loses on Saturday, one reason will be that many voters feel they simply do not know or understand him enough” (*The Age*, 6 October 2004). She seemed unwilling to acknowledge that a majority of the electorate could make a negative assessment of the Labor leader because they believed that they did know and understand him. In the same article, Grattan argued that “Latham’s boldness has attracted voters, as it has confounded opponents, while also giving the latter windfall opportunities”. But she did not address the issue of whether Latham Labor might lose more votes than it might win. It was only after the election that Grattan publicly recognised that “much” of Labor’s poor performance was Mark Latham’s “fault” (*The Sunday Age*, 24 October 2004).

## **AND IT’S GOOD (LATHAM) NIGHT FROM KERRY O’BRIEN**

The problem with media coverage of the 2004 election is that so many journalists assumed that

Mark Latham had political skills and vote-winning and values-based policies which would have special appeal to the Australian electorate. So much so that many could not accept the implications of Latham Labor’s devastating defeat on 9 October.

*Take, for example, ABC TV 7.30 Report* presenter, Kerry O’Brien. O’Brien headed the ABC TV’s election night coverage. It was evident soon after the votes began to be counted that the Howard Government would be returned. Kerry O’Brien’s body language suggested that he was not enjoying the experience. As John Howard was making his way to the Wentworth Hotel in Sydney for his victory speech – and as Labor supporters were bemoaning the ALP’s loss of votes and seats along with the likelihood that the Howard Government would obtain a majority in the Senate – Kerry O’Brien paid the following extraordinary compliment to Labor’s (defeated) leader. It was as if Mark Latham had had a good election night:

**This has been a very tough moment for Mark Latham. Another chapter in the bleeding of man who may well be on his way to the prime ministership at some future point but right now has to face up to a Labor defeat and a tough one. A defeat in States where Labor had hoped to poll extremely well like Queensland, like South Australia. Questions are obviously going to be asked. There’s clearly going to be a post-mortem about what went wrong. But for this moment what has to be said about Mark Latham is that he grew through the campaign (I think even his opponents will acknowledge that), that he won some respect from quarters where perhaps he didn’t have it beforehand and that, certainly in the middle weeks of the campaign, you could say that Mark Latham was beginning to come of age as a Labor leader after only ten months in the job. That he grew in stature, there was a sense that he began to strike a cord...amongst Australians around those middle weeks. But the bottom line is, he’s lost.**

Enough said. Has Kerry O’Brien made any concession to his *7.30 Report* viewers that he had a bad night on 9 October? Not at all. After all, political journalism means never having to concede your errors.



## (FALSE) PROPHECY CORNER

“Does one detect, deep in the PM’s eyes, the same sort of shock and bewilderment that Attenborough registered in Spielberg’s parable? A few days ago the next federal election looked like a walk in the park for Howard. Now it’s Jurassic Park.”

*Phillip Adams – The Australian, 11 November 2003. A few months later, Phillip Adams confirmed his prophecy by declaring that John Howard “seems mortally wounded” (The Australian, 17 February 2004).*

☆☆☆☆☆

“Pauline Hanson’s plans for a political comeback have been boosted by a poll today showing One Nation’s vote in Queensland has quadrupled since her release from jail. Currently relaxing on Magnetic Island off the Queensland coast, Mrs Hanson is comfortably placed to become a senator at next year’s federal election.”

*Alex Mitchell – Sun-Herald, 23 November 2003.*

☆☆☆☆☆

“Over the past fortnight one curious chapter in Australian politics was closed and a new, unpredictable chapter opened. In essence, John Howard’s apparently unchallengeable ascendancy suddenly and unexpectedly came to an end.”

*Robert Manne – Sydney Morning Herald and The Age – 23 February 2004*

☆☆☆☆☆

“More than ever, I feel an election coming on. And don’t rule out an early one, perhaps as early as soon after the May budget. I see it in the Prime Minister’s body language and demeanor. I hear it around the traps. I observe it in the government’s recent resort to pork barrelling.”

*John Hewson – Australian Financial Review, 5 March 2004.*

☆☆☆☆☆

“...a 38 seat Labor majority is probably about what we’re looking at just now”.

*Crikey’s “philosopher-at-large” Charles Richardson – Crikey.com.au, 11 March 2004.*

☆☆☆☆☆

“The way events are unfolding in Iraq, Mark Latham could be excused for wishing he had called for Australian troops to be home by Easter, rather than Christmas. The longer the troops stay, the more the tide looks like turning his way.”

*Brian Toohey – Sun-Herald, 11 April 2004*

☆☆☆☆☆

“The Howard Government is beginning to collapse under the weight of its contradictions.”

*Ross Fitzgerald – The Australian 17 June 2004*

☆☆☆☆☆

“Queensland could be the jewel in Labor’s Federal election crown.”

*Ross Fitzgerald – The Australian, 22 July 2004*

☆☆☆☆☆

“Both John Howard and Alexander Downer will lose their seats”

*ABC Radio National presenter Terry Lane on The Conversation Hour, ABC Radio 774, 12 August 2004*

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“If letters to the editor and barbecue chats etc mean anything, it is that the Liberal Party will just scrape back but Howard might lose his seat.”

*John Hewson – Australian Financial Review 20 August 2004.*

☆☆☆☆☆

“This week for the first time in eight years I sense a significant growth in public dissatisfaction with John Howard.”

*Michael Duffy – Courier Mail 27 August 2004*

☆☆☆☆☆

"Pauline Hanson is a good chance to return to Federal parliament. She’s a much better chance of winning a Senate seat in 2004 than she was in 2001. She’s back all right."

*- Denis Atkins – Courier Mail, 17 September 2004*

☆☆☆☆☆

“It’s possible after October 9, power will rest not with John Howard or Mark Latham but with a bunch of politicians voters have hardly heard of. With opinion polls indicating Australia is heading for one of the closest elections in recent history, there’s a chance neither of the main political

parties will be able to govern in its own right after all 13 million votes are counted. Instead, the result could swing on the votes of three or four independent MPs on the floor of parliament.”

*Tony Vermeer – Sunday Telegraph, 19 September 2004*

☆☆☆☆☆

“What does the Greens’ decision to preference the ALP ahead of the Coalition mean for the outcome at the ballot box on October 9? For starters, it makes the already strong likelihood of a hung parliament even likelier.”

*Glenn Milne, The Australian – 20 September 2004*

☆☆☆☆☆

“Hard-headed political observers are now speculating that a Labor mini-landslide is not out of the question.”

*Hugo Kelly in Crikey.com.au – 30 September 2004.*

☆☆☆☆☆

“No one has said it yet, but John Howard is looking more and more like Paul Keating, circa 1996.”

*Ross Fitzgerald, The Australian, 30 September 2004.*

☆☆☆☆☆

“Crikey’s political editor Christian Kerr was openly tipping a Labor victory on ABC Victoria this morning.”

*Christian Kerr’s prediction – as reported in Crikey.com.au, 1 October 2004*

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“I’m expecting a strong Liberal backlash against the Government because of the Iraq war and I think Mr Howard could be in for a shock”

*Whistleblower Andrew Wilkie and Greens candidate in John Howard’s seat of Bennelong – The Independent Weekly, 3 October 2004.*

☆☆☆☆☆

On ABC TV *Insiders* on Sunday 3 October 2004 Andrew Bolt declared that a Labor win was “likely”. On the Sky Election Report on Monday 4 October he predicted a Coalition win.

☆☆☆☆☆

“...the general impressions forming in voters’ minds are more likely to favour Latham than Howard, especially in younger minds. Nearly two million voters have known only the Howard government. The few dozen that I’ve spoken to

recently think it’s boring (and they don’t fancy Peter Costello). They are also least likely to be encumbered by a mortgage and fearful of Labor’s alleged affinity with very high interest rates. And I suspect that most would not believe that someone aged 43, with his whole working lifetime in politics is too “inexperienced” to be prime minister.

*National Press Club President Ken Randall – New Matilda, 6 October 2004*

☆☆☆☆☆

“Mark Latham, Australia’s brash populist leader who has accused the government of kneeling at America’s feet, is close to snatching an unlikely election victory on a promise to bring troops home from Iraq by Christmas.”

*Stephen Robinson – in the (London) Weekly Telegraph, 6 October 2004.*

☆☆☆☆☆

“Howard is becoming desperate and it’s showing. Latham has been cleverer at presenting himself as non-threatening yet with a frisson of excitement about him.”

*Clive Hamilton, director the Australia Institute, on why Labor would win the election – as reported in the issue of The Bulletin published on Wednesday 6 October 2004.*

☆☆☆☆☆

“I believe that Labor’s Tasmanian forests policy, and its superiority over the Coalition in other areas of environmental policy, will be the game breaking move that wins the election for Labor.”

*Letter to The Age – 6 October 2004 – by Dr Paul Norton, School of Politics & Public Policy, Griffith University, Queensland.*

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“My guess is that Labor and Latham will win thanks to younger voters”.

*Academic and occasional columnist Rodney Tiffen – quoted in The Asian Wall Street Journal, 7 October 2004.*

☆☆☆☆☆

“My heart says something amazing could happen...I’m putting really positive vibes out for there to be a change of government in whatever form.

*Margo Kingston, Sky News – 8 October 2004*

☆☆☆☆☆

# “IT WAS LIKE A LUNATIC ASYLUM”: REMEMBERING LABOR’S 1974 BUDGET

John Kunkel

One simple, politically devastating policy idea. ... Mark Latham’s Medicare Gold proposal has shown him to be as wily a tactician as John Howard has ever been. ... Latham once again used his “rope-a-dope” strategy on an increasingly frazzled Prime Minister, and used it with devastating effect to lunge at Howard in his own territory of older voters.”

-(Laura Tingle, “Audacious lunge into Howard heartland”, *Australian Financial Review*, 30 September 2004, p. 1)

We now know that, contrary to Ms Tingle’s quick-fire diagnosis, the only political devastation that mattered was quietly, clinically administered by the Australian people on 9 October. RIP Medicare Gold.

In the end, this Whitlamesque open-ended, not means-tested, blank cheque policy proved, in the words of long-time Labor insider Michael Costello, a “strategic disaster” for the ALP – “the health policy equivalent of free beer for all the workers”. And far from winning over older Australians, Mark Latham’s physical and philosophical embrace of Gough Whitlam at the Labor Party campaign launch on 29 September was completely counter-productive.

The mystery is why anyone outside of a narrow body of left-leaning romantics could have thought otherwise at a time when the Labor Party needed above all to establish its economic credentials.

The reason the Whitlam Government remains a byword for economic incompetence (especially among older Australians) is not hard to identify. Indeed, the 2004 election campaign coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of Exhibit A in this regard – the 1974 Gough Whitlam-Frank Crean budget.

There has been much hand wringing of late about the fiscal profligacy of our politicians. But when it comes to fiscal irresponsibility, nothing comes close to the 1974 budget. Commonwealth outlays soared by a

breathhtaking 45.9 per cent in 1974-75 – an increase of 5.1 per cent of GDP in a single year. Taxes rose by 28 per cent and the budget deficit climbed from 0.6 per cent to 4.2 per cent of GDP (Norton 1982).

But raw numbers alone do not convey the magnitude of the Whitlam Government’s budget brain explosion in 1974. This is perhaps best captured by the following passage on cabinet’s pre-budget discussions from Alan Reid’s book (1976: 180), *The Whitlam Venture*.

**No broad limits were fixed at the outset for government spending. Instead it was decided what each department would have in the way of spending money. When this operation was completed, the various allocations were totted up and their total sum became the limits of government spending. It was more an exercise in fragmented irresponsibility than the product of an overall, balanced judgment. Thus were the destinies, the wellbeing of ordinary citizens, the jobs of scores of Australian workers decided. At the end of the week’s meeting, a very senior and responsible minister said quietly: “It was like a lunatic asylum – there were men there who were supposed to be responsible ministers but they were prepared to let doom come and the economy race towards the rocks of disaster”.**

## A GOVERNMENT OF ECONOMIC CRANKS

Challenging economic circumstances from the end of the post-war “long boom” and the first oil price shock quickly descended into economic chaos and mismanagement in 1974. Contrary to Labor mythology, Australia was not simply the helpless victim of international forces through this period. As one respected economic historian has noted: “The international recession proved to be more significant in prolonging rather than initiating Australia’s economic difficulties.” (Whitwell 1986: 214). And as former Labor Finance Minister Peter Walsh (1995: 23) has observed, the Whitlam Government’s economic problems in 1974 and 1975 were “largely of its own making”.

A job-destroying wage-price spiral and out-of-control government spending dramatically worsened Australia’s economic predicament. In the December quarter 1972, when the Whitlam government came to office, annual inflation (as measured by the Consumer Price Index) was at 4.5 per cent. Within a year, inflation had reached 13.2 per cent fueled by high wages growth, rising commodity prices, loose financial conditions and expansionary pressures from the 1973 budget. The Whitlam Government increased Commonwealth outlays by 19.4 per cent in 1973-74.

Wages (as measured by male average weekly earnings) grew by 14.8 per cent in 1973 setting the

scene for a further inflationary spiral in 1974. As was standard practice under the old centralised industrial relations system, an industry-wide deal in the metal trades award in April 1974, combined with the doctrine of comparative wage justice, institutionalised the 1974 wage explosion. This saw a surge in nominal wages of 28 per cent in 1974, while inflation climbed by a record 16.3 per cent. A big slump in output was inevitable due to the acute squeeze on profits and a dramatic tightening in monetary policy by the Reserve Bank.

Into a deteriorating economic situation in 1974 came the full force of Whitlam government profligacy. This was a government dangerously ignorant on basic economic matters. Then a newly elected Labor member, Peter Walsh would later reflect that the “vast majority of both Caucus and Cabinet had little understanding of what had caused inflation and recession and therefore no idea of how to deal with them. They refused to accept there was *any* linkage between wage increases and either inflation or unemployment.” (Walsh 1995: 16). The Whitlam Government’s economic negligence started from the top down. In Walsh’s words: “For most of the time Whitlam behaved as if the economy didn’t matter, or at least was a low order priority. ... Most of the 10 or 12 dominant Ministers ... were economic cranks.” (Walsh 1995: 23-24).

## JIM CAIRNS TAKES OVER

Immediately following the May 1974 election, Whitlam argued in favour of a tighter fiscal policy in line with Treasury advice. His court scribe Graham Freudenberg (1977: 304) would record that Whitlam “found himself almost alone in putting the deflationary view”. But after talking tough, Whitlam was humiliated by his Cabinet’s rejection of Treasury’s recommendations. His response was to sulk. Whitlam “retreated to the Lodge for many weeks and his government was left without strong leadership in a rudderless condition shifting from crisis to crisis, being discredited each day” (Kelly 1994: 79).

On 23 July 1974, Treasurer Frank Crean delivered a mini-budget widely seen as a fiasco. It included tough Treasury rhetoric but no substantive new policy measures. By this point, neither Whitlam nor Crean were exerting any influence whatsoever over economic policy. This was being fought over by Minister for Overseas Trade and darling of the left, Jim Cairns, and Social Security Minister, Bill Hayden. Cairns would emerge victorious.

What is striking about Whitlam’s own account of government decision-making in this period is his total disengagement. His memoirs read more like those of the assistant Cabinet note-taker than of someone actually sitting in the prime minister’s chair with a responsibility to exert leadership and to shape government policy. Whitlam (1985: 207) writes that:

**In preliminary meetings at the Lodge in July and August, Treasury was urging us**

**to budget for a level of unemployment which, unknown to them, their monetary policies were already producing. On 12 August Caucus met to discuss the budget strategy. Crean presented the Treasury’s hard-line, deflationary package of reduced expenditure and increased taxes across the board. Such policies, expressly designed to increase unemployment, had no hope of gaining the approval of Caucus. ...**

**Cairns, as chairman of the Caucus Economic Committee, led the opposition to the proposals. He proposed a wide-ranging package to stimulate the economy. Hayden proposed an alternative package, comprising an easing of the credit squeeze, expenditure pruning, wage-tax tradeoffs, a capital gains tax and a guaranteed income scheme. Caucus chose Cairns’ package.**

While Whitlam was happy to let Cairns take over economic policy, Crean was “relegated to obscurity” (Kelly 1994: 81). Bizarrely, however, it was Crean who stood up in parliament on 17 September 1974 to deliver the 1974 budget. In an extraordinary speech, Crean welcomed a private sector recession as providing the scope for more government spending. Or as he euphemistically put it: “The relatively subdued condition in prospect in the private sector provides the first real opportunity we have had to transfer resources to the public sector.”

The outlays side of the 1974 budget remains a testament to Whitlamism gone mad. Spending on education rose by 94.7 per cent, on social security and welfare by 49 per cent, on health by 35.6 per cent, on housing by 108.4 per cent, and on urban and regional development by 162.4 per cent. It’s sometimes suggested that economic responsibility was restored with the Hayden budget of 1975-76. In fact, this was another big spending affair which saw Commonwealth outlays rise by a further 22.5 per cent.

Even those economists sympathetic to the Whitlam government have highlighted its manifest inability to grapple with Australia’s economic circumstances in 1974-75. Whitlam economic adviser Fred Gruen (1976: 28) criticised Labor for its “dilettante methods of decision making and for losing its nerve from August 1974 to June 1975”. By its second term, the Whitlam government was “marked by a lack of discipline in the face of adversity and an inability to come to grips with the very difficult choices which were thrust on it” (Gruen 1988: 178). According to Barry Hughes, the period from May to November 1974 was marked by “paralysis”:

**Six months of somersaults, indecision, quarrels among key ministers, about-turns by Cairns and an obvious public rejection**

**of official advisers without an alternative plan destroyed the government's economic credibility. (Hughes 1980: 85)**

## WHITLAM'S CULPABILITY

By any measure, however, the most culpable figure from this whole period is Gough Whitlam himself. Based on conversations with figures involved in the 1974 budget, Alan Reid (1976: 181) described the scene as "like starving men surrounding a cook pot and, under the eyes of an approving and participatory overlord, trying each to spoon out as large a share as possible before the pot was completely emptied".

Almost as damning was Whitlam's subsequent move to reward Jim Cairns by appointing him Treasurer in December 1974. This decision encapsulated both Whitlam's colossal economic irresponsibility and his well-known capacity for petty jealousies. Paul Kelly (1994: 87) would argue that:

**Whitlam had an ambivalent attitude towards Cairns. He endorsed everything Cairns was saying about economic policy, even though as Prime Minister he was not playing a direct role in the formulation of that policy. But at the same time Whitlam was irritated at the limelight Cairns was grabbing and the extent to which he was projected as the architect of the new economic strategy. ... He [Whitlam] decided to make Cairns Treasurer and put the pressure on him.**

Whitlam's subsequent reflections on Cairns as Treasurer are truly frightening. It would become apparent to Whitlam (1985: 212) that Cairns "had virtually abandoned any faith he had ever had in the effectiveness or even the value of the Australian political party and parliamentary system. By the time he took Treasury, he was undergoing an agonising re-appraisal of long-held personal and economic beliefs. ... He was even less able to heal the rifts between Cabinet and Treasury than Crean. Cairns would not take on Treasury because he, too, eschewed conflict and because he did not consider Treasury important in his scheme of things. He would often not support his own submissions in Cabinet. By now espousing 'the economics of love', he was hardly able to speak a common language with the hard-nosed men in his Department." Oh dear.

In the typically insouciant, yet superior, tone of his memoirs, Whitlam (1985: 184) conceded that: "It is fair comment that my own preoccupations and predilections lay beyond the narrower field of economic theory." He goes on to quote himself approvingly from a 1961 speech: "Socialists are now more concerned with the creation of opportunities than the imposition of restraints. Within our own nation we do not have to ration scarcity but plan

abundance." This same outlook characterised Whitlam's 1972 policy speech where he asserted that Labor's big spending programs would be paid for by "the automatic and inevitably massive growth in Commonwealth revenues".

## A TOUCH OF THE SUN?

Of course, there are still many who find it hard to look unkindly on the Whitlam *Zeitgeist* when so much was promised by so few with other people's money. Even the normally professorial and sober Paul Kelly lets his guard slip on this one. In July, in a special supplement coinciding with the fortieth anniversary of the launch of *The Australian* newspaper, Kelly offered the following gem in his wide-ranging review of modern Australian politics: "The earth moved on December 2, 1972, when the sun-god ended 23 years of conservative rule and began his [Whitlam's] initially convincing performance as the great leader." (*The Australian*, supplement, 21 July 2004, p. 3).

Perhaps he was being uncharacteristically ironic. But served up as political history, it's no wonder some of the young guns in the Labor Party got a bit excited on that sunny Brisbane day in September when Mark Gough hugged Gough.

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- John Kunkel is an adviser to the Howard Government*



# INCREMENTAL POLITICS - FROM MAY COUCHMAN TO JULIA GILLARD

Anne Henderson

There they stood, side by side, as Labor leader Mark Latham announced his shadow ministry line up following the federal election for 2004. The media pictures of the two youngish suited chaps, Wayne Swan and Stephen Smith, had something of the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about them, a pair of blokes when one should do and all very much into games. Swan and Smith had played off for the treasury shadow position. In the end, Swan had effectively snatched it from Julia Gillard, their leader's preferred candidate.

What is apparent in the aftermath of the federal election 2004, is the breaking down of the "sisterhood" mentality surrounding women MPs as they increasingly become part of the blended team, male and female. Labor has its factions, the Coalition its different stances on hot issues from abortion to the republic. Women MPs will undoubtedly continue to benefit from a flow of support, material and psychological, from women's groups. But in the coming era of politics for women, their alliances will be less and less gender based.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow voiced her own take on the appointment of Swan rather than Gillard to the shadow treasury portfolio – it was a clear case, she believed, of chauvinism. "I'm amazed that we still raise the question of merit in regard to women. Julia Gillard is one of the best parliamentary performers in parliament, bar none," she told Channel 10's *Meet the Press*.

Columnist Alan Ramsey also mentioned Julia Gillard's gender in assessing what had gone wrong in her bid to attain so high a placement: "Political reason said Labor would have been slaughtered, by the government and by the electorate at large, with a woman from Victoria's socialist left as Latham's key economic spokesperson." (*SMH* 27 Oct 2004)

Yet, in spite of headlines like "Labor boy's club", there is little evidence that Gillard's forced withdrawal from candidacy for the treasury spot was

due to gender. And Julia Gillard would be the first person to say that. In fact, with the results in for election 2004, women MPs like Gillard, on both sides of the House, are finally making it, or not, by playing the boys at their own game.

Like Kevin Rudd, who also wanted the treasury spot, Gillard has been in parliament since 1998. Like Rudd, she has risen fast in the ranks, and done well. She can afford, also like Rudd, to plateau for a while and bide her time.

"As manager of opposition business," says one insider, "Julia plays hardball. She's knows the difference between compromise and giving in. She's as good as the best with quid pro quos and trade offs. She will tell herself, I'm in a battle here so what do I have to do to win. She is very strategic and plans her moves well before a fight." All of which would sound familiar to any seasoned politician bent on a prominent career.

Clearly, in the jockeying for the shadow treasury, Gillard calculated that being from the socialist left hadn't helped her chances, especially in a situation where Labor was well down and facing a tough clawing back of its economic credibility.

Gillard's Medicare Gold which had seemed like the policy which would take Labor over the line on election day, is now called economically utopian by its opponents. In spite of Labor's polling showing Medicare Gold was well received in the electorate, Gillard wasn't prepared to be blamed for any slip in economic policy over the next parliamentary term. With the controversy in the parliamentary party over Mark Latham appointing her as his ally to the treasury spot, any such blame would only have deflected directly from her to the leader. So, calculating her chances, Gillard made her own choice not to stand for treasury. So where do women stand in politics after election 2004?

If gender wasn't a crucial factor in Julia Gillard's failure to attain the shadow treasury position, it was certainly on Mark Latham's mind before his shadow ministry announcement. After nearly two weeks of silence from election day, Mark Latham emerged to announce that his front bench line up would see the rise of a new generation of women MPs. But when the names were eventually known, just seven out of a shadow ministry of 30 turned out to be women. This is just one woman more than on John Howard's front bench. What's more, in the factional struggles that had played out for nominations, a few of the battles were woman against woman.

In South Australia, right faction MP Linda Kirk was matched against newcomer Kate Ellis, with Kirk claiming her colleague Senator Geoff Buckland's vote for Ellis was done at the instruction of union factional leader Don Farrell whom Kirk claimed wanted her seat.

In Victoria, Anna Burke let fly at Mark Latham accusing him of “criminal” treatment of women and ignoring them. Anna Burke had every reason to believe she was owed a front bench spot after holding her marginal seat at three elections, and in 2004 especially. But she missed out after Nicola Roxon gave her factional vote to Kelvin Thompson.

Meanwhile, there’s little love lost between Julia Gillard and her deputy leader, Jenny Macklin, whose style could not be more different from each other’s.

Co-convenor of Emily’s List, Joan Kirner, is a great believer in the power of critical mass – the strategy to place as many women in parliamentary seats as possible in order to generate a force of women that will sweep away tokenism in female placements and create a swell of female power to take women all the way to portfolios and even the leadership. In other words, to create a normality about women being in politics.

To that end, Labor women have pushed the quota policy to ensure a fair percentage of winnable seats are allotted to women candidates. This has certainly seen more women take seats in parliaments across Australia for Labor. In spite of Labor’s loss at the 2004 election, there will be 32 women in Labor’s caucus, which amounts to 36 per cent of all members and a record.

But in that success, inevitably women will be forced to compete with their so-called sisters for positions on the front bench, as yet far from reflective of the numbers of women in caucus. Emily’s list supported MPs Linda Kirk and Kate Ellis had barely cashed their Emily’s cheques when they were sparring over which of them would get their faction’s nomination for the front bench. Coalition women might well say, we told you so.

On the other side of politics and after the new senators take their seats next July, Coalition women MPs will make up 21 per cent of the parliamentary team. Unprotected by a policy of affirmative action, Liberal women MPs are expected to take their chances like any of the men. And while the fourth Howard ministry remains top heavy with suits, women like Amanda Vanstone, Helen Coonan and Kay Paterson have made it close to the top of the list like any of their male counterparts, without the benefit of affirmative action. Off a very low base, with three women in his Cabinet, John Howard can claim that this is an unprecedented number for any government.

Moreover, unlike Labor’s shadow ministry which has been stripped of much male competition with many experienced MPs like Bob McMullan going to the back bench, Vanstone, Coonan and Paterson have risen in government when competition is most fierce.

For all their success in the ministry, however, the Coalition’s most senior women MPs are all senators. As such, none of them present any competition to their male colleagues in future contests for leader.

Judgements of probability or ability aside and in spite of the rapid increase in female representation in federal parliament since 1996, this leaves Julia Gillard or Jenny Macklin as the only women MPs presently in parliament within any range of contesting a leadership ballot.

Shortly after claiming victory in the 2004 election, Prime Minister John Howard commented that it wasn’t enough to win the leadership of a major party and expect to coast into government. This was a dig at the much younger and inexperienced Mark Latham and the expectation for some ten months in the media and the Labor Party that a new man with personality could take Labor back into government. It’s not that easy, said the Prime Minister.

John Howard should know after years of rise and fall and rise again before he took the reins. The same might be said of those relative newcomer women MPs who now dot the chambers of federal parliament. At barely a third of the number of MPs overall, their collective experience and critical mass is well in the shadow of many male colleagues.

Emily’s List Australia has been a force for reform of Labor’s preselection process and it has been vital in supporting women candidates to win seats. Its success can in part be measured by the record number of Labor women in the Australian parliament. But Emily’s List cannot determine or influence a woman MP’s rise or fall once she enters the fray within the parliament. Here, like any male MP, a woman must make her way on her ability to strategise, forge alliances and work hard. Just ask Julia Gillard.

This is not to take from the heroic and ground breaking work of groups like Emily’s List and the Liberal Women’s Forum. Most effective politics is incremental, although this can leave different generations impatient at the slow pace of change. And this is why it often pays to look back, as in climbing a steep slope, on the achievements or terrain covered.

October 2004 also marked the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the Liberal Party of Australia. Robert Menzies stands tall in that achievement. But he was, by no means, the single force that led to that Party’s foundation as recent historical research has finally revealed. Without Elizabeth (May) Couchman, the formidable conservative women’s advocate and leader of the Australian Women’s National League (AWNL), Robert Menzies and his male colleagues may not have brought it off.

May Couchman delivered to the newly emerging Liberal Party, a women’s organisation comprising dozens of branches throughout Victoria and thousands of members. This women’s network would become vital to the establishment of Liberal Party branches in the stronghold state for Menzies’ Liberals. It gave the Party an army of politically active women, used to networking

and campaigning. In his memoirs, *Afternoon Light*, Menzies singled May Couchman out for acknowledgement saying, "May Couchman (as I knew her) had a clear mind and a practical grasp of politics."

For all that, May Couchman's consummate political skills both in practical campaigning and in the advancement of policy were not enough in her era to gain her a seat in parliament. As Margaret Fitzherbert has recorded in *Liberal Women – Federation to 1949* (Federation Press, 2004) Elizabeth (May) Couchman ran for a senate seat three times from 1930 to 1940 for the main conservative party and in her last attempt had every reason to believe she would succeed:

**She had led the AWNL, which at that time was arguably the strongest of the non-Labor organisations in Victoria, for twelve years ... She was a well known public figure, a current ABC board member, prominent in various community organisations and an accomplished political operative ... the AWNL considered it had an excellent chance to send a woman to Canberra for the first time. It was not to be and the loss cut deeply. (Fitzherbert, p 201)**

May Couchman's lasting legacy to conservative women would be operational rather than parliamentary. As leader of the AWNL, she brought an end to its opposition to women running for parliament. Later she pushed for its merger with the newly formed Liberals, recognising that being part of the party would give women a seat at the table where policy was determined. In the handover of the AWNL organisation, she struck a deal with the Liberals that "there should be equal representation of men and women on all committees in the Victorian party" and this continues. After the formation of the Liberal Party, the women of the AWNL dominated the party in Victoria, its strongest state, for another two decades. Yet, it would be almost 50 years before women emerged among the Liberals' parliamentary ranks in significant numbers, after John Howard's landslide win in 1996.

Only as the Coalition women MPs of 1996 won their seats would May Couchman's influence on the Party begin to gain notice in written history. Her foresight for her generation and her ability to work within the ranks was remarkable and her professionalism should be remembered as women contemplate their next level of attainment – the leadership and places in the Cabinet.

As election 2004 and its aftermath suggests, May Couchman's practical politics and tactical skill may yet offer the best model for any woman MP with ambition. On either side of the House.

*Anne Henderson is editor of The Sydney Papers*



## DOCUMENTATION (1)

**SPEECH NOTES BY THE HON. PAUL KEATING AT THE LAUNCH OF MICHAEL KEATING'S BOOK WHO RULES: HOW GOVERNMENT RETAINS CONTROL OF A PRIVATISED ECONOMY (FEDERATION PRESS) - 10 NOVEMBER 2004**

An analysis of the oft-promoted view that (i) the role of government has been blunted; (ii) the scope for policy discretion reduced; (iii) the nation state has been hollowed out by financial markets; (iv) privatisations cut across or cut down the value of national institutions; (v) the growth of liberal markets and the aggregates that shape and foster this is inimical to a shared sense of community and communitarianism.

Or, as Michael Keating puts it, "many see marketisation as a substantial loss of state power". The purpose of his book, he says, is to examine that contention. And, in the examination, he looks at the mutual dependence of the state upon markets, and vice versa, markets upon the state.

In the book Michael argues that "governments continue to be responsible for promoting a prosperous and egalitarian nation – where initiative and opportunity are encouraged". But governments "can enhance their capacity" to meet society's expectations by getting leverage and help by adapting to change – in technology, in economics and in social relationships. In other words, governments "sign markets up" as re-enforcements or "force multipliers".

The critics he says, and I agree, confuse the capacity of government and even what is a good society with the size and imperatives of the public sector. His book, he says, proposes the middle way. Between those who say the state has "lost the capacity to manage" and those, like the Francis Fukuyamas of this world, who would "minimise the role of the state – in favour of unfettered markets".

Michael Keating asks: Are the means and policy instruments the state now employs so different to the traditional values and goals? He makes the point that the "clearest measures" of government intervention i.e. the ratio of outlays to GDP and the ratio of revenue to GDP – have not fallen. And the level of government regulatory activity continues to increase. What has changed is the nature of the regulation. Today governments are more interested in what I have often termed "steering the boat" rather than "rowing the boat".

Michael says – and I agree with this also – that it is misleading and wrong to say that governments have lost power or are withdrawing from responsibilities.

Indeed his book aims to demonstrate that “while marketisation may have changed the instruments and policies of governments, governments can still govern”. They still command the power to determine a course of action and achieve their objectives. That is, government, still has the capacity to manage aggregate demand so as to stabilise the economy or avoid major fluctuations in the level of economic activity. Look at Bush tax cuts and Greenspan’s monetary policy.

- That the state “continues to play a leading role in fostering national development” but is now more focussed on “overcoming instances of market failure”. It sees more value, these days, in well set up markets, competition and
- That “by recasting its role in the provision of human services”, the state is better able to meet the “demands of a more individualistic society”.

People get too caught up and starry eyed about traditional notions of government and especially the old model in Australia. The Australian Defence Model or, as it is called these days, The Australian Settlement. That triangle of arrangements which lasted for seventy odd years. High terms of trade, financing a high tariff – itself afforded by arbitrarily set wages. The problem was – one leg of the triangle seriously broke down. By the 1970s the things we sold were inexpensive – and the things we bought were becoming more expensive. Our national income was declining. So the policy of “protection all round” had lost its economic underpinning - let alone notions of embraced productivity.

The three most important prices in the economy – were uncompetitive and wrong. The price of foreign exchange, the price of capital and the price of labour. A decade and a half of high inflation had distorted all three.

Australia needed a new economic model. As a consequence the Australian Defence Model had to be dismantled. And the unlikely happened. A Labor government walked away from centralised wage fixing, industrial protection and nominal control of the exchange rate in an unprecedented opening of Australia’s financial and product markets – with productivity rising mostly from decentralised wage fixing being the device with which to lower unit labour costs.

Michael Keating argues that many of the former controls represented more “a display of symbolic power than they did real controls”. And he is correct. For instance:

- With the managed exchange rate system, the government had some control over the nominal exchange rate – but not the real exchange rate.

- Through centralised wage fixing, it had some influence on nominal wage rates but not those subject of “over award payments”.

- Through deposit maturity and lending controls it had some apparent command of bank resources – yet non-banks grew vigorously around the controls.

Let me give you some of my own impressions – those in general sympathy with Michael’s point of view:

**The Float:** We moved from a price to a quantity based system. When the government stopped buying all the foreign exchange – those huge additions to primary liquidity stopped. All of a sudden it was possible to run a competent monetary policy as monetary policy did not have to target the exchange rate or mop up excess liquidity.

Monetary policy is now appropriately focused on stabilising domestic demand. Following this change, the only additions to primary liquidity came from the Central Bank’s own money market operations and the budget – if it was in deficit.

This removed a massive monetary mopping-up task – saving the budget huge PDI costs for years to come and further taking the pressure off domestic interest rates.

The quantity based, moving exchange rate – free of major Central Bank interventions – allowed the exchange rate to find its own competitive rate. Whole new industries sprang up because the exchange rate was appropriately priced. Tourism, wine and, of course, financial intermediation are examples.

**Removal of deposit maturity and lending controls – and the deregulation of housing finance – in 1984 and 1986 respectively.**

Under the controls, banks were rationers of credit – not creators of credit. The Reserve Bank of Australia controlled the ration – occasionally it would induce a credit squeeze. This would affect all business including housing and construction.

Banks would only lend to their best customers. Non-banks grew around the controls – permanent building societies, cash management trusts etc. Banks could not bid for deposits on the market and on-lend them as they saw fit with risk and price being their only constraint. Small business could not get finance. Housing was restricted to loans of \$30,000 at a fixed rate of 13.5 per cent. The housing and construction industry went up and down with credit squeezes. “Off the plan” selling, which now finances so much development, – was not possible. People could not themselves guarantee to put the loan together. Housing supply was intermittent and bank

margins were high. Under the old rules, housing margins were up to 350 basis points. Now with open markets and competition and from the mortgage lenders it is more like 140 basis points. A lot of social benefits and social self determination there.

The government nominally had control of financial aggregates and price under the old rules. But it was a chimera – the rules strangled social benefit.

**Tariffs and Protection:** With the tariff, government notionally protected industry. But it protected it with a tax on the rest of us. The effect was to misallocate resources for investment (i) where the protection was more lucrative, (ii) where the barriers to imports encouraged low quality and low productivity and (iii) where the burden of their protection fell on the really internationally competitive industries we had (the good ones had the monkey on their back).

When I became Treasurer the effective rate of protection on a car was 97 per cent. Today it is more like 7 per cent. The result is, today, you can buy a reasonable quality small car for under \$15,000. That would have been nearer to \$30,000 under the previous system.

For those who argue that materialism is hollowing out our social cohesion and happiness, one has to ask – will people have better “values” and be better “put together” if their car costs twice as much? Is that extra call on their disposable income going to provide some astringent moral effect? We lift people’s real disposable income in two ways – lifting real incomes while lowering the price level.

We lift people’s real disposable income in two ways – lifting real incomes while lowering the price level. Getting rid of tariffs lowered the price level. Productivity lifts incomes while lowering unit labour costs – making goods cheaper which means incomes go further. Those old controls – that paternalism in fact – made us poorer.

**Wage Controls:** Centralised wage fixing nominally gave the government some handle on incomes – but with over award payments not really. And aggregate wage adjustment left no place for incentives and inducements or scope for productivity enhancements.

Productivity is the principal source of income growth. When the government I led abandoned general centralised wage fixing to create the private bargaining stream along with other supply side changes, productivity took off. It went to 3 per cent (or near enough) over all the 1990s. The trend rate for the decade to 1985 as 1.25 per cent. Two percentage points of that 3 per cent went to labour and up to 1 per cent went to profits. Ten years multiplied by 2 per cent equals a 20 per cent real

increase in incomes. The highest rate of real income growth in any decade of the 20th century. And profits rose too. So we had the real “daily double”. Rising real wages and falling unit labour costs.

What commentary has the Michael Puseys of this world got to say about that? The government lost control of an inflation prone, tear away wages system. It is enough to make a John Langmore sit down and cry.

**The Privatisations:** The Commonwealth Bank and Qantas.

The State Banks of Victoria and South Australia were both failure prone. Qantas was a debt laden regional carrier. The State Bank of Victoria was rolled into the Commonwealth Bank to become one of the strongest and best managed banks in the country. Qantas is now one of the most adequately capitalised, best performing airlines in the world. Both the institutions have made the Australian Stock Exchange and the All Ordinaries Index much more robust. As government instrumentalities they failed to serve the public either as adequately or as well as they are about to do now. The ownership was a secondary issue.

Perhaps a final example of government being in charge or government being creative. When I became Treasurer (John Howard was my predecessor) we taxed debt once and equity twice. This gave us a system where the dynamic production of income was penalised – and people took capital profits free.

The really great increments to wealth occurs in stock markets. The tax system was locking ordinary people and institutions out of this medium. The introduction of dividend imputation meant that people were only taxed once. This change has induced participation in our stockmarket – where people these days can live on dividends – 5 per cent to 6 per cent – and have some capital growth. With the superannuation funds locked into equities through imputation this has turbocharged our capital market while guaranteeing access and equity to the community at large to the wealth of the stockmarkets.

Governments can be masters of the national destiny. It is just that the mastery has to be creative – about steering the boat not rowing it. Michael Keating has done us a service with *Who Rules*. It is a timely check on the sloppy analysis that is too often proposed.



# DOCUMENTATION (2)

## A NOTE ON THE LEFT – THEN AND NOW

In his syndicated newspaper column on 22 June 2004, Gerard Henderson referred to the ABC's "leftist orthodoxy". David Marr, presenter of the ABC TV Media Watch program, wrote to Gerard Henderson asking him to spell out what was his "definition of the Left". David Marr said that he wanted to discuss this in his September 2004 Overland Lecture. On 30 July 2004, Gerard Henderson sent David Marr the following document.

☆☆☆☆☆

For much of the 20th Century, the term left was well understood. Men and women on the left supported communism abroad and socialism at home. The left's attraction to the Soviet Union lessened in stages – following the Nazi-Soviet Pact (1939) and the USSR's invasions of Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). It had almost expired when European communism collapsed circa 1989-1991. However, sections of the left continued to believe in the communist experience in China, Vietnam, even Cuba. Some still do. On the domestic front, Western socialism (of the kind which existed in Britain and New Zealand) collapsed due to the unwillingness of the electorate to pay high taxes for poor public services. Before that, socialists believed in both widescale state intervention and maximum state ownership along with cradle-to-grave welfare.

There was another tradition on the left, broadly defined. Namely, social democracy. Social democrats favoured a high level of government involvement in the economy but opposed state domination of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Many social democrats also played an honourable and courageous role in opposing communist totalitarianism.

In *The Way We Live Now* (1998), Robert Manne wrote that "with the end of the sterile certainties of the Cold War, we have moved to a world beyond left and right". The problem with this analysis is that there are quite a few individuals in Western democracies who still regard themselves as on the left or the right. In France, for example, Jean Marie Le Pen's National Front is avowedly right-wing while the Socialist Party considers itself left-wing and the likes of Segolene Royal are proud to describe themselves as socialists and leftists. Clearly neither group agrees with Professor Manne's hypothesis.

It's much the same in Australia. The likes of Phillip Adams and Terry Lane claim to be on the left. The former is significantly rich (as is Michael Moore) – demonstrating that the definition of leftism bears no

relationship to private wealth. Then there are the openly left-wing publications such as *Arena*, *Green Left Weekly*, (which John Pilger promotes) and *Overland*. So there is little point in maintaining that we have all moved to a world beyond left and right when there are living persons and organisations who/which identify with left and right causes.

So what's left of the left? In Australia, that is.

The German sociologist Max Weber invented the concept of the ideal type. *Ideal types* are defined by Reinhard Bendix (in his entry on Max Weber in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*) as "bench-mark concepts...which deliberately simplify and exaggerate the evidence" in order to make useful distinctions. Ideal types are formulated on the basis of comparative historical evidence. Then a position is analysed with respect to the extent to which it deviates from, or is approximate to, the bench-mark concept.

In other words, an ideal type does not reflect absolute reality – in that such a pure concept does not exist in fact. But the creation of an ideal type provides a useful understanding of an ideology or belief, political system or regime. For example, it is possible to construct an ideal type for a totalitarian system of government. Obviously no regime is the same. But the communist regimes led by Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin, Mao Tsetung, Ho Chi Minh and Fidel Castro are close enough to the ideal type of totalitarianism to be regarded as totalitarian. The same can be said of Adolf Hitler's regime in Germany. Benito Mussolini's Italy probably fits the model – but this is arguable. However, Franco's Spain was not a totalitarian state but rather a military dictatorship – for it lacked a state ideology which is central to the totalitarian ideal type.

The ideal type for left or leftist in contemporary Australia would consist of the following positions:

1. A belief in the desirability of widescale government intervention (funded by taxation) in the domestic economy – in such areas as education, health, welfare and the environment. Along with a corresponding scepticism about private solutions in such areas as education, health, welfare and the environment. In other words, a view that the public sector is good in itself and that the private sector is, at best, a dubious exercise.
2. A belief that governments should not interfere in the realms of private morality – covering such areas as abortion, censorship, same-sex relationships etc.
3. A scepticism about Western religious beliefs – in particular traditional Christian churches and the emerging fundamentalist Christianity.
4. An unwillingness to support the use of military force abroad – along with a disdain for patriotism at home. An ambiguity towards, or outright opposition

to, the Australian-American Alliance – along with concern about Israel’s role in world affairs.

5. An abiding sense of shame and guilt for the past acts of Western nations in their colonial manifestations – a commitment to reconciliation with native peoples.

6. A belief in the sanctity of international solutions to international problems – comprising a commitment to the United Nations, despite its evident inefficiency and virtual impotency.

7. Opposition to the globalisation process of economic reform – including a resentment to such international organisations as the World Trade Organisation, World Bank, International Monetary Fund. A preference for international aid over the reform of the political systems and domestic economies of third world nations.

8. A tendency to be alienated from elected mainstream political leaders (whether conservative or social democrat) and a conviction that the modern democratic system is inhabited by politicians who lie by habit.

9. A tradition of moral compromise – leading to a belief that democracies are not much better than dictatorships in the way they operate. In other words, moral equivalence.

It is not being suggested that every leftist in Australia would hold all these positions. But, rather, that most would. And it is not being maintained that all the positions adumbrated in this ideal type would only be held by a leftist. Quite the contrary. It is known that some attitudes of the right are similar to left wing positions – e.g. the right and the left tend to oppose economic reform along with globalisation. What has been set out is a pure ideal type. Individuals on the left would hold the views set out in this leftist/ideal type to a large extent. Whereas conservatives would not readily identify with most of the positions in the left ideal type – some, however, would identify with a couple of components of the left/leftist ideal type.

## DOCUMENTATION (3)

On 2 August 2004 the Melbourne based Scribe Publications released Tony Kevin’s *A Certain Maritime Incident: The Sinking of the SIEV X*. The book contains an endorsement by American leftist intellectual Noam Chomsky and has been praised at launches by Julian Burnside and Margo Kingston. According to the Scribe flyer, “*A Certain Maritime Incident* joins the dots for the first time” to reveal a veritable conspiracy of “government misconduct” concerning the deaths of some 353 asylum seekers. In view of the importance of the implied allegations in

*A Certain Maritime Incident*, the following correspondence between Tony Kevin and Gerard Henderson is reproduced in the public interest.

### FROM TONY KEVIN TO GERARD HENDERSON - 13 AUGUST 2004

Dear Gerard

Congratulations on inviting Margo Kingston to speak at the Sydney Institute. That was a liberal decision. She gave a very good lecture.

Now that you have named me in your column four days ago (10 August) in the *SMH* and *The Age* on the Group of 43 statement - and I particularly noted your second paragraph in *The Age*, which did not appear in the *SMH* – how about inviting me to debate some of those matters with you, or to speak solo about my book on *SIEV X*, *A Certain Maritime Incident*, at the Sydney Institute?

I am sure that if you read the book, you would find it a work of serious historical scholarship. Or if you did not find it so, it would be interesting for me and your members to hear why.

It seems a little one-sided that you can criticise me in two major Australian metropolitan dailies, selectively in words of your choosing, for my book on the sinking of *SIEV X* and my essay on foreign policy in Robert Manne’s *The Howard Years*, yet I should have no right of public reply.

If Mr Howard does not call an election this weekend, such a debate might help keep us entertained over the next few weeks while we wait in suspense for him to do so. I would enjoy the challenge of trying to convince a possibly initially sceptical audience of my position on *SIEV X*.

I am copying this note to the opinion page editors of the *SMH* and *the Age*, and to some others as above.

And if you choose not to take up this friendly challenge, thank you anyway for the two free plugs .

Regards

Tony Kevin

### FROM TONY KEVIN TO GERARD HENDERSON - 16 AUGUST 2004

Dear Gerard

A follow-up to my email to you last Friday afternoon:

After the unanticipated Scafton disclosures today, I want to renew my serious offer to speak or debate at the Sydney Institute on *SIEV X*. I note that recently my friend and fellow writer Margo Kingston spoke there - another “ideological type” ?

You might like to read this exchange of speeches at the Canberra launch of my book last Tuesday 10 August (there are words there about your Age opinion piece, children overboard, and whistleblowers). The two speeches, Bill Maley's and my own, indicate the kinds of propositions that I would like to explore with your members.

Look at it this way - if I am wrong, this would be a wonderful opportunity to expose and discredit my flawed analysis of the facts about Operation Relex and the Australian upstream disruption program in Indonesia .

As a true liberal - rather than a Howard Liberal - you should be open to this friendly challenge ?

Regards

Tony Kevin

[The book launch speeches were published on the website [www.tonykevin.com](http://www.tonykevin.com)]

## FROM GERARD HENDERSON TO TONY KEVIN - 25 AUGUST 2004

Dear Tony

I refer to your emails of 13 August 2004 and 16 August 2004. Apologies for the delay in responding – I was interstate late last week and had a lot of correspondence to deal with when I returned to the office.

Initially I should clarify some points re your 13 August note.

In my syndicated newspaper column, I write my opinions. Consequently, the proper place to respond to my published opinions is in the *Sydney Morning Herald* or *The Age*. I have no control whatsoever over what is published on the Letters or Opinion pages – it's up to the editor of each page. In other words, my position is no different from that of Robert Manne. Anyone who disagrees with one of Professor Manne's columns can write a letter-to-the-editor or submit an article for the Opinion Page – but they cannot realistically demand a platform at La Trobe University.

It is my practice to cite books/articles in my column where relevant – the aim is to provide information in addition to opinion. In other words, people who agree or disagree with me might choose to check the source themselves. This is the background to my reference to *A Certain Maritime Incident* and to your chapter in Robert Manne's *The Howard Years*. I thought you might have appreciated the reference – along with the implication that I take your views seriously (irrespective of whether I agree with them). However, if you do not want me to refer to you again – then, that's okay. I invariably have more source

material than I can adequately use in any one column. For the record, I do not believe that I have quoted selectively from your work – and you have not provided any evidence in support of this claim.

At your book launch in Canberra on 10 August, you made the following comment:

**I could say something about Gerard Henderson's pieces in the SMH and The Age today. It was another own goal, because by writing a nasty piece about me in The Age, he was really drawing attention to the SIEV X story. And the government's strategy since October 2002 has been to pretend that story doesn't exist any more. Gerard blew that today.**

The fact is that I have no idea whatsoever as to what is the Howard Government's "strategy" on *SIEV X*. In any event, it is a matter of public record that I have been a critic of the Howard Government's administration of mandatory detention in recent years. I even received one letter from you praising my stance – which I acknowledged verbally during a phone conversation. Moreover, I do not regard my reference to you on 10 August as "nasty" – I simply quoted, and then disagreed with, your position. You seem to be willing to dish out criticism but become super-sensitive when being criticised yourself.

I do my own cuts to fit in with the word requirements for the *SMH* or *the Age* – when one editor requests a shorter word length than the other. In answer to your query, it was my decision to cut some references to you from my *SMH* column on 10 August 2004 in order to meet the designated word length.

Now, concerning your request to address The Sydney Institute on *SIEV X*.

The Sydney Institute is a forum for debate and discussion. The Institute has no line of its own. As you are aware, many speakers at the Institute disagree with my views on foreign policy related issues. For example, recent speakers at the Institute include Tariq Ali, Mustapha Barghouthi, Kevin Rudd, Amin Saikal, Alison Broinowski, Richard Butler, Richard Woolcott, Andrew Bartlett, Bob Brown, William Maley and Margo Kingston.

The essential criteria for addressing the Institute are that the speaker has something to say which will draw an audience and which is worth publishing in *The Sydney Papers*. There are, however, some additional criteria. Speakers at the Institute are expected to avoid both defamation and/or conspiracy theories. That's why, for example, Pauline Hanson was not invited to address the Institute.

I do not rule out your addressing the Institute some time in the future. However, I am concerned that a

thesis of *A Certain Maritime Incident* turns on the assertion that the Australian Defence Force was complicit in, or indifferent to, the deaths of the passengers on the *SIEV X*. This is a highly serious allegation – which, as far as I can determine, is not supported by any conclusive evidence. In *A Certain Maritime Incident* (at Page 240) you go so far as to suggest that Labor conspired with the Howard Government to hush up the *SIEV X* tragedy. I do not believe that so vast a conspiracy theory warrants publication in *The Sydney Papers*.

As you are aware, the Labor, Liberal and Democrat members of the Select Committee on *A Certain Maritime Incident* did *not* support your claims on the *SIEV X* in their report – see the Committee’s findings at Page xiii. Likewise, your thesis is not supported by David Marr and Marian Wilkinson in their book *Dark Victory*. Other commentators who would agree with your general critique of the Howard Government’s foreign and border protection policies – broadly defined – also do not support your theory about the *SIEV X*. Mike Carlton, for instance.

As you will be aware, lots of “ideological types” address the Institute. But I do not want the Institute used as a platform to cast aspersions – in this instance – on the Australian Defence Force. It is one thing to criticise the Howard Government on border protection – these views have been heard at the Institute and, no doubt, will be heard again. It is quite another matter to allege (without compelling evidence) that the men and women of the Australian Defence Force did little or nothing while children, women and men on the *SIEV X* drowned.

This is not an issue of censorship. Your position on the *SIEV X* tragedy is set out in your book where anyone can read it. It’s just that I do not believe that your theory on this issue deserves hearing at the Institute or subsequent publication in *The Sydney Papers*. Perhaps another time and (in the absence of fresh evidence) another issue.

Yours sincerely

Gerard Henderson

## **FROM TONY KEVIN TO GERARD HENDERSON - 27 AUGUST 2004**

Dear Gerard

Thanks for this.

I do owe you the courtesy of a reply. I won’t go into the substance of your letter. You and I have better things to do than to get into futile Keith Windshuttle-style polemic. I will simply observe that you apparently have not read my book (in the sense of actually reading it, rather than skimming chapters for useful quotes), if you see it as propounding a conspiracy

theory or seeking to impugn the ADF. This is not the book that I wrote. As a public intellectual, you might want to read the full book with some care and attention to the public interest questions it asks.

I’ll just quote you a few of the launching comments :

“Tony was interviewed by Jon Faine of the ABC this morning, and when he was concluding the interview, Jon himself said to Tony: ‘If you are right, Australia has blood on its hands; and if you are wrong, then you owe an apology to a lot of people in the current government’. That is about as good a summary as you could get, without going into details ...You’ll find when you read this book that it is a most extraordinary forensic analysis of a case that smells to high heaven – I won’t put it any stronger than that. It is a persuasive, explosive, compelling analysis. It is the result of years of investigation, and behind it are 30 years of training that Tony Kevin has had in the Australian diplomatic service. His understanding for the nuance and the significance of everything that has happened in this case is unparalleled.” - Henry Rosenbloom, publisher, 2 August, Melbourne .

“Tony Kevin, I think, was a force that the government could not have guessed at or reckoned with. His persistence in pursuing this story, which would otherwise have sunk without trace, has been astonishing. It has come at a very great cost to him personally, financially, and in terms of the attacks on his reputation which inevitably followed, of someone who is uncomfortably pursuing the truth. The fact that Tony has stuck at it over these last several years, I think is a great credit to him...as Henry [Rosenbloom] has pointed out, the evidence that Tony has put together makes a compelling case for the greater probability being that the government was complicit in the deaths of the people on the *SIEV X*, very likely knew about the overcrowding on the boat, very likely knew that it had embarked, very likely knew that it was in the surveillance zone, and very likely turned a blind eye. Because they understood only too well what a message it would send to people smugglers if some asylum-seekers drowned on their way to Australia” - Julian Burnside QC, 2 August, Melbourne .

“[This book] is a magnificent example of what in the old days used to be called exact scholarship. It does not advance claims which are implausible or are unjustified in the light of the hard evidence which has been adduced. And to that extent, I think it is a much more profound challenge to the entire set of policy settings which allowed this disaster to come about, than would have been the case had it delved into realms of idle speculation unrelated to the evidence. And I think that is a great achievement” - Professor William Maley, ANU, 10 August, Canberra.

Even allowing for a degree of courteous hyperbole at book launches, these are strong commendations, from people who have real public standing, of my book's integrity and scholarship.

I have no doubt it will win through in the end. Important books sometimes take a while to establish their public purchase.

I think that one day I will be speaking at the Sydney Institute on this book, and I look forward to that. Until then -

Best wishes,

Tony Kevin

### **FROM GERARD HENDERSON TO TONY KEVIN - 1 SEPTEMBER 2004**

Dear Tony

Thanks for your note of 27 August 2004 and for enclosing some endorsements of your book *A Certain Maritime Incident*. I read them with interest.

Believe it or not, I have read your work. Based on my reading of your views on the *SIEV X* sinking – up to and including your book – I ask two questions viz:

If you are not saying that members of the Australian Defence Force were not complicit in, or indifferent to, the drowning of children, women and men on the *SIEV X* – then, what *are* you saying about ADF personnel with respect to the *SIEV X* sinking?

I note that, at the launch of *A Certain Maritime Incident*, your publisher Henry Rosenbloom quoted Jon Faine as saying to you: “If you are right, Australia has blood on its hands...” So it seems that Henry Rosenbloom accepts that, inter alia, you are accusing the Australian Defence Force of being complicit in, or indifferent to, the sinking of the *SIEV X*.

If you are not saying at page 240 of *A Certain Maritime Incident* that Labor conspired with the Howard Government by striking a “political deal” whereby the Howard Government “would wear the blame on ‘children overboard’ if the [Labor] Opposition allowed *SIEV X* to be pretty much whitewashed and set aside” – then, what are you saying about Labor's attitude to the *SIEV X* sinking?

Cheers

Gerard Henderson

### **FROM TONY KEVIN TO GERARD HENDERSON - 1 SEPTEMBER 2004**

Dear Gerard

(Written from Ormond College in Melbourne). Thank you for your questions. As I wrote in my last

email, I won't enter into Keith Windshuttle-style polemic by personal correspondence with you - nor will I try to parse my book for you in such correspondence.

If you want to argue with me about what my book “really” says, let us have that reasoned argument publicly before an appropriate audience - in the Sydney Institute or if that venue causes problems for you, on other perhaps more neutral ground, e.g. at the Australian Institute of International Affairs in Sydney or Canberra ( I am a member of the latter branch). I am sure we would get a good and good-quality audience in either AIIA branch, before which you could challenge whatever it is that you think are the theses of my book, and I could attempt to respond.

Best

Tony Kevin

### **FROM GERARD HENDERSON TO TONY KEVIN - 2 SEPTEMBER 2004**

Dear Tony

I refer to your email of 1 September 2004.

I note that you have declined to respond to my questions as to what is the actual thesis of your book *The Sinking of SIEV X*.

This is extraordinarily unprofessional. You are willing to travel around Australia implying that the Australian Defence Force personnel were complicit in, or indifferent to, the drowning of children, women and men on the *SIEV X* – even to the extent of hinting at the implementation of “premeditated murder” (your letter in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 2 July 2003 refers). Yet you are unwilling to unequivocally state your thesis. Likewise, you are willing to imply that Labor was involved in a cover-up with respect to the *SIEV X* – yet, once again, you are unwilling to unequivocally state this. Instead, you prefer the tactic of allegation- by-rhetorical-question. If you are running an argument, it is up to you to state a clear thesis and support it with evidence. You have not done either in your book.

As previously advised, I am not willing to have The Sydney Institute used as a platform where a person can make unsubstantiated and irresponsible assertions against members of the ADF – based on hints, innuendo, rhetorical questions, and indirect sourcing (i.e. of the “what some are seeing as premeditated murder” genre). This is an intellectually dishonest approach to argument – and potentially defamatory as well.

I have no intention debating of you on this matter – at the AIIA or elsewhere. I have no idea as to what was

the cause of the *SIEV X* tragedy. I have read your work on this issue along with the thoroughly detailed Senate Committee report titled *Select Committee on a Certain Maritime Incident*. From this I know that the bipartisan Senate Committee, headed by Labor Senator Peter Cook, could not “find grounds for believing that negligence or dereliction of duty was committed in relation to *SIEV X*”. In other words, the Senate Committee report does not support your claims.

I intend to accept the Senate Committee’s finding until I see compelling evidence to convince me that the Senate Committee’s finding was incorrect. You have not provided such evidence in your book or elsewhere. And, now, you are not even willing to state what it is that you are actually claiming in your book with respect to the ADF.

The record demonstrates that I was an early critic of the Howard Government’s handling of the “children overboard” affair. However, as I have previously indicated to you in a phone conversation, your grossly irresponsible behaviour is of no assistance to those Australians (on all sides of politics) who are working hard to advance the cause of asylum seekers in detention or on temporary protection visas. The unintended consequence of your conspiracy driven thesis is to discredit this noble cause by associating it with extremism.

As far as I am concerned this correspondence is concluded.

Yours sincerely

Gerard Henderson

## **FROM TONY KEVIN TO GERARD HENDERSON - 2 SEPTEMBER 2004**

Dear Gerard

You continue to miss the point of my book - which makes me wonder if you really can have yet read it properly ?

My book is not “running an argument”.

It is recording a set of well-founded and specific questions, that have arisen out of the public media-based record, and out of the government’s own presented Senate evidence, about the conduct of accountable Australian government agencies in a matter where 353 people died by drowning in Australian- surveilled international waters, where the Australian government at the time had a duty of care to them; deaths also where the little that is so far known about activities connected to the Australian government’s upstream people smuggling disruption program in Indonesia, suggests questions about possible government negligence, even of possible criminality, arising out of that program.

You are not willing to engage with me publicly in a discussion of the merits of the evidence that supports my questions. That is your right.

It is however less than intellectually honest of you to make no reference as yet in this correspondence to the facts of the Senate history before, during and after the CMI Report’s tabling on 23 October 2002: i.e., John Faulkner’s statements in the Senate on 23-26 September 2002, asking questions about the disruption program that have never been answered; the individual Report chapters and Senate tabling statements by Cook, Faulkner, Collins and Bartlett on 23 October 2002; and the subsequent three-year Senate history of five *SIEV X*-related motions, and of continued efforts by opposition senators to establish more of the truth in Senate estimates and other committees. Not to speak of later-submitted evidence such as the Jakarta Embassy cable of 23 October 2001 and the PM and C minute to the Prime Minister on 24 October 2001, both of which only came to light in 2003.

You may find these facts inconvenient but they are facts, most of which are recorded in my book (although the fifth Senate motion in 2004 was too late for my book).

My book has set down serious factually-based questions that require serious answers, if we are to continue to enjoy governance in Australia that is based on principles of the universal rule of law and respect for human life. Instead of engaging with me at the level of those specific questions, you are doing what Senator Brandis tried to do in his examination of me on 1 May 2002 in the CMI Committee - complaining that if I am not making specific allegations about the conduct of any Australian government agency, I should withdraw my questions.

As recalled in my book, I did not fall into that debating trap then; nor will I now.

My questions about the history of the sinking of *SIEV X* remain legitimate. Your reluctance to debate them publicly with me reflects on you rather than on me.

I am not seeking to close off this correspondence as long as I remain hopeful that I may be able to convince you that my questions - and the Senate’s questions - about the sinking of *SIEV X* and the people smuggling disruption program are serious and legitimate public questions. So I will keep this correspondence going for as long as you want to. But I do think we should preferably debate these questions publicly, given their public importance, so that your and my views can be shared with others.

Regards,

Tony Kevin

## FROM GERARD HENDERSON TO TONY KEVIN - 3 SEPTEMBER 2004

Dear Tony

As indicated, I do not intend continuing this correspondence. However, I believe a brief response to your email of 2 September 2004 is appropriate.

In your email, you acknowledge that your book *The Sinking of Siev X* does *not* run an argument. In other words, there is *no* thesis. Rather, you ask “specific questions” and posit theories in the absence of documented evidence.

This is extraordinarily unprofessional. On your own admission, you have accused members of the Australian Defence Force of being complicit in, or indifferent to, “premeditated murder” – not on the basis of the construction of a sustained argument but, rather, by posing questions “that require serious answers”. Likewise, your implication that Labor conspired with the Howard Government to whitewash the *SIEV X* sinking is based not on evidence but, rather, on questioning.

Moreover, you regard anyone who asks you to state precisely what it is that you are alleging as attempting to force you into a “debating trap”.

As advised, I have no particular knowledge about the *SIEV X* tragedy. If you can establish a case to support your implied allegation of serious criminality, then I would be interested in reading it or hearing it. So far you have not supported your theory with documented evidence. In short, your case turns on rhetorical questioning, innuendo, suspicion and conspiracy. This is an appalling way to treat the men and women of the Australian Defence Force. I will not be assisting you to obtain a platform to diminish the reputation of the ADF personnel by merely positing leading questions.

That’s about it.

Yours sincerely

Gerard Henderson

## FROM TONY KEVIN TO GERARD HENDERSON - 3 SEPTEMBER 2004

Dear Gerard

Thanks for your letter. I will keep this simple.

The 353 people who died on *SIEV X* were just that - people. They had families who mourn them. They could have been your or my relatives. Their families and friends have a right to know how and why they died - just as the families of people who died in the Thredbo ski lodge landslide disaster, or the Bulli rail

disaster, or the Canberra bushfires, have a similar right. Imagine yourself a relative of one of the victims of those fatal events and you will see my point at once.

In fact, in a democracy ruled by law, any person has the right to ask questions about possible official negligence or worse in situations where people have died in insufficiently explained circumstances.

Thus, one does not have to make allegations or accusations against individuals or agencies in order to have the right to ask questions about their conduct that are based on observed facts, e.g., one does not have to accuse the NSW Dept of Main Roads of negligence in order to be entitled to ask why the stormwater drainage system of the road embankment above the Thredbo ski lodge was not working properly; or to accuse NSWGR or negligence in order to ask why the dead man’s brake system on the NSWGR train was not working properly. Similarly with *SIEV X* - there is now a wealth of public evidence, that of itself gives rise to legitimate questions. I and the Senate have asked those questions. The government is not answering them.

Do you have any difficulty with understanding this logic so far ?

Normally, this is the work of coroners’ courts. They try to find out what happened in cases where people died and where other persons’ or agencies’ negligence or culpability may or may not have been involved. They do not make allegations or accusations. They do sometimes suggest there may be a case to be answered - after they have examined all the available evidence, under scrupulous legal protocols.

There has not yet been a full-powers coroner’s court or equivalent into the sinking of *SIEV X*. There clearly needs to be. As I discuss in my book, the CMI enquiry was arguably an attempted “coronial” investigation, but with such limited powers as not to be able to do the job properly (see my book, Chapter 13).

I have the right as a concerned Australian who cares about the value of human life, the rule of law, and the integrity of governance in my country to ask questions that are based in the public record of evidence, about how 353 people died on *SIEV X* during a time of major Australian border protection and people smuggling disruption operations.

It is really irrelevant whether you think it is “unprofessional” of me to do so - my professionalism or lack thereof has nothing to do with this matter. Whether I am a former diplomat or a former plumber, I still have the right to ask such questions if they are soundly based in the public record - as I believe they are.

If you were to sit down and read the book properly, we might then be able usefully to discuss the intrinsic merit, or lack thereof, of the questions about Australian government agencies' conduct that I am asking in my book. I think that would be a more useful way to approach this issue.

Surely, after the history of the *HMAS Voyager* royal commissions, and the Fitzgerald Inquiry into the Queensland Police, you would not claim that it is *ipso facto* inconceivable for the ADF or AFP or any other Australian government agency to have been negligent, or possibly worse, in the case of SIEV X? You would not simply shelter behind a presumption of official regularity, and refuse to consider the possibility that something might have gone terribly wrong here?

Regards

Tony Kevin

### **FROM GERARD HENDERSON TO TONY KEVIN - 6 SEPTEMBER 2004**

Dear Tony

Re your note of 3 September 2004.

Of course, you have the "right" to ask questions about the sinking of the *SIEV X* – or any other matter. But it is unprofessional to suggest, without any evidence, that ADF personnel were involved in what you term "premeditated murder". Ditto your implied accusation that the Labor Party was involved in a conspiracy to "whitewash" the *SIEV X* tragedy – also made without evidence.

Gerard Henderson

### **FROM: TONY KEVIN TO GERARD HENDERSON - 6 SEPTEMBER 2004**

Dear Gerard

Thanks for your letter.

Please point me, if you can, to the page and line references in my book that support your claim that my book suggests "without any evidence, that ADF personnel were involved in what you term 'premeditated murder'"? I'm not aware of any such suggestion in my book, and it would not be accurate of you to ascribe such views to me.

I am aware that my book asks many questions based on evident inconsistencies and gaps in the evidence put forward by ADF, AFP and other Commonwealth Government ministers and senior departmental officials: questions that I believe will need to be addressed judicially if we take seriously the loss of 353 human lives where our government had a duty of care.

Please also point me to my book's "implied accusation that the Labor Party was involved in a conspiracy to "whitewash" the *SIEV X* tragedy – also made without evidence" ?

If you are referring here to the question I ask at one point in my Chapter 13, my response is simply that you must read my question asked there ( not an "implied accusation") in the context of that chapter as a whole - which pays repeated tribute to Labor's sustained, politically courageous and responsible expressions of concern about *SIEV X* and the Australian people smuggling disruption program over the past three years, as evidenced in John Faulkner's speeches and written statements, other Labor Senators' speeches and written statements, and the record of Senate motions passed (texts of motions are reproduced at the end of my book) . My book is full of relevant quotations from Labor Senators. As a responsible commentator, you could not credibly ignore this context.

There is a further Senate motion passed after my book went to press, on 22 June 2004:

### **22 JUNE 2004**

The Leader of the Australian Democrats, Senator Andrew Bartlett moves a *fifth SIEVX related Senate motion* calling for the government to act on 'the order of the Senate of 16 October 2003 calling for the establishment of a judicial inquiry into all aspects of the People Smuggling Disruption Program operated by the Commonwealth Government and agencies and, in particular, issues surrounding the sinking of the boat known as the *SIEV X*, with the loss of 353 lives.'

Best,

Tony Kevin

### **FROM GERARD HENDERSON TO TONY KEVIN - 7 SEPTEMBER 2004**

Dear Tony

Re your email of 6 September 2004.

The reference to "premeditated murder" appeared in your letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* which was published on 2 July 2003. If you did not hold this view, you should not have referred to "premeditated murder". If you no longer hold this view, you should withdraw the comment – publicly.

The reference to Labor having "whitewashed" the *SIEV X* affair appears at Page 240 of your book *A Certain Maritime Incident: The Sinking of SIEV X*. If you did not mean to make this suggestion of a Labor

“whitewash”, you should not have written what you actually wrote. If you no longer hold this view, you should withdraw the comment – publicly.

I am surprised that you do not seem to be fully aware of your own writings – and the implied allegations which you have made. You do not seem to understand that words have precise meanings and that imputations really matter.

Gerard Henderson

PS : I have just received your note of 7 September 2004 attaching a copy of your email of 2 September 2004. As you will recall, I replied to this on 3 September 2004. I have nothing further to add to what I wrote there.

### **FROM TONY KEVIN TO GERARD HENDERSON - 7 SEPTEMBER 2004**

Dear Gerard

Thanks for your letter today. First, here is the full text of my letter as published in the SMH on 2 July 2003, as it appears on the archival website [www.sievx.com...](http://www.sievx.com...)

Gerard, I'd be happy for every word of that short letter to appear again in public - I stand by it. I don't think it would be possible for any reasonable reader to construe this sentence:

**What some are seeing as the premeditated murder of up to 353 people and the subsequent alleged cover-up of that crime by Australian national security agencies were not acts in any “just war”.**

as implying any allegation by me, to quote your words, “that ADF personnel were involved in what you term “premeditated murder” “. I have not and do not now make any such allegation against the ADF, so there is no such allegation by me against the ADF to withdraw.

Your arguments are very reminiscent of Senator Brandis' Senate questioning of me on 1 May 2002. I did not blink then, and I am not blinking now.

My position has remained consistent throughout our correspondence, and indeed since my Senate Committee testimony on 1 May 2002 - that there are serious public questions that need to be addressed about the sinking of *SIEV X* which cost 353 human lives, and about the subsequent Howard government cover-up of truth about that huge tragedy, that have not to date been properly judicially addressed. That is also the Senate opposition parties' position. You know these to be facts.

Similarly with your reference to me and Labor. I have already fully answered that in my emails of 2 and 6 September.

Gerard, with respect, I am aware of my own writings; and I don't think you are winning this long argument. Why not re-think your position? You might actually find that if you take the questions set out in my book seriously, you will see that they have evidentiary weight and merit. Then we could begin to work together in the interests of the Australian values we share - truth and justice for all.

One day, we will all look back on this sleazy Howard era as a sort of bad dream. Unfortunately, it has been all too real.

Regards

Tony Kevin

### **FROM GERARD HENDERSON TO TONY KEVIN - 7 SEPTEMBER 2004**

Dear Tony

I guess we have a different attitude to language. You believe it is okay to use the term “premeditated murder” – concerning which the ADF would have to be either complicit in or indifferent to. And then you deny that you really said what you actually wrote. It's the same with your attitude to the ALP and its (alleged) whitewashing of the *SIEV X* sinking.

You believe in advancing a case by asking questions. I believe in constructing an argument based on available evidence. We're different.

That's all I can say. I have other work to do.

Gerard Henderson

### **FROM TONY KEVIN TO GERARD HENDERSON - 7 SEPTEMBER 2004**

Dear Gerard

I'm happy to let this correspondence rest there.

Best

Tony Kevin

### **FROM GERARD HENDERSON TO TONY KEVIN - 8 SEPTEMBER 2004**

Dear Tony

Fine.

Best wishes

Gerard Henderson

### **PROFESSOR PATRICK WELLER'S ASSESSMENT**

As this correspondence was drawing to a conclusion, the following review by Professor Patrick Weller appeared in the *The Canberra Times* on 4 September 2004. Professor Weller, at times, has been a critic of

the Howard Government. His review of Tony Kevin's book *A Certain Maritime Incident: The Sinking of the SIEV X* was published under the heading "An angry take on the deaths of 353 boat people".

*The resuscitation of the children-overboard allegations has brought the events of October 2001 back into the spotlight. That case revolved around the issue of what the Government knew and whether the public was misled during the election campaign. Fortunately, because of the skill of the Australian navy, no-one died.*

*But in another case, far more tragic later that month, a refugee vessel sank without any rescue vessel available and 353 people died. For the past three years Tony Kevin has sought to keep the attention of the Australian people focussed on their fate.*

*Kevin is angry and this is an angry book. He believes that the sinking of SIEV X (X for unknown, a title he gave it and which stuck) was "a managed event, rather than an accidental one: the boat had been intended to sink, thereby creating a major loss of life and a major deterrent signal against people smuggling".*

*If he is right, then those who sank the boat committed murder. He wants to ask what the Australian Government knew and whether it was involved. He hoped the case would become an Australian Watergate; he regrets that it has not. That can be either because the crimes were covered up or because he is wrong. Most think the latter. Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty told the Senate that all the information that might have saved the boat was obtained after the event, too late for a rescue operation. David Marr and Marion Wilkinson in *Dark Victory* conclude that Australia did not kill the refugees. The Senate inquiry into children overboard found no evidence to support Kevin's propositions, even if some of the senators were highly critical of the evidence, or lack of it, given to them by defence personnel.*

*Kevin has no patience for those who cannot see the case he puts. He is frustrated by their inability to see the pattern of behaviour he presents and castigates, even ridicules, their obduracy. The Senate report in particular is attacked for failing to ask all the obvious questions that he had supplied.*

*So how good is Kevin's case? He does not claim to have proof that Australian intervention led to the sinking. Rather he seeks to determine what happened by calculating the highest probability hypothesis that best explains the accumulation of facts.*

*At times, when unconvinced by a series of stories, he rejects them and replaces them with an account that no-one has so far proposed, and for which there is no direct*

*evidence. Fishing boats, he suggests, were dispatched to the location of the sinking to ensure some refugees were rescued to tell the tale (p84). The RAAF records were doctored to remove evidence of where the surveillance flights went, to hide any unreported sightings of the rescue (p196).*

*More often he seeks to show the inconsistency of the explanations provided, to suggest there is more to the real case than is being presented. He asks a series of questions, invariably loaded, to cast doubt and suspicion. Indeed, if all the stories presented by Kevin are true then there is a network of actors in two countries, from police to serving officers to officials to smugglers, who know more than they have said, and who in effect are covering up murder.*

*If such a dastardly plan had been concocted, could it be kept quiet? Not all would be constrained by military discipline. Some would be all too willing to sell such a story. Yet no-one has come forward to provide any corroboration for the darker images that Kevin seeks to portray.*

*Inconsistencies in evidence certainly, questions left dangling, stories that may be true not tested. But can it add up to more than a tragic accident? As the recent revelations on children overboard show, there may be evidence that will yet come to light.*

*So far, given the choice between the extensive sting and ensuing cover-up on the one hand, and a tragic stuff-up on the other, I tend towards Murphy in still being persuaded by the latter. Even after reading this book I can accept that it was a terrible and avoidable tragedy, without being persuaded that it was more than that. I may be too ingenuous, or too cynical, to believe that all those involved would keep quiet about mass murder.*

*At times this is a hard book to read; part detailed evidence, part speculation, part condemnation. In the end the message is not clear, because Kevin himself is not clear if, and to what extent, Australia was involved. There are questions, details and suggestions. It is an unfinished prosecution case.*

*The anger suggests Kevin will not let the case rest here. His dedication to the cause is rare, his zeal admirable. Few of us have his staying power and dedication to finding the truth. He will keep digging for clear evidence to implicate the Government. I fear he may continue to find it frustrating.*

**Patrick Weller**



# BOOK REVIEWS

John McConnell

## THE TROUBLE WITH ISLAM: A MUSLIM'S CALL FOR REFORM IN HER FAITH

By Irshad Manji

Random House Australia, pb 2003,

rrp \$32.95

ISBN 174051 292 8

Recent years have seen the spread of deadly and destructive forms of terrorism. Atrocities and violence formerly centred in the Middle East increasingly stalk the world stage.

Indicators point to terrorists exacting their inhumane price on the wider scale for decades to come. Militant forms of Islam are intent on committing crimes against humanity. The target is Western civilization. If other Muslims get in the way, tough.

Why is it that so many Muslims remain silent while fundamentalists or Islamists fly planes and their passengers into buildings, detonate explosives strapped to their own bodies in order to kill and maim passers-by, and disseminate video clips recording their beheading of civilians?

For those of you who wonder about the silence of the wider Muslim community in the face of such evil, Irshad Manji's book *The Trouble with Islam* presents a Muslim voice of reform. The author's family fled Idi Amin's Uganda and arrived in Vancouver, British Columbia when she was four years of age.

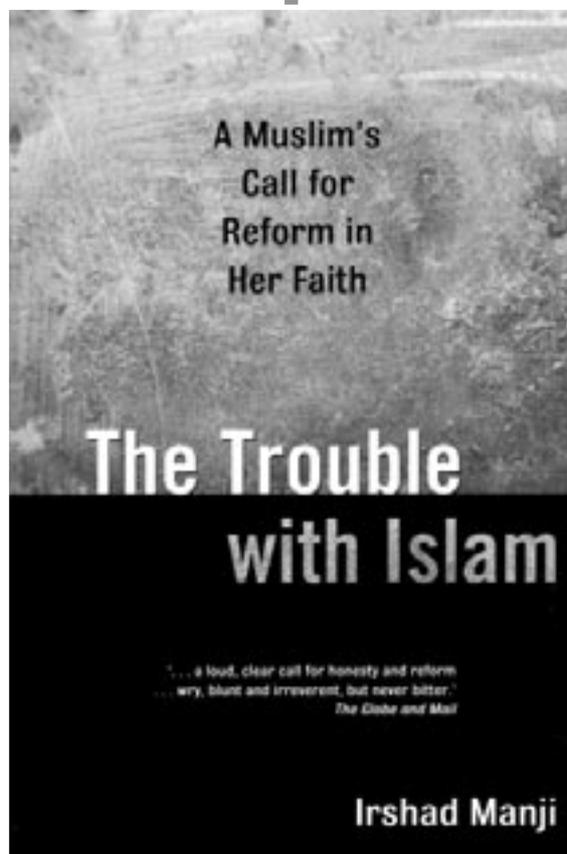
Irshad Manji grew up as a Muslim in Western society. She attended a secular public school in Canada. She also attended a Madressa, an Islamic religious school for several hours on Saturdays until she was expelled

at the age of 14. Her questioning of religious matters exhausted the patience of her teachers.

It is clear from a reading of *The Trouble with Islam* that Irshad Manji is curious and thoughtful. Equally it is clear that she is irreverent and blunt. Here is someone who writes directly with passion. In colloquial terms, there is no beating about the bush.

Irshad Manji may not be the voice of mainstream Islam. However, *The Trouble with Islam* provides a thought-provoking analysis of why so many Muslims remain silent in the face of such barbarism and savagery. Irshad Manji questions many aspects of her Muslim faith. She also bears unhappy memories of her childhood years.

She grew up in what she describes as "a miserable household under a father who despised joy". Her critique of Islam includes feminist and lesbian perspectives. She pounds out one question after another.



Why is there inferior treatment of women in Islam? Why does Islam squander the talents of women? Why is there a stubborn streak of anti-Semitism? Why is there a continuing scourge of slavery in countries ruled by Islamic regimes?

Why do totalitarian impulses inhabit mainstream Islam? What will the self-appointed ambassadors of Allah do next?

Readers are left in no doubt. Irshad Manji target is mainstream Islam. She rejects the thought that fundamentalists have hijacked the Islamic religion. Rather, she sheets the blame home to "the nasty side of the Koran, and how it informs terrorism".

Instead of imitating conventional interpretations, Muslims, the author argues, should interpret the Koran. Break from the herd, she urges fellow Muslims. Cast aside imitation. Imitation, according to Irshad Manji, has become the norm in Islam.

It is an imitation of intolerance, she declares. Intimidation has displaced intellect. Irshad Manji calls for a return to independent thinking – a tradition known formerly in Islam as "ijtihad".

The author challenges the Arabic hold on Islam. She labels this as desert tribalism. She argues that females wearing the veil amounts to a cultural capitulation. It is cultural capitulation rather than an act of spiritual submission. She challenges Islam to fulfill its humanitarian potential.

Every faith has its share of literalists, Manji says. Only in Islam, she believes, is literalism mainstream.

Irshad Manji issues a number of challenges to the West too. The West, she argues, needs Muslims. Just look at the contrasting demographics, she says. Muslim migrants must be on the agenda of Western nations. She insists that Muslims living in Western countries should utilise and indeed defend the pluralism that they benefit from while Western leaders should be determined to resist claims that they are racist when seeking to encourage multiple interpretations of Islam.

Western countries, Manji argues, must work to revitalise Islamic economies. She focuses particularly on Western assistance to engage the entrepreneurial talents of Muslim women to become business people.

Help to generate wealth, the author argues, using the commerce tendencies long associated with Muslim societies. Promote a competition of ideas in Islamic societies, she urges.

Irshad Manji sees competition as a prerequisite to democracy in Arab Muslim countries.

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**INTERRUPTED JOURNEYS:  
YOUNG REFUGEES FROM HITTLER'S  
REICH**

By Alan Gill

Simon & Schuster Australia, pb 2004

rrp \$34.95

ISBN 0 7318 1229 8

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*Interrupted Journeys* is mainly about children, young German and Austrian Jews, who were brought to Australia in the period preceding and following World War Two. In fleeing Nazi oppression in the land of their birth, the children secured refuge in Australia.

However, they arrived without their parents and other family members. On top of the dislocation they suffered, they lacked the security of family and friends. Many of the children did not know what had happened to family members left behind in Europe.

*Interrupted Journeys* records the stories of a variety of children, and adults too, displaced by Hitler's Reich. *Interrupted Journeys* includes "the Dunera Boys" –

friendly "enemy aliens" – who were interned in Australia following their transfer from Britain as the prospect of the invasion of Britain grew.

Alan Gill also recounts the experiences of the (non-Jewish) members of the Vienna Mozart Boys Choir. The group happened to be touring Australia when war was declared.

Gill was formerly the religion writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald* over many years. He has skillfully woven these interrupted journeys of young lives into a moving account of sometimes lonely and difficult beginnings in a country a long way from Europe.

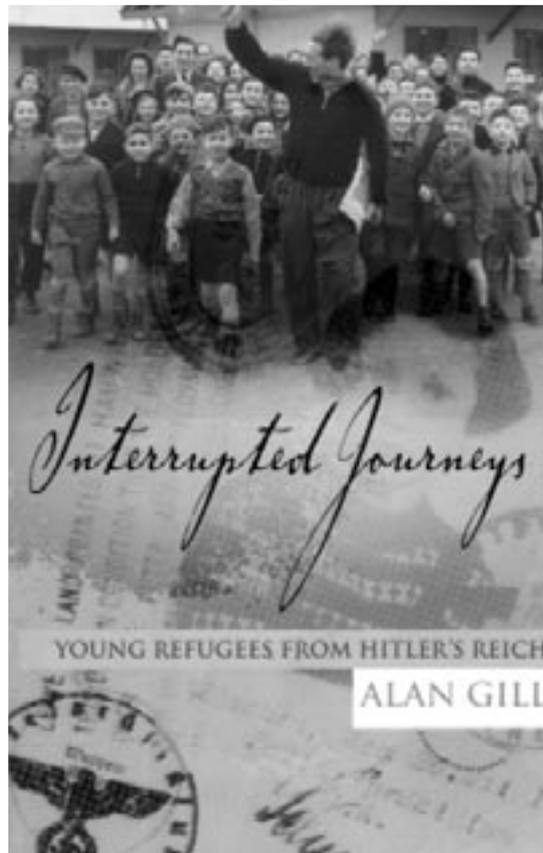
*Interrupted Journeys* records the wartime stories of these children and describes how many of them made Australia their permanent home. As

such it examines the critical role played by various Jewish welfare societies in assisting the settlement of refugee children in Australia. Alan Gill's first book was *Orphans of the Empire*.

Brothers, Richard and George Dreyfus, for example, arrived in Melbourne on 22 July 1939. It is an easy date for George Dreyfus to recall. It was his eleventh birthday. The brothers were in a group of seven boys and ten girls. At twelve years of age, Richard was the oldest child in the group.

The brothers were placed in accommodation at the Larino Children's Home in Balwyn in Melbourne's east. In his interview with Alan Gill, George Dreyfus recalled their departure from Berlin's Zoo-Bahnhof station "as if it were yesterday".

"The goodbye scenes," he said, "they'll always be there... I don't think I was crying, but lots of the other children were. I had no understanding I might never see my parents again."



Fortunately, as it turned out, the Dreyfus brothers were reunited with their parents in Australia. Unlike many of the families of other refugee children, the parents of Richard and George Dreyfus managed to escape the Holocaust.

As difficult as it was for the young refugees who arrived in Australia without their families prior to World War Two, it was far worse for those remaining in Europe during the Holocaust. Alan Gill quotes Tom Keneally who in researching *Schindler's Ark* concluded that this particular group was the most damaged of any group of survivors.

Gill refers to the comparative positions of the children of the Holocaust and British child migrants to Australia. Both groups suffered an acute sense of loss. Both lacked family support. The Jewish children knew their parents. However, in most cases, they were to suffer the loss of their parents. Years would pass before most of them could establish just what fate had befallen their parents, brothers and sisters.

On the other hand, the British children did not know who their parents were – or whether they had any siblings. Many of them were to spend a lifetime searching for family members, with mixed degrees of success.

As mentioned, *Interrupted Journeys* includes the story of the members of the Vienna Mozart Boys' Choir. Twenty children ranging in age from eight to fifteen arrived in Australia in June 1939 as part of this Choir – as distinct from the Vienna Boys' Choir.

Regarded as “enemy aliens” at the outbreak of war, they were provided with accommodation in Melbourne through the Catholic Archbishop Daniel Mannix. As such, they became the official choir of Melbourne's St. Patrick's Cathedral during the war years.

The book includes quite an interesting tale connected to the members of the Vienna Mozart Boys' Choir. As well *Interrupted Journeys* provides an interesting and moving account of the effect of the Nazi oppression on many young lives.

Alan Gill refers to himself as a “compulsive scribbler”. Clearly, he gains personal satisfaction from writing. Readers of Alan Gill's book will share in this interesting and moving account of so many interrupted journeys that in many cases led to a new life in Australia.

*John McConnell is the author of several senior Australian text books*



# REVIEW OF THE REVIEWERS

Stephen Matchett

**Different war. Same Anzac icons. Stephen Matchett looks at how Kokoda and the campaigns that followed are becoming the measure of patriotic achievement.**

The idea of an unchanging Australian national character, born of historical memory and based on a universally admired code of behaviour is impossible to sustain when so many millions of us are first generation migrants.

Yet, there is still a sense among conservative commentators and older Anglo-Celtic Australians that previous generations behaved in ways that set standards we should still support. And if the crowds for marches and ceremonies around the Commonwealth on 25 April are any indication, the ideals of Anzac are far more popular than they were a generation back.

This drives the left wing media-academic alliance, that so dislikes patriotic pride in military achievement, absolutely nuts. Theirs is an attitude that has as much to do with contemporary cultural politics as it does with history. It assumes that having any interest in soldiers who fought to defend a racist, sexist Australia in the past somehow translates into opposing refugees and supporting the American alliance today.

For as long as the left focused on class, it could sell the ideal of the digger as a socialist in a slouch hat, egalitarian and suspicious of officers. But, as the academic establishment became more interested in oppression based on race, gender and sexual preference, historians lost interest in working class achievements and the idea of a unifying Australian identity.

And when many academic historians do write about the Anzacs it is to debunk their achievement. Thus Dale Blair did his best to demolish the foundation story of the performance of the Australian army in World War I in his history of the 1st battalion, First AIF. Dr Blair presented the unit as not especially good at its job and certainly no better than comparable British battalions on the Western Front.

However, the historical and popular consensus has always been that Australians make good soldiers who have fought in honourable causes. For the generation after World War 1, the achievement of the AIF filled the bill. There was a popular sense that the egalitarian ethos made Australians superb citizen soldiers, capable of outperforming the armies of more class-ridden countries. John Monash set the standard, calling his war reminiscences *The Australian Victories in France*. And in World War II and subsequent conflicts we have liked to think that though there are never very many Australian soldiers their values make them world-beaters.

This is especially important for a nation that lacks great patriotic symbols. In the absence of a Bastille Day to celebrate or equivalent texts to Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg and Second Inaugural addresses to venerate we have turned to the values of the Australian citizen soldier and the achievements they inspired to define our national character. In military history, Australians look for examples of mateship and equality on the battlefield rather than just grand victories.

But with World War 1 beyond living memory, and the Vietnam War still sufficiently unpopular to be off-limits for writers looking for fuel to keep the Anzac flame alive, historians interested in the Australian way in war are turning to the Pacific campaigns.

With the imperial link long gone and the idea of fighting Germans or Turks inexplicable to any Australian under 40, the Pacific provides easier evidence to explain why Australians make good soldiers. Academics who dislike the idea of finding anything positive to say about the old Anglo-Celt Australia will dismiss the Australian infantry of 1942 as racist and insular. By the standards of our own age they probably were. The Papuan porters who literally did the heavy lifting on the Kokoda Track undoubtedly had a different perspective on the diggers they served to the one passed down to us.

But the combat performance of most Australians at Kokoda, and in the campaigns that followed, was eminently admirable. And they certainly possess the qualities required to be the heirs of Anzac.

The signs that New Guinea could take over from WWI as symbolising the Australian spirit have been with us for a while. A decade back Paul Keating adopted the Kokoda campaign as a defining example of Australian achievement. Certainly, it fitted his overtly nationalist philosophy that Australia could, and should, look to its own defence rather than depend on the not always reliable promise of help from great and powerful friends. It was a fair enough assertion, and one that continues to suit Labor leaders. Mark Latham proposed an annual day of remembrance of the defence of Australia in the Pacific War in September 2004 and it is an idea that may well stick. Because, the campaigns in Papua and

New Guinea possess all the characteristics of the Anzac legend.

First, the campaign was fought under especially appalling physical conditions. If anything, the soldier's physical experience on the Kokoda Track, and some of the fights that followed, was worse than most of WWI.

Second, there was the challenge of awful odds. Kokoda was as hard a fight as Pozieres or Villers-Bretonneux, against an enemy as skilful as the Germans, and far more willing to take casualties, or less prepared to accept surrenders.

Third, they were soldiers' battles. The Australians did well on the Western Front because they mastered their craft but above also because

they held combat discipline and looked out for each other. The 53rd Battalion, the only unit to fail on Kokoda, broke the code. It did not stick together and was amateur in its methods.

Fourth, the soldiers were bedevilled by an incompetent high command, with Douglas MacArthur taking the role of Douglas Haig. And to add an element of the class war that once would have been required for the legend to be popular, there were also incompetent and blood minded Australian commanders, notably Thomas Blamey, who cared more for his power and reputation than he did for the troops. Prime Minister John Curtin's support for his general complicates his standing as a Labor saint, which may be why the popular record emphasises the Curtin who stood up to Winston Churchill rather than the one that supported the Yanks and his own senior commander over the safety of Australians in the field.



And, finally, it was an honourable war fought in the national defence in which Australians demonstrated they could look after their own interests. If it were not for the way the academic left now sneers at the achievements of past generations of Australians, we would likely have already heard a great deal more about these fights. The Australian achievement in the Pacific could be a fertile field for the left in the contemporary debate over the worth of the American alliance. The Americans were with us in 1942 as much out of self-interest as any desire to save Australia.

These are all themes considered by this collection of independent scholars and writers, but only so far as the evidence allows. Most of these men are historians not myth makers or ideologues. None of them ignore the failure of the lamentable 53rd Battalion, for example. Yet there is no doubting that they are authors who are rightly impressed by the qualities and achievements of the AIF and militia.

## BLOKES AT WAR

Peter FitzSimons in *Kokoda* (Sydney, Hodder Headline, 2004) certainly is, and his admiration is obvious in his tale of Blokes at war.

FitzSimons knows what it takes to be a Bloke. Blokes serve heroically on the battlefield. Blokes are natural warriors, their discipline comes from within and they are rarely daunted by horrible conditions and terrible odds. Blokes are selflessly brave, willing to sacrifice everything for their mates and Australia. Blokes are reserved but loving, modest but passionate. Blokes are always respectful of others and tolerant of difference. They are fierce fighters who delight in destroying the enemy, but gentle souls who care for their mates and want nothing more than to return to their loving wives and kids. Sometimes people who do not play football and have never been soldiers can be Blokes, such as Kim Beazley, the subject of a FitzSimons' biography. Even sheilas can be Blokes, at least if they are like resistance heroine Nancy Wake, who has already received the FitzSimons' treatment in a book that reputedly sold over 150,000 copies.

This book will appeal to people who want to read about Blokes who met all the conditions to be Anzac heroes. FitzSimons' Blokes are the blokiest. They slog through the truly awful highlands of Papua's Owen Stanley Ranges and, despite horrible losses, hold off the better trained, Japanese army. The baddies who get in their way are very bad. Blamey is so pompous and stupid he could be British. As for the Americans, they either cannot fight or are military politicians who sneer at real soldiers.

Just because FitzSimons sticks to a simple template does not mean that what he writes about did not happen. The problem is that so did a great deal of

other things that do not fit his formula. The heroes of this book are the men of the 39th militia battalion who slowed and then stopped the Japanese advance on the Kokoda Track in 1942. For FitzSimons they were blokes with a very big B, all the more magnificent for their being ordinary men whose mateship and courage made them capable of doing extraordinary things. FitzSimons does not attribute their prowess to any innate national characteristics but there is a sense throughout the book that being Australian made them special. Thus, he writes that Blokes were better at grenade fighting than the Japanese, "partly because the poor bastards had never had a chance to play cricket and didn't know what it was to grow up hurling balls in from the outfield" (299). This is far from a claim of racial superiority, but in its own silly way, it certainly asserts the superiority of the Blokes' way of life, which translates to the mystical moral power of the citizen soldier. For example, consider FitzSimons' explanation why all the walking wounded from the 39th' who could, returned to the front when their mates were in trouble:

**It was not so simple a thing as courage ... It was the common man of the free countries rising in all his glory from mill, office, mine, factory and shop and applying to war, the lessons learned when he went down the mine to release trapped comrades; when he hurled the lifeboat through the surf; when he endured hard work and poverty for his children's sake... This is the great tradition of democracy. This is the future. This is victory. (319)**

This is also over-writing. Not that there is anything especially wrong with FitzSimons' argument, however ripe. Citizen soldiers who are well trained, properly led and believe in the justice of their task are very hard to beat. But artillery and automatic weapons are no respecters of commitment to cause and comrades. And not all Australians were heroes.

The 53rd Battalion was made up of men of the same backgrounds as the 39th but was militarily negligible on the Track. The 53rd failed because it was formed with a hard core of malcontents, was untrained and badly led. Its dreadful performance demonstrates that the same cross-section of Blokes who could become heroes can just as easily be sloppy soldiers who could not, would not fight. While FitzSimons does not ignore the 53rd, he certainly does not go out of his way to explain why all Blokes were not super soldiers.

There is no place for subtlety in this book. FitzSimons sticks to the big picture and describes it with the

broadest brush strokes. For a simple description of the Kokoda Track it will do. But the purple prose, the eccentric authorial asides, even the melodramatic use of italic type to signify surprise, make this spectacularly simple story telling. While FitzSimons sticks to the basics of names, dates and events he also includes much of what he thinks men must have thought. Certainly, the book provides a fair summary of other peoples' research, always attributed, but the bibliography does not demonstrate any time spent in the archives. The only reason to read this book, as opposed to any of the others, is for the benefit of FitzSimons' style and opinions.

FitzSimons writes that "I am not an historian and this is not a history book", (xiii). But this is a convenient cop-out. He is writing history and as such is obliged to write the whole story as it happened and not just focus on the bits that make the Aussies look extra good.

## TRAINED AND DISCIPLINED BLOKES

Phillip Bradley in *On Shaggy Ridge: The Australian Seventh Division in the Ramu Valley Campaign* (South Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2004) is everything FitzSimons is not - a meticulous historian in the service of his material rather than using the record as a foundation for an egocentric essay on heroism. This is a superb tactical study written on a very small scale, less a history of the 7th Division as a whole than the combat record of some of its constituent companies in a New Guinea battle which, while important, lacks the drama of Kokoda and is largely forgotten. It should not be, because the combat involved was over terrain as tough, or worse, than anything on the Track. The company level assaults Bradley describes were extraordinary feats of arms over country that men should not have been asked to march over, let alone fight across.

Bradley's work suffers from many of the common faults of specialist battle-studies. The only overall campaign map is woefully inadequate. The tactical maps do not sufficiently support the text and readers who do not know the ground, that is to say virtually of all them, will find it hard to follow the fighting. There are times when Bradley's desire to tell the whole story in as much detail as he can overwhelms the narrative. And beyond the detailed tactical descriptions, it is badly structured. The strategic context of the campaign to push the Japanese out of the Ramu Valley is not set out until the middle of the book.

Yet, for all these faults, while Bradley lacks the breezy style, he does everything FitzSimons does, and does it better. He writes from a soldier's perspective and relates anecdotes of individuals in

battle to the overall course of the action. Nor are the Japanese missing from the book. Bradley makes it plain that whatever their ethical attitudes to combat, they were brave soldiers, seemingly resigned to their fate - which, with worse logistics and no air cover of their own, was inevitably grim. But the overall emphasis is on the Australians and Bradley is a master of describing their small unit fighting, possibly the hardest aspect of the military historian's craft. Where most writers would simply state that a company took its objective Bradley describes what platoons, sections, even individuals, faced in a fight.

Much of the oral history he relies on was compiled long after the war and as memories fade this inevitably reduces the overall credibility of the text. But there are no better sources and there are no jarring notes in the text that give the sense that Bradley is writing to make a case rather than recording as many of the representative experiences of the men who were there as he can. When he chooses, he presents a strong sense of the miserable theatre of war. The book begins with a superbly written set piece description of the death and injury of 150 men from the 2/33 Battalion in an airfield accident as they waited to be flown up to the front.

Bradley's soldiers were ordinary Australians, the sort of men many of us grew up around and they certainly were not treated as national heroes in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, Bradley demonstrates that they did extraordinary things. Thus, he describes Sergeant Lindsay Bear and a mate conducting their own individual bayonet charge to clear a Japanese position. It was an extraordinary feat of arms and Bradley describes Bear as "one of the finest soldiers his country ever put into the field, in any war" (80).

And while Bradley is no Aussie exceptionalist, he obviously has no doubt that Australians make great soldiers. Thus he describes a textbook platoon assault, "they were in a position to do what was required and the character of the Australian infantryman took care of the rest". (83) Bradley's use of the evidence supports his case that the campaign produced "some of the finest feats of arms in the history of the Australian army" (243). These fights may have been a strategic sideshow but for Bradley they are the equal of anything at Gallipoli, Pozieres and Kokoda.

Bradley's cast pass the Bloke test in spades, but their performance also demonstrates that there is a great deal more to the Australian military tradition than knowing how to throw a cricket ball. Certainly a flat social structure and a sense that Australians should be measured by their ability, rather than the circumstances of their birth, ensured the men of the 7th Division had the initiative small unit jungle

fighting requires. But, what made them so effective was the quality of their training and leadership. The lesson of Shaggy Ridge is that of France in 1918, the great Australian military tradition lies in training and discipline far more than raw courage.

## BLOKES VERSUS COMMANDERS

In contrast to Bradley's narrow focus, Peter Brune's *A Bastard of a Place: The Australians in Papua* (Crows Nest, Allen and Unwin, 2003) has a strong claim to be the definitive history of Australia's reconquest of Papua in 1942 and early 1943. Brune has spent decades writing about the campaigns, and it shows in the depth of his scholarship. There is much of the regimental history about this very big book. In part, this gives it the character of an antiquarian study that provides the foundations for broader analyses to follow. Brune cannot leave anything out and in his desire to explain everything, he sometimes provides more minute information than is absolutely essential.

But, among all the detail, Brune also sets out the key issues of the campaign – military and political. And, although harder to find, the book also puts Papua in the context of Australia's national story.

Certainly all the elements of the digger odyssey are here. In the way the book contrasts the performance of the fighting soldiers, the gentlemen of the staff and the American ally there is a touch of the FitzSimons' style. But only a touch. Brune's command of the sources, his restrained style and his grasp of the theatre as a whole make this in every way a bigger, better book.

There is also a familiar theme. Like FitzSimons, Brune writes from a patriot's perspective. He obviously believes that his tale is the second chapter of the foundation story of Australia. Thus he writes of the, "men who saved Australia in 1942-43 ... who fought not for the birth of a nation but for its very rite of passage" (4). And he makes the point that we did it ourselves:

**America did not save Australia in Papua in 1942-43. It certainly helped. But it should never be forgotten that during those critical six months of the Papuan**

**campaign, Australians stood up and essentially saved themselves. (622)**

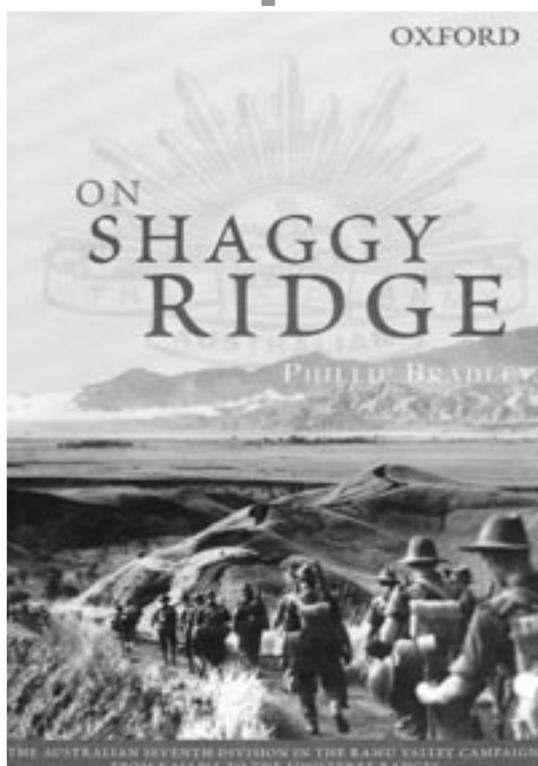
Brune is also inclined to make a case that there was something more than training to the success of the Australians. In a version of the "great generation" argument popularised by American historian Stephen Ambrose, he argues that Australian soldiers had taken from the Depression, the physical and emotional resilience to fight a hard campaign. (21) However, he does not run the line that Australians are innately excellent as soldiers, pointing to the disastrous performance of the 53rd Battalion as a failure of training and leadership:

**The notion that an Australian citizen need only enlist in his armed forces and immediately become the stuff of a new legend is quite simply nonsense. That citizen requires, and deserves, trained, dynamic leadership; he should have adequate equipment and the time to train and learn how to engender esprit de corps. The legend comes later. (166)**

When it comes to the performance of the high command, Brune adopts the traditional Australian digger legend where soldiers succeed in spite of their commanders. He holds Macarthur in contempt and

plays the patriot card in arguing that whatever the Americans thought, Australian troops did the fighting and won the victory of Kokoda and the subsequent Papua battles. And he is critical of Curtin for placing too much credence on American expertise. But, above all, he presents Blamey as a political general, pompous, obsessed with holding onto his post and in his disinterest in his troops, thoroughly un-Australian. He never got close enough to the fighting to know what was going on and had a habit of sacking officers who were doing their job by ignoring his endless orders to attack, especially Arnold Potts, the man who saved Australia from defeat on the Kokoda Track. "During the defensive phase of the Kokoda campaign Blamey, failed the Australian Army. History should condemn him," he writes. (607-608)

Brune does not simplistically assert every action was a victorious triumph for Australian courage or a tragic



betrayal where Australian soldiers were let down by their allies or senior officers. But he makes it plain that in winning the battles of Milne Bay, Gona, Buna and Sanananda, the Australians on the ground suffered because the high command did not know what it was doing. He makes a convincing case that these fights were mishandled and as such the book carries on the tradition of popular writing about the Western Front in WWI: the “Australians reached their objectives but were let down by British units on their flanks” approach.

Brune, like Bradley, is a scholar rather than a teller of patriotic tales. But while he sticks to the sources this is a book written to remind, more likely to inform, modern Australians of how the core characteristics of ordinary men, mateship, self-discipline and quiet courage saved the country. For Brune, the performance of Australians in Papua makes it sacred soil:

**The history of a nation is composed of the spiritual, intellectual and emotional energy of its citizens, both in the individual and collective sense, implanted into the building blocks of momentous events. (622)**

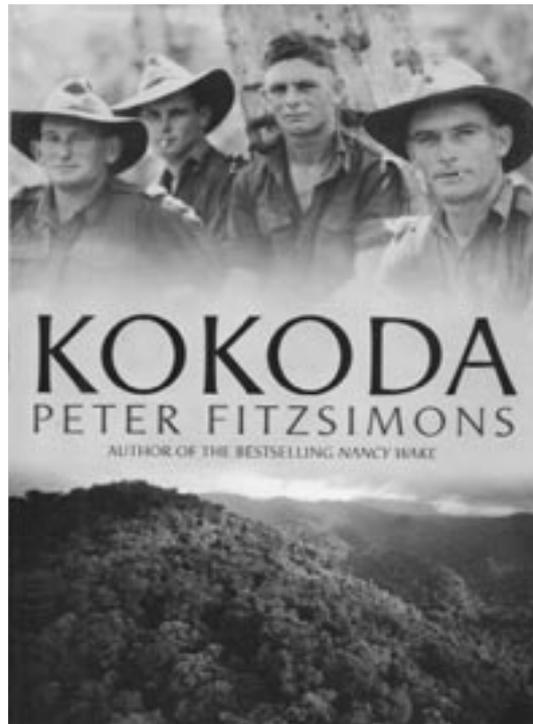
## A MODEL CITIZEN SOLDIER

Steve Eather’s *Desert Sands, Jungle Lands: A biography of Major General Ken Eather*, (Crowns Nest, Allen and Unwin, 2003), a biography of his distant relative, Major General Ken Eather, adds little to Brune’s study of Kokoda and the subsequent campaigns. But Ken was present for much of the most significant fighting there, replacing Arnold Potts when he was scapegoated for the retreat towards Port Moresby. And while he was always a subordinate player, the course of Ken’s combat career explains a great deal, about why Australian citizen soldiers did so well in World War II.

Eather was a dental mechanic by trade and seems to have escaped the economic impact of the Depression. Yet, although he was not a desperately poor man neither was he all that educated nor does he appear to have been all that ambitious. He certainly did not grow rich after the war, holding a biggish public service job but running a grocery round for his wife’s business towards the end of his life, and dependent on a pension.

It is the juxtaposition of his unremarkable post war life and senior wartime command that makes Ken’s career a model of the Australian ideal of citizen soldiering. He succeeded because of his tenacity, determination and ability. He rose to command a militia battalion in his early 30s and sold his business to join the AIF at the beginning of the War. He served in the Middle East and only missed the Greek campaign through illness before seeing most of his service in the Pacific, where he commanded a brigade. He was promoted major general and took on a division in the last days of the war.

Two aspects of his performance are especially interesting. Eather was a strict disciplinarian but he also had a strong sense of a fair go, presumably born of a sense that the men he commanded owed him no deference in civilian life. Thus, Steve describes Ken refusing to stop soldiers taking revenge on a camp canteen that had exploited them. And Ken jeopardised his command career by taking the right military decision on the Kokoda Track, by defying a tactically senseless order regardless of the consequences for his career.



When he replaced Arnold Potts on the Kokoda Track, Ken was under orders not to retreat. However, he acted exactly as Potts had planned; falling back to a ridge where he knew he would be able to stop the Japanese. Eather’s plan worked and he kept his job, but a professional soldier, worried about his career prospects, would not necessarily have defied his superiors.

Even in Steve’s sympathetic hands, Ken does not appear to have been an especially talented commander but he was certainly typical of his generation of Australian leaders, modest in his expectations and motivated by a great sense of duty. He was a model member of Robert Menzies “forgotten people” the original moral middle class, motivated by a profound patriotism and a remarkable sense of duty. Ken lacked the exuberance of FitzSimons’ bloke writ big but this modest biography of a forgotten soldier provides an insight into why Australians did so well at Kokoda - without all the histrionics.

The tactical details of the battles described in these books are irrelevant to all but the most devoted reader of military history, making them difficult to

review for a general audience. Some reviewers took the easy patriotic path, explaining how the fighting in Papua and New Guinea saved Australia from the Japanese, although where they were going to find the men and shipping to do anything more than mount raids is not clear. The more professional reviewers played it straight and considered them on their own terms, as history.

## REVIEWING PATRIOTIC HISTORY

Steve Eather's biography was not widely reviewed. This is entirely understandable. Ken Eather is a key figure in the history of Kokoda, but his performance did not define the courage of command there, a role that belongs to the commander of the 39th Battalion, Ralph Honner. Nor was he overwhelmed by the military politics that unfairly ruined the careers of other commanders who made the correct decisions about Kokoda and the subsequent campaigns. The only substantive piece appeared in the online *Journal of Australia Studies* (26 August, 2004, www.api-network.com) in which Richard Gehrman produced a respectful review calling it "a well written and carefully researched account of the life of an Australian citizen soldier". However, it was a piece with very little of substance and summarised rather than analysed the book.

John Wellfare, (*Army*, 25 September 2003) thought it was a competent piece of work that "set out in a simple, chronological style ... a reliable insight into the nature of leadership and warfare in his time". But he suggested that it was a book for gentlemen rather than the rest of us, "officers will likely be inspired by his leadership style and sense of responsibility for his men".

Brune's book was much more widely reviewed and strongly praised, both for its quality and sacerdotal subject. There was very little criticism, apart from Bernard Whimpress (*Journal of Australian Studies*, 26, August 2004, www.api-network.com) who made the entirely reasonable point in an otherwise favourable review that Brune sometimes lost control of his material.

Most of the reviewers were too awed by Brune's achievement to go even that far and some played it

safe by over-stating the book's case. John Wright (*Courier Mail*, 24 January 2004) thought Brune had produced a book that was both "monumental", not to mention "readable" (more than can be said for one of his garbled pars). But it was the subject as much as the quality that made the book important:

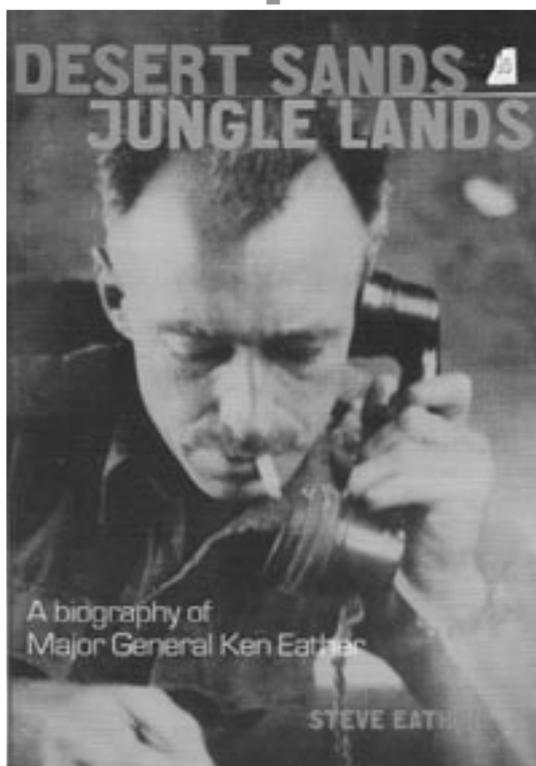
**If Gallipoli were (sic) Australia's baptism of fire as a nation, it has been said, then Kokoda was the confirmation, and the battle that was fought along the mountainous jungle track which bears the name was arguably the most important Australians have fought. It was a victory against appalling odds and a triumph of courage and tenacity by young Australian soldiers which probably saved Australia from invasion.**

Adrian Tame, (*Sunday Herald Sun*, 4 January 2004) focused on Brune's text as story rather than history, focusing on the way the 53rd Battalion was badly treated and committed to the fight while still untrained. But his statement that "by the time they emerged from the hell that was to follow, these boys had become men", is a very generous reading of the unit's performance on the basis of the comprehensive criticism that Brune provides.

Peter Ryan (*Weekend Australian*, 27 December 2003) knew much more about the subject and provided informed praise for Brune's mastery of his material: "it is marvellous what he has packed into this book'. He concluded that the book told an essential element of the Australian story: "Any high school that lacks a copy in its library has ceased to teach Australian history." Perhaps this was a calculated swipe at the state of Australian studies, but is a fair bet that most school libraries are light on for military history.

Peter FitzSimons (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 December 2003) was so impressed that his review actually spent more space on Brune's book than on his own forthcoming work:

**Brune is that rare combination of a great researcher, powerful historian and good writer (his book) brings all these qualities together on the canvas of Australia's greatest war story.**



But others, notably Geoffrey Barker, could not help creating contemporary comparisons with these past campaigns, (*Australian Financial Review*, 15 November 2003). He who spent most of his review of Brune's book describing the wickedness of those unholy allies, Blamey and Macarthur, who did down the Australian field commanders who led the fighting. For Barker, the contemporary lesson was obvious:

**In the present uncertain world, with the American government seeking to nestle beneath the American eagle's enveloping wings. Brune's book is a timely reminder that despite the warmest alliances, nations sometimes have to stand up and save themselves.**

The best review came from a professional, Michael McKernan (*The Age*, 17 January, 2004) who recognised Brune's achievement precisely because he did not try to create a tale of universal Aussie honour:

**The better ending of this story would have been the triumph of the good and the great, the Australians and their inspiring commanders, at home: honoured as heroes, paraded in our cities, admitted into the heart of the Australian myth like their fathers at Gallipoli. Brune cannot end his tale that way because it did not happen. History may yet treat his heroes kindly. If not, it will not be for lack of effort on Brune's part. *A Bastard of a Place* is a triumph of writing and empathy: it may just become an Australian classic.**

Some of the reviewers also had high hopes for FitzSimons' book. Michael McKernan (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 August 2004) hoped it will communicate what Australian values can accomplish to a new audience: "The extraordinary quality of *Kokoda* is its open embrace and celebration of the Australian values that gave these soldiers their victory". For McKernan this is less history than a heroic tale of the tribe of Blokes: "He writes with love and insight; he will move you to tears and then fill you with pride."

Christopher Bantick (*The Age*, 31 July 2004) also played the patriot card praising FitzSimons' description of the *Kokoda* as "Gallipoli for a new generation".

But Red Harrison (*The Weekend Australian*, 24 July 2004) was not charmed by the FitzSimons' style. As far as he was concerned FitzSimons plays far too fast and loose with the facts and gives his readers too much of what he thinks soldiers might have thought

and felt when he has no evidence. Nor did he think much of the writing, "readers should be aware that the cliché cringe factor is unpleasantly large and that some of the writing is sufficiently lurid to qualify for the kind of publications that used to be called penny dreadfuls". Most of all, Harrison did not like the book because it demeaned the campaign it chronicled:

**These criticisms might seem mean, given FitzSimons' enthusiasm for the subject and the obvious intensity of his hero worship, but trivialising history is never to be regarded lightly. *Kokoda* was a campaign fought by great men who showed great heroism and performed great deeds. Their courage can stand alone without meretricious adornment.**

Or as Nicola Wright (*Herald Sun*, 4 September 2004) put it, "In a word: melodramatic."

And so it was. But McKernan has a point; if FitzSimons encourages people to read further, his book will have done no harm and may even bring readers to Brune. In any case, with *Kokoda* and the subsequent campaigns in Papua and New Guinea likely to supersede Gallipoli and the Western Front as the popular patriotic history, we should brace for more of the same.

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## GEORGE BUSH AND THE MEDIA

***There was much more hailing than wailing the chief as the leader writers considered the American presidential poll, writes Stephen Matchett.***

Most of Australia's editors were relaxed and comfortable with the re-election of George W Bush if the editorials are any indication. Most of them suggested President Bush had a clear popular mandate and was now well placed to both prosecute the war on terror while pursuing reforms at home. And there was the inevitable speculation of what it would all mean for us.

Most of the editorials argued the alliance would continue strong, in part due to the friendship

between our Prime Minister and the President. "The two have an understanding forged in both war and commerce over the past four years," *The Mercury* (5 November) wrote.

And demonstrating the accuracy of the aphorism that all politics is local, *The Mercury* managed to get that perennial of Australian politics, interest rates, into its leader on the election outcome:

**Major changes in US economic policy could have a significant effect on Australia. Whenever the US sneezes, Australia catches a cold. That is a prospect many Australians with big mortgages and debt could do without over the next four years.**

*The Australian* (4 November, in a leader by this writer) agreed that being friends with the President would help, but was not so sure it would guarantee us a rails run:

**...while Australia is recognised as a loyal ally in Washington, the Americans are far more important to us than we are to them. As American nit-picking in the negotiations for the free trade agreement demonstrates, the Bush administration is unlikely to do us any special favours.**

There was general agreement that Mr Bush had beaten Democrat Senator John Kerry fair and square, in what was a wartime election. Thus the *Courier Mail* (4 November):

**Senator Kerry campaigned hard after a slow start dominated by his opponents and their supporters. But in the end, Mr Bush was the commander-in-chief at a time when the US is at war and Americans do not vote their president out of office in times of war.**

According to *The Advertiser*, (5 November) it was the war that won him the popular mandate he did not receive in 2000, when his election depended on court awarded victory in Florida:

**The transformation from a president without a mandate or a vision began on September 11, 2001 ... Suddenly, George W Bush had a cause, a focus. He assumed the role of chief of the defence forces, a leader determined to safeguard not only the US, but the civilised world against terrorism, even if much of the world has not supported his action.**

And the leader writers all had ample ideas on what Mr Bush now needed to do. The *Herald Sun* (5 November) was succinct: "The re-elected President must restore an economy running record deficits, as well as moving to rebuild relationships with other countries, including those in Europe."

*The Advertiser* went further:

**The world will be looking for signs of an end to the Iraqi occupation, while oil-rich Iran's refusal to accept international guidelines on nuclear proliferation is a looming problem. Domestically Mr Bush must confront projected budget deficits..., generated in part by Iraq and the war on terror, but also by tax cuts and spending on domestic programs, particularly health care.**

And the policy papers emphasised the same sort of points. In *The Australian*, an Imre Salusinszky leader (5 November) suggested the United States had made a mess of the occupation of Iraq, which had to be fixed fast:

**What should animate any assessment of the mission in Iraq is the clear recognition that the mission remains a just and noble one. Last month the people of Afghanistan, including women, had a historic opportunity to take charge of their own affairs – and they grabbed it. The democratic triumph, for which Mr Bush has received far too little credit, shows what can lie ahead for Iraq.**

The paper came back with more advice for the President on 6 November when another Matchett leader considered circumstances on the American home front and pointed to the President's contradictory tastes for spending more while trying to tax less:

**In his first four years Mr Bush increased discretionary spending by 29 per cent, more than any president since fellow Texan and war-time leader Lyndon Johnson. And nowhere near all of it went to pay for the unavoidable costs of the war on terror.**

But the leader's overall tone was optimistic, suggesting that on the evidence of his first term Mr Bush would be game to have a go at spending big on his preferred policies while reducing government's share of national income: "It is the record of an optimist who believes apparently intractable problems can be solved by enterprise, ingenuity and vast amounts of money."

The *Australian Financial Review* (5 November) adopted a broadly similar stance but, as is the nature of the beast, focused on economic issues: "His presidency risks being overwhelmed unless he tackles America's economic problems with more resolve." The piece pointed to the way President Bush has fought a war without cutting costs to pay for it and while handing out tax breaks to "rich investors". And it warned against the coming cost of supporting America's ageing population and the present problem of the current account deficit, which is running at "an unsustainable 6 per cent of GDP" - "Financial markets initially welcomed Mr Bush's re-election, but will quickly lose patience if he can't meet these challenges."

The free-trade *Fin* proposed a simple solution, easing the pressure on the American current account by pushing harder for a global agreement to cut tariffs. This would require President Bush to move on domestic protectionists in industries from steel to textiles. Easy peasy. And while he was at it, the paper suggested, Mr Bush should also buddy-up to the Europeans and UN.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* (4 November) argued the President's challenges were far more profound than the pursuit of prosperity and peace at home and away. Mr Bush had to earn the trust of the American people. Despite his "authoritative victory" the people were divided:

**Not since the 1970s and an America wearied and humiliated by the Vietnam War had a presidential election been fought on such an ideological divide. ... This was a nation bitterly split not by geography, or haves and have-nots, but by a fierce faith in one's own camp and resolute suspicion or mistrust of the other.**

But despite having become president with a majority of the popular votes, the *Herald* thought it would be much better if Mr Bush governed modestly:

**Power is not a licence to recklessness or bravado. Quite the reverse. Mr Bush's actions and style over the past three years have worried many. But a second term can temper exuberance and bellicosity, just as it did for Ronald Reagan.**

And this humility should be applied abroad. Two days later the *SMH* went back to warn Mr Bush that while he may have domestic support he should not upset his international audience:

**This week America gave Mr Bush a real mandate, a winning margin of millions. ... Mr Bush may also claim popular**

**endorsement for his muscular, go-it-alone view of a world divided between the forces of darkness and light. The real test, however, lies in Mr Bush's ability to differentiate between his clear domestic mandate, and the rather less than enthusiastic embrace of American power across much of the globe.**

And the paper had no confidence that a bellicose Bush could cool crises in the world's hot spots, Baghdad, Tehran and Pyongyang, all by himself:

**For all Mr Bush's thundering first-term rhetoric about despotism and terrorism, these are complex, perilous crises. They are best confronted through broad, international cooperation, bridging the divide between the West and Muslim world. A polarised world is a dangerous place. In his second term, Mr Bush should drop his characteristic clenched fist of defiance and offer the world a handshake and a new start.**

They were suggestions that say a great deal about the *Herald's* take on international affairs. Mr Bush is blamed for foreign policy problems in his first term, when most of the time, notably 9/11 and the refusal of Saddam Hussein to renounce weapons of mass destruction, he was responding to the consequences of the ambitions of others.

Perhaps the *Herald* would prefer the Americans to stay quietly within their own frontiers. The paper certainly seem to prefer presidents who did, quoting Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of isolationism in its 4 November leader. But while the Americans, who are constantly criticised, but still expected to pay for the policing of the world in the campaign against international terror, may find this kind of free advice irritating there is no need to worry about offending them. When people in Washington talk about the *Herald* it's the one published in Miami they mean.

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# GERARD HENDERSON'S MEDIA WATCH

## THE AFR MAGAZINE'S POWER PLUG

Just half a year has passed since what *The Australian Financial Review Magazine* terms "The Panel" met to draw up its "Power 2004" list – which was published in the *AFR Magazine's* August 2004 issue. Last year the "Issues of Power" survey was published in October. The 2004 survey was brought forward to guard against the possibility of an early election. In October 2003, journalist Andrew Clark commenced his assessment of Australian politics with the comment: "Prime Minister John Howard commands all he surveys...this is the consensus of *The AFR Magazine's* Power Panel's review of the political scene seven-and-a-half years into John Howard's prime ministership". Clark overlooked the constraints on the Howard Government's "power" by such institutions as the Senate, the judiciary, the States and so on. But, then, *The AFR Magazine's* power survey is all about power - so there is little point in mentioning that powerful types may not be so powerful.

When The Panel (Chris Anderson, Rod Cameron, Allan Fels, Gary Gray, Bruce Hawker, Margaret Jackson, Carmen Lawrence, Robert Manne, Max Moore-Wilton, Grahame Morris, Sue Nattrass, Helen Nugent, Heather Ridout) met in June 2004, a majority clearly was of the view that John Howard's "power" was in decline. Journalist Julie Macken, who wrote up the "Overt Power" discussion, reported that – in a majority of panelists' view – the Prime Minister's "advantage of incumbency" and "singularly mastery of the agenda" had "largely deserted him" since 2003. This was due to the belief that "Howard was facing his first real challenge in the form of Mark Latham".

Rod Cameron declared: "I have not seen an Opposition leader in 30 years change the agenda as Latham has done." Robert Manne maintained that Howard was being kept in office by, wait for it, Rupert Murdoch: "Just imagine if all the tabloids and *The Australian*, had been given instructions to oppose the war in Iraq. I think Australian politics would be entirely different. If Murdoch turned against Howard, I think Howard would be over". Manne overlooked the fact that all the News Limited tabloids, along with *The Australian*, had urged a "yes" vote in the 1999 referendum on the republic – without any apparent impact. So clearly Rupert Murdoch, and his newspapers, are not as influential as Robert Manne believes. Mr Manne is an academic.

Anyrate, the top three in the 2004 "Overt Power" list were John Howard, Mark Latham and Peter Costello. And what about "Covert Power"? As Julie Macken reported, "the fact that the PM no longer dominated the Overt List meant that his advisers and confidants no longer had the run of the Covert List either". And so it came to pass that (then) Labor backbencher Laurie Brereton came in as Number 3 in the "Covert Power" list. According to Macken, "no one doubted for a second that Latham's advent as Opposition Leader marked a new watershed for Brereton's power". In other words, Brereton had covert power because Latham had overt power. Laurie Brereton announced his resignation as an MP shortly after the panel met. Mark Latham lost the 9 October election. Stand by for some changes in the 2005 "Overt Power" and "Covert Power" listings.

Ditto with "Cultural Power". Greens leader Bob Brown came in as Number 2 on The Panel's "Cultural Power" list and Julian Burnside QC as Number 3. Both men were prominent in campaigning for the Howard Government's defeat on 9 October. Which suggests that their "cultural power" is not as significant as some members of The Panel believe.

Julian Burnside QC (as he is commonly known) had his profile written up in *The AFR Magazine*. Story by Andrew Cornell. Photographs (all six of them and all in colour) by James Davies. JB(QC) told Cornell that he had voted for John Howard in 1996. How is it that so many of the Howard Government's most vocal critics voted for him in 1996? The list is long and includes Robert Manne, Margo Kingston and (now) Julian Burnside QC. JB (QC) also told Cornell that he "stumbled into" the asylum seeker issue in 2001, following the *MV Tampa* incident. He advised Cornell that he had no idea about the plight of asylum seekers before then. In other words, JB (QC) uses ignorance and naivety as a defence for not having criticised mandatory detention when it was introduced by Paul Keating's Labor government in 1994 or when it was continued by the Howard Government after March 1996 up until the *Tampa* incident in August 2001.

JB (QC) did not confine his criticisms of the Howard Government to asylum seekers. He also bagged the Prime Minister over such issues as Australia's commitment in the Second Gulf War and civil liberties. Once again, if JB (QC) has such "cultural power" – how is it that the Howard Government was

re-elected with an increased majority in October 2004?

## ROBERT MANNE'S (EGOTISTICAL) CENTURY

A similar question could be asked with respect to Robert Manne – the winner of the “Society” category in *The Bulletin Microsoft Smart 100* awards. The judging panel of three luvvies (Rhonda Galbally, Jude Munro, Mark Raper) gave the gong to Robert Manne. As reported by Julie-Anne Davies in *The Bulletin* (12 October 2004), *The Bulletin Microsoft Smart 100* panel declared that Manne’s “writings and advocacy have shown us all that ideas and words can be as powerful a force in our community as deeds”. Davies also reported that, according to the judges, Manne reflects “the times we live in”. Maybe. But despite the panel’s assessment, Manne’s advocacy of the asylum seeker cause and his opposition to the involvement of the Australian Defence Force in Iraq has not “acted as a circuit breaker”. Alas, his writings have had scant influence on the administration of asylum seeker policy. What’s more, his opposition to Australia’s role in Iraq has not broken any circuits.

It’s much the same with The Professor’s political advocacy. This time round, Manne predicted that Latham Labor’s Medicare Gold proposal might act as “a kind of *Tampa* in reverse” against the Howard Government and win many votes for Labor in the election (it didn’t). And, once again, Manne urged Australians to vote the Howard Government out of office (they didn’t):

**In the November 2001 election I voted against Howard mainly because of his attitude to reconciliation and his cruelty to refugees. This time, in addition, I will be voting against his Government because of the complicity of the Prime Minister in the invasion of Iraq and the impact of his increasingly authoritarian style of government on Australian public life. (*The Age, SMH, 4 October 2004*).**

According to *The Bulletin’s* panel, Manne reflects “the times we live in”. It’s just that a majority of Australians do not reflect The Professor’s views. How about that?

And so it came to pass that, yet again, Robert Manne felt the need to write about the development of his political ideas. This time for the *Good Weekend* (13 November 2004). The article made use of the pronoun “I” on no fewer than 112 occasions. There were also some 42 uses of the words “my”, “me” and “myself”. All this is a 4500 word long article. The Professor even managed to use the word “I” on three occasions in his final two sentences (consisting of just 25 words). Well done.

Yet, in an article based solely on the self, Robert Manne omitted many of his policy changes over the years (they are documented in *The Sydney Institute Quarterly*, December 1999, pages 16-18). For example, over the past two decades Manne has held contradictory positions on such issues as the republic, economic reform, multiculturalism, Asian immigration and, of course, Vietnam. Manne referred to Vietnam in his *Good Weekend* article when discussing his 1985 essay on the pro-communist Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett:

**When I recently re-read my [Burchett] essay I found in it only one seriously discordant note. No one reading the essay would have known that I had once been opposed to the American side in the Vietnam War and that, even in 1985, the war still seemed to be, on balance, a grave mistake, if not a crime.**

Hang on a minute. Here is Robert Manne declaring in November 2004 that – as recently as 1985 – the Vietnam War “still seemed” to him to be “on balance, a grave mistake, if not a crime” This is the very same Robert Manne who, in August 1981, addressed a *Quadrant* seminar held at the Australian National University in Canberra. His paper, titled “Foreign Policy after Vietnam”, was subsequently published in the March 1982 issue of *Quadrant*. A reading of Robert Manne’s 1981 speech reveals that – contrary to his subsequent self-revisionism – in the early 1980s he did *not* regard the Allied commitment in Vietnam as either a “grave mistake” or a “crime”. Quite the opposite. In fact, in 1981 Manne explicitly *opposed* the left-wing interpretation of the Vietnam War as a grave mistake/crime both in his address and during the follow-up question/discussion period. In fact he was criticised from the floor by former Labor senator John Wheeldon for supporting Australia’s Vietnam commitment. The concluding paragraph of Manne’s 1981 speech gives a flavour of his argument :

**If the Vietnam question were to be honestly raised I have no doubt that wounds which are extremely painful to the Right would be reopened, but I also suspect that much of the left-wing mythology concerning the war, which now goes virtually unchallenged, would be ultimately forced into retreat. In particular I believe it would eventually become clear that in 1975 the Vietnamese people were not liberated from foreign aggression, but rather subjugated to a Stalinist regime, from which an enormous number of Vietnamese have already, and will in the future, risk their lives in order to escape... However misguided the Vietnam war**

**appears in retrospect I cannot bring myself to submit to a revised version of history in which ultimately thoughts, such as mine concerning the totalitarianism of “post liberation” Vietnam, have been culturally censored.**

So there you have it. In 2004 Robert Manne maintains that in 1985 he regarded the Vietnam War as a grave mistake/crime. But in 1981 Manne argued that Vietnam had not been liberated in 1975 but rather “subjugated to a Stalinist regime”. In this (1981) speech he made no criticism whatsoever of the Allied commitment in Vietnam – except to maintain that it was based, unrealistically, on “moral enthusiasm”. So, how to explain Robert Manne’s position on Vietnam? Easy, really. As a student he opposed the Allied commitment in Vietnam. Later on he supported it. Then he opposed it again. And now he seems to support it. Clear, eh?

## **ALAN RAMSEY AS AN OCCASIONAL BLEEDING-HEART**

While on the subject of self-revisionism, consider the case of Alan Ramsey. In his *Sydney Morning Herald* column on the morning of the Federal election (9 October 2004), Ramsey quoted – in agreement – from a Michael Leunig cartoon which had been printed in *The Age* the previous day. The Leunig cartoon – which Ramsey claimed “succinctly” summed up the choice facing the Australian electorate – consisted of two quotations viz:

**It was truly said by one of my predecessors that you change the government and you change the nation and so it will be that if government changes on Saturday, the nation will change.**

John Howard  
Oct 7, 2004

**It was truly said by one of my predecessors that you divide the people, exploit their fears, lie to them continuously, commit them to an illegal, immoral war, treat refugees horribly and you change the nation and so it will be that if government changes on Saturday, the nation will change.**

John Citizen  
Oct 7, 2004

Fancy that. On the eve of the October 2004 election, here is Alan Ramsey supporting Michael Leunig’s criticisms of John Howard on a host of issues – including the treatment of “refugees”. Yet the record reveals that the refugee issue was the *only* matter on which Ramsey had supported the Howard Government over the previous three years. He had even backed the Howard Government’s position on

the children overboard issue – i.e. the claim that some asylum seekers had thrown their children from small boats into the sea in 2001.

Remember? On 16 February 2002, Ramsey referred dismissively to “boat people and their attempts to manipulate their way into this country by whatever means possible, including ramping up the media”. And, on 30 March 2002, he described Labor’s attempt to find fault with the Howard Government concerning the children overboard affair as a “futile political pursuit”.

## **THE WELL-HEELED ACHILLES**

Not all members of the Canberra Parliamentary Press Gallery believed that the Labor Party’s ongoing attack on John Howard over the children overboard issue was futile. As the ABC TV 7.30 *Report* presenter Michael Brissenden put it on 16 August 2004:

**So who do we believe? The Prime Minister says the two men only talked about the video [concerning the children overboard issue]. He’s asking us to believe him. But is that the end of the matter? Well, that’s unlikely. The political reality is that, whether he’s right or not, truth has now become this Prime Minister’s biggest political Achilles heel.**

Interesting comment, to be sure. But what does it mean? How many Achilles heels can a person have at any one time? And, if a person is limited to two heels, how can there be such an entity as a “biggest Achilles heel”? For a definition of “Achilles heel” – see *The Methuen Dictionary of Clichés*. Where else?

## **DAVID FLINT AS GOUGH ADMIRER**

Still, Michael Brissenden is not the only one into clichés, big time. Remember David (“My father’s from Tasmania; my mother’s from Batavia”) Flint? Well, in case the answer is in the negative, he was the chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Authority at the time when he wrote *The Twilight of the Elites* (2003). The use of the term “elites”-as-cliché entails that those who disagree with you are part of an elite whereas those who agree with you are not – irrespective of their wealth, social standing or educational background.

Take David (“call me Professor”) Flint, for example. He was educated at Sydney University, the University of London and the Univerite de Droit, de l’Economie des Sciences Sociales de Paris, became a professor of law at the University of Technology, Sydney and was appointed by the Howard Government as ABA chairman – a high salaried, taxpayer funded, position.

Yet according to *The Twilight of the Elites*, your man Flint is not part of the elite. Yet a librarian on a modest wage, who disagrees with Flint on some social issues and who enjoys no government appointments, is a member of the elite. Convenient.

In the event, Professor Flint saw the need to step down from his position as ABA chairman. The problem was that he had made so many public comments on so many public issues that he was unable to consider many matters that were brought before the ABA. Including matters relating to (i) broadcaster Alan Jones, (ii) broadcaster John Laws, (iii) Radio 2GB, (iv) Radio 2UE and (v) the ABC. That's about it.

Shortly after stepping down from the ABA, Flint agreed to be interviewed by Jane Cadzow for the revealing profile which appeared in the *Good Weekend* on 3 July 2004. The highlight of the profile was David Flint's confirmation that he joined the Labor Party (and all its elitists) in 1975 – on account of the fact that he supported the then ALP prime minister Gough Whitlam and opposed his dismissal by the Governor-General Sir John Kerr on 11 November 1975. As Flint told Cadzow: "I liked Whitlam. I think I was attracted to him because he was so polished. I still am." However, some time later, Flint resigned from the Labor Party and became a Liberal Party member. And he now believes that Kerr acted correctly in dismissing Whitlam. The explanation? Well, as Flint told Cadzow, his change in political position is part of "the normal progress" of moving from left to right. Interesting. Yet such Liberal Party luminaries as the late Robert Menzies and John Howard never felt the need to engage in such political progress – normal or abnormal.

## DAVID BARNETT – DUFFLE COATED FOR GOUGH

David Flint did not say whether or not he voted for Gough Whitlam in December 1972 – when the Whitlam Government came to office – but, presumably, he supported Labor's "polished" leader at the time. However, (nowadays) fellow conservative David Barnett OBE is up front about being part of the pro-Whitlam "It's time" set in 1972. Barnett told Jennifer Byrne (*The Bulletin*, 31 August 2004) that he was bedazzled by Gough Whitlam in 1972. Then, less than three years later, he became media adviser to Liberal leader Malcolm Fraser. Byrne also reported that Barnett was married to his first wife Maureen for 32 years. His former wife did not agree – maintaining that the marriage lasted for "only 24 years". Well, perhaps it seemed longer.

Maureen Hickman told *The Bulletin's* Letters Page that reading Jennifer Byrne's interview with her former husband had her "choking" on her "Weeties". She looked back in whimsy at a time when your man Barnett was a duffle-coated leftie:

**When we married in 1957, what struck me about him was his high tolerance of other opinions and of people who were different from him. David had been the proverbial left-wing groupie; duffle coat, beard and a copy of *To the Finland Station* under his arm. And he wouldn't have been the first to discover that "girls lie down for the left" (as they used to say). But let me put the record straight: we were married for only 24 years, not 32 – give me a break! (*The Bulletin*, 14 September 2004).**

Enough said.

## OH! – MICHAEL DUFFY – OH!

Another recipient of "Lunch with Jennifer Byrne" gig was Michael Duffy. He, too, spoke to Ms Byrne about his leftist past (*The Bulletin*, 15 June 2004). Duffy told Byrne that his parents were supporters of the late B.A. Santamaria and the anti-communist Democratic Labor Party. He reacted by joining an anarchist group and running a bookshop. How about that? Does anyone really care? And so on.

Michael Duffy has been much in the news of late following his appointment to the position of presenter on the new ABC Radio National program *Counterpoint*. ABC Radio National manager Mark Collier was reported as declaring that *Counterpoint* was designed to balance the views of Phillip Adams. In short, Duffy became the embodiment of the much sought after "right-wing Phillip Adams" personality to counter the very left-wing Phillip Adams. Duffy told Byrne that he is not really a conservative: "I'm not a monarchist, I'm not opposed to homosexuality, I believe drugs should be legalised". John Howard, are you listening?

Michael Duffy seems to have moderated his views on the ABC now that he is on Aunty's pay-roll. Once upon a time Duffy favoured the virtual privatisation of the public broadcaster. In 1999 he questioned whether "we really need a government-subsidised Australian Broadcasting Corporation" and asked: "Why should the taxpayers subsidise our middle class's desire to watch television without commercials" (*Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 1999). Later he declared that "90 per cent of the ABC is about...subsidising middle-class light entertainment" (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 June 2000). Later still he described "much" of the ABC as "a dinosaur that has managed to escape extinction" (*Daily Telegraph*, 3 November 2001).

But now Michael Duffy reckons the public broadcaster is okay. He told Byrne that he respects the ABC "a lot more now" that he is "working there". How surprising. So how is Duffy doing on Aunty? Here's a sample:

• **26 July 2004.** MD devotes his *Counterpoint* program to a discussion of (female) orgasm with Bettina Arndt, who is described as a “sex commentator”. The program is surprisingly titled: “Wedge Watch: Politics of the Orgasm”. It follows Ms Arndt’s article in *The Bulletin* (20 July 2004) titled “The Politics of Oh!”. *The Bulletin* sub-title makes the message clear: “The vagina is making a comeback: Social commentator Bettina Arndt reports on how science is re-defining the female orgasm”. Wow – or rather, oh! – with a capital OH!

BA tells MD that she has “lived through an era when clitoromania was rife and it was ‘not done’ at all to talk about the vagina”. She is “very pleased to see that there’s some new research now suggesting that the vagina is due for a comeback”. BA does not say where the vagina is coming back from – and MD does not ask. Phew. MD asks BA to define “clitoromania”. She responds: “Well clitoromania – just the notion that the clitoris is king – I suppose we should say the clitoris is queen...”. Well, thanks for that.

And so it went on and on. When the topic moved to men, MD responded: “I think there’s an entirely new program in this, Bettina”. OH! NO!

• **1 August 2004.** Michael Duffy appears on the ABC TV arts program *Critical Mass* (sometimes referred to as “Critical Mess”). He is part of a panel of three – along with leftist Radio National presenter Stephen Crittenden and leftist La Trobe University academic Leela Gandhi – whose tasks include reviewing American leftist Michael Moore’s film *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Presumably Duffy is expected to provide some “right wing” balance. Crittenden gives the film 5 out of 5. He supports Moore’s attack on George W. Bush’s administration – which Crittenden describes as “one of the worst bunches of lying carpetbaggers there’s ever been”. That’s all. Gandhi also supports Moore’s criticism of Bush; she gives the film 3 out of 5. Duffy has a few criticisms of the film – but not many. He gives it 4 out of 5. This from the ABC’s so-called “right-wing Phillip Adams”.

• **27 September.** *Counterpoint* devotes a program to the late B.A. Santamaria (1915-1998) titled “The Power of Bob Santamaria”. He is described as the “brilliant but bitter man behind the Labor Party split in 1954”. This overlooks the fact that it was the then Labor leader Bert Evatt who was primarily responsible for the split in the Labor Party which took place between 1955 and 1957. MD did not provide any evidence that Santamaria was “bitter” circa 1954 – or how this could have affected the Labor Party (of which he was not a member).

MD announces that he has invited two historians on to the program to discuss matters Santamaria – namely Fr Bruce Duncan and Michael Hogan. MD

did not mention that both Duncan and Hogan are known critics of Santamaria. Which suggests that *Counterpoint* is much like many other Radio National programs – where what passes for “debate” is frequently mutual agreement, from a leftist perspective.

## JAPFELLAS MOVE DOWN (ALLEGEDLY)

Mutual agreement seems all the rage at the moment. Remember the breakthrough in Australian historical studies which occurred in Germaine (“call me Professor”) Greer’s *Quarterly Essay* (Issue 11, 2003) entitled *Whitefella Jump Up?* Here Professor Greer revealed that “the Japanese invaded the Northern Territory” during World War II (see page 75). Well, this “fact” is repeated in the book *Whitefella Jump Up* (Allen & Unwin, 2004) – see page 124. So it must be true. Previous reportage of the Pacific War and Australia had the Japanese air force and navy attacking Australia but had not recorded any land invasion. Now you know.

What’s more, the ABC’s in-house historian Michael Cathcart has stepped forward to support Professor Greer’s the-Japanese-invaded-Australia thesis. Really. Interviewed by Tanya Nolan (ABC Radio AM program, 28 August 2004) about Frank Macfarlane Burnet’s involvement in biological weapons research after World War II, Cathcart commented:

**Well, after the Second World War, there were extensive programs in the United Kingdom to develop chemical and biological weapons. And the Australian Defence Department decided that it had to get involved as well, because, of course, we had just come out of the Second World War. We’d been invaded by the Japanese, and the chance of another onslaught from Asia was very real. And Macfarlane Burnet was our top man in the field and he was enthusiastic, I think you could say, about the potential of biological weapons for keeping the Asiatic hordes, as he saw them, at bay.**

Michael Cathcart’s *Rewind* history series program on ABC TV has just been cancelled. Pity, really. For viewers would have been interested in hearing from Greer and/or Cathcart precisely where the Japanese Army went when it “invaded” Australia six decades ago.

## MALCOLM’S PENDULUM – AN UPDATE

Unlike Professor Greer and Dr Cathcart, Malcolm Mackerras does not tend to make errors about the

past. Rather, his howlers are of the futuristic kind. As a psephologist, no less, Mackerras specialises in making predictions about election winners and losers. His forecasts are invariably super confident – and frequently wrong. But not this time round – not with respect to Australia, at least.

In August 2004 a strange thing happened with a Mackerras prediction – he made a forecast which turned out to be correct, or almost correct. Writing in the *Australian Financial Review* on 30 August 2004, Mackerras predicted that the Coalition could improve its position in the Senate following the forthcoming election. Mackerras claimed that the Coalition could end up with 38 seats in the Senate after 1 July 2005, only one vote away from an absolute majority in its own right. In fact, unexpectedly, the Coalition ended up with 39 Senate places. Still, it must be acknowledged that Malcolm Mackerras was very close.

Certainly Mackerras diminished the gravitas of the Senate prediction by making the following comment on the House of Representative outcome: “I confidently predict that there will be a response and that the result will lie somewhere between a landslide to Howard and a landslide to Latham”. Not pretty. Yet MM did think that the former result was more likely than the latter. So at least he got the outcome correct.

Mackerras should have quit while he was in front. But he had another look at his crystal ball and slightly modified his Senate forecast – now maintaining that “the Coalition is likely to have 37 seats in the Upper House next July but it could have 38 (*AFR* 5 October 2004). Not bad, really. MM also predicted the result in the House of Representatives – Coalition 79 (it got 87), Labor 68 (it got 60) and Independents 3 (correct). Again, quite an acceptable outcome. Then, alas, MM turned his attention to the United States presidential election. *The Australian* ran the analysis under the heading: “Pendulum swings to Kerry landslide” (*The Australian*, 1 November 2004). MM produced what he termed the “Mackerras US Pendulum” – it was not good news for George W. Bush.

MM viewed the Mackerras US Pendulum and declared a “landslide certainty” – for the Democratic Party challenger John Kerry. Subsequently, MM defended his addiction to predictions based on pendulums in a letter to *The Weekend Australian* (6-7 November 2004). He said that he had only been wrong with respect to four states – Florida, Ohio, Nevada and New Mexico – overlooking the central fact that these were, after all, the crucial swing states. That’s all. MM continued:

**The article...was a valuable addition to the historical record. I shall certainly continue to publish pendulums and predictions for as long as they are thought worth publishing.**

Go to it Malcolm Mackerras. *Media Watch* will continue to follow your (overwhelmingly false) prophecies. Along with those of The (False) Prophet Bob Ellis.

## DAMP DREAMS OF A RANCID BORE

The publication of the most recent Bob Ellis tome – *Night Thoughts In Time Of War* (Viking, 2004) – gave The (False) Prophet Ellis a chance to engage in some crystal-ball gazing. Interviewed by Jon Faine on “The Conversation Hour” on ABC Radio 774 on 12 August 2004, Ellis predicted that the Australian Federal election would be held on 23 October (wrong) and that it would result in “a narrow Labor win” (wrong). He described Mark Latham as “the ordinary suburban man” and indicated that this would have electoral appeal. Ellis then directed his crystal ball towards North America and confidently declared that John Kerry would defeat George W. Bush “by a surprising landslide” (wrong again).

Then on 19 September 2004, Ellis was interviewed by Michael Willesee for the Sky News *Viewpoint* program. He again predicted that the Howard Government would be “narrowly beaten.” and that the Bush administration would “be beaten by a landslide”. Clearly, The False Prophet’s crystal ball remains out of focus. He maintains that a Coalition victory would mean that “we won’t have a university system and we won’t have an ABC and we won’t have reasonable hope for our children to get jobs that they might keep”. In other words, if the Howard Government were to win, “we don’t have much chance for civilisation” – indeed it would be the end of democracy as we knew it. That’s all.

In a surge of self-hatred, Ellis declared: “We have seen the enemy and he is us”. Later he told Willesee that he was feeling “underused and rancid and elderly and fist-shaking” and that his latest book had “derived partly from my insomnia” and as a result of his “thinking about life and death” in “those tender dark hours” between 3 am and 6 am and conceded: “I’m getting angrier.” As if the reader could not work this out. In conclusion, Ellis told Willesee: “I seem to be writing a screenplay of George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* about the American [sic] Civil War”. This should be, er, challenging.

*Night Thoughts In Time Of War* is a rancid ramble by a death-obsessed, angry, insomniac. All this held together by such Ellis favourite terms as “And so it goes” and “Discuss”. Here are some – slightly embellished – highlights. As the author, would say – “as you do”. We live, after all, in post-modernist times. In the words of another Ellisism: “Prove that I lie”.

- **Friday, 11th April 2003.** I wake up with the usual symptoms and go downstairs. I can’t sleep and George W. Bush is a complete bastard and so is John Howard and so is Tony Blair. Fall asleep, wake up, surprised to be alive. I will live for another day and another note-book entry. And so it goes.

• **Saturday, 3rd May 2003, 4.10 am.** I have seldom scarcely ever felt worse in body or spirit and must see the doctor soon for more tests. Death is stalking me. It's all the fault of Bush/Howard. Discuss. It's also very early but not early enough to stop me dropping names in this note-book. This morning I will mention my Sydney Harbour yacht trip with Bob Carr and Sir Donald Sinden and Ian Richardson and Derek Jacobi and Janet Suzman. And so it goes, and so it goes and soon is gone.

• **Friday, 9th May 2003, 4.20 am.** I sleep in. Discuss. A bad night. Up and pacing, then writing, fearful I won't survive to drop more names in this note-book. Mortgage not paid. And Gerard Henderson still insistent that I pay up the remaining \$750 – the result of a rash bet on the 2001 election. We live in fascist times. Discuss. Bankers and debt collectors are fascist. Discuss. [These last few sentences are a very much embellished extract from the Bob Ellis stream-of-unconsciousness mode. Editor].

• **Sunday, 10th August 2003.** A bright chill Sunday, greying into dim rain. Just like my life. I imagine a car bomb in the Harbour Tunnel. And so it goes-off. What to do? Just find a terrorist, any terrorist. Then ask what he wants and give it to him. All of it. Or give him the fraction that he, and we, will settle for. How pleasant it would be to give unto al Qaeda what Osama bin Laden wants. And how quiet the planet would then become. Oh yes, Howard's a real bastard. In Graham Freudenberg's wonderful phrase, he shrinks to the occasion. Discuss.

• **Friday, 15th August 2003.** Howard in much trouble over ethanol. He may be losing his mind. And so it went.

• **October 2002.** These night thoughts, written during the day, are from last year's note-book. No particular time or date. Discuss. I wrote a speech for John Howard (not the little creep, the actor). This will not be attributed to me. So here it is so that I may receive full recognition for my brilliant thoughts. This is what John Howard (meaning me) said last year in Hobart and at considerable length. And so it went (last October).

• **Saturday, 6th September 2003.** The mouldy cockatoo is back. So am I. Woken at 10.40 am – with advice that Bob Carr may go to Canberra, leaving me without employment. My mouth went dry, the floor became quicksand beneath me, I saw myself jobless, houseless, futureless, fucked and old, begging with a tin cup in Hyde Park. On second thoughts, this is a bit like my present life. Not too bad really. Prove that I lie.

• **Friday, 12th September 2003.** I recall, not that it matters but I thought I would mention it all the same, standing near Yasser Arafat in Bethlehem's

Nativity Church on Christmas Eve of '99. He is a good man who is not corrupt. Really. I and Mike Rann had not turned up for a meal with him the night before because our Israeli hosts, lying, told us the dinner was cancelled. Arafat waited for an hour in the restaurant, then went away. If my readers will believe this, then will believe anything. Discuss.

• **Monday, 15th September 2003, 12.35 am.** Strange that my famous phrase "The True Believers", which I used in my *The True Believers* screenplay in 1988, was actually coined by Mohammed fifteen hundred years ago. Plagiarism is not a new phenomenon. Discuss. Strange also that the term "The True Believer" is the title of a book on ideology written by Eric Hoffer in 1951 (when I was just nine years old) Can it be my phrase, after all? Discuss. On second thoughts, don't.

• **Friday, 3rd October 2003.** Dinner with an old girl friend of Mike who was a girlfriend of an old girlfriend of mine. And we talked of spermlines and old lost loves (two spermlines, we found, led both Mike and me to Hitler). Prove that I lie.

• **Sunday, 5th October 2003.** In my play on Ben Chifley, I describe the anti-communist Bob Santamaria as a "prattling celibate". Quite an achievement for a father of eight children. Discuss.

• **Thursday, 18th December 2003.** Saddam Hussein is a good man, I'm told. Unlike Bush or Howard or Blair. And so it goes.

• **Wednesday, 24th December 2003.** Fascism. It's all fascism. Especially Christofascism. At least Islamofascists don't believe in interest rates and don't collect mortgage payments. Discuss.

• **Friday, 23rd January 2004.** Crashes of thunder, vast sheets of lightning and spatters of hail. Am thinking of history, as you do, as I await the arrival of the Dread Lord. Chamberlain started World War II. Truman started the war on Korea. Asquith started World War II. It's all our fault. Bush can't win or Howard or Tony Blair. Bright stars over Pittwater. And so it goes.

• **Wednesday, 28th April 2004, 3 pm.** Mark Latham is a winner. A man so convinced of his destiny, and so luckily placed in history, that he will prevail. A man who, if I can, I should make peace with and get a job with and write speeches for which I can boast about later even if only in *The Northern Rivers Echo*. And so things change. Sometimes.

• **Tuesday, 24th May 2004, 5.30 pm.** The Angel of Death has not called but the publisher has in search of a rambling, rancid manuscript. A good day to end a book on, or to die. I choose first option. Discuss. And so it goes.

