

# THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE ANNUAL DINNER LECTURE

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## Function co-hosted with the Sydney Writers' Festival

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- SPEAKER** YASMINA KHADRA (Algerian army officer turned author, most recently, *Swallows of Kabul*)  
**TOPIC:** *From Army Officer to Writer of Fiction*  
**DATE:** Tuesday 24 May 2005 **\*\*Bookings from 10 May only\*\*** **TIME:** 6 pm for 6.30 pm  
**VENUE:** Dixson Room, State Library of NSW, Macquarie Street, Sydney **(note time)**
- 
- SPEAKER** PROF MARYANNE CONFOY RSC (Professor of Practical Theology, Jesuit Theological College, and author, *Morris West Literary Maverick* [John Wiley])  
**TOPIC:** *Remembering Morris West*  
**DATE:** Wednesday 25 May 2005 **\*\*Bookings from 11 May only\*\*** **TIME:** 5.30 pm for 6 pm  
**VENUE:** 41 Philip Street, Sydney 2000 **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**
- 
- SPEAKER** BILL SHORTEN (National Secretary, Australian Worker's Union)  
**TOPIC:** *to be advised*  
**DATE:** Monday 6 June 2005 **\*\*Bookings from 16 May only\*\*** **TIME:** 5.30 pm for 6 pm  
**VENUE:** Mallesons Conference Room, Level 60, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney
- 
- SPEAKER** GERALDINE DOOGUE AO (ABC TV presenter, Saturday Breakfast) & DR SAMINA YASMEEN (Senior lecturer, University Western Australia; co-author *Islam and The West – Reflections from Australia*, UNSW PRESS)  
**TOPIC:** *Islam and the West*  
**DATE:** Wednesday 15 June 2005 **\*\*Bookings from 1 June only\*\*** **TIME:** 5.30 pm for 6 pm  
**VENUE:** BT Training Room (Room 401), Level 4, Chifley Tower, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney
- 
- SPEAKER** DR KEN HENRY (Secretary to the Treasury, Department of Treasury)  
**TOPIC:** *to be advised*  
**DATE:** Monday 20 June 2005 **\*\*Bookings from 6 June only\*\*** **TIME:** 5.30 pm for 6 pm  
**VENUE:** BT Training Room (Room 401), Level 4, Chifley Tower, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney
- 
- SPEAKER** JUNG CHANG (author, *Mao: The Unknown Story* [Random])  
**TOPIC:** *Writing About Mao*  
**DATE:** Thursday 21 July 2005 **\*\*Bookings from 7 July only\*\*** **TIME:** 5.30 pm for 6 pm  
**VENUE:** BT Training Room (Room 401), Level 4, Chifley Tower, 2 Chifley Square, Sydney
- 
- SPEAKER** DR EILEEN PITTAWAY (Centre for Refugee Research UNSW) & LINDA BARTOLOMEI (Lecturer, School of Social Work; Research Associate, Centre for Refugee Research UNSW)  
**TOPIC:** *Refugees and the UN*  
**DATE:** Tuesday 26 July 2005 **\*\*Bookings from 12 July only \*\*** **TIME:** 5.30 pm for 6 pm  
**VENUE:** 41 Phillip Street, Sydney **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**

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THE

# Sydney Institute

## QUARTERLY



*ISSUE 25, VOL. 9  
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**GEOFFREY LUCK**  
on the Whitlam  
Government's  
First Year

**JOHN HOWARD,**  
the ABC and God

**ANNE HENDERSON**  
on why Japan and  
Australia have never  
been closer

**STEPHEN MATCHETT**  
on the Latest Stories  
of Australia

Reporting on the  
Pope's death

**JOHN MCCONNELL**  
reviews the 2004  
Election and Prime  
Ministerial Speeches

**MEDIA WATCH** tackles  
Mungo MacCallum,  
Michael Duffy, Craig  
McGregor, Alan Ramsey  
(again), Germaine  
Greer, Rachel Griffiths  
and Phillip Adams  
(yet again)

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*with Gerard Henderson's*

# *MEDIA WATCH*

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## MR HADLEY AND MS JACKSON

Sydney Radio 2GB shock-jock Ray Hadley became a national figure – for a while, at least – following his live interview with Foreign Minister Alexander Downer. On 12 April 2005, in an interview about whether his Department had issued adequate advice about sexual assault on young children in some Bali hotels, Mr Hadley lost it. The 2GB morning presenter roared at the Foreign Minister – accusing him of being a “pompous dope” (the phrase was repeated) and maintaining that he was “disgraceful” and “a disgrace”.

The Hadley outburst has been widely reported in the print media and extracts of the interview have been played on radio and television. Ray Hadley's outburst was quite unprofessional – but it will probably not do his career any harm. Shock jocks like Mr Hadley thrive on aggression induced publicity. Commenting on the controversy on the *PM* program, presenter Mark Colvin wondered what would be the reaction of the Howard Government if one of its Cabinet ministers had received such a treatment on the ABC. Mr Colvin overlooked the fact that the Ray Hadley-Alexander Downer interview was the most aggressive interview in Australia between a media personality and a senior politician – since Liz Jackson interviewed John Howard on *Four Corners*, the ABC TV flagship current affairs program, on 28 February 2002.

The interview took place on the aftermath of the 2001 Federal election in which the issue of asylum seekers was an issue in the campaign. It was by no means the dominant issue, although many a journalist wanted to think otherwise. The myth soon spread that – without asylum seekers and all that – Labor would have defeated the Coalition. This formed the backdrop of the Jackson/Howard interview. It was conducted on a live-to-tape basis with an agreement that neither the questions nor the answers would be altered subsequently. Liz Jackson entered the interview room in an obviously agitated state. So much so that she made two factual howlers in her first question. They were small errors but indicated that the normally exact Liz Jackson was off-key. This soon became obvious with her aggression, interruptions and evident sarcasm. It was a dreadful interview which put the Prime Minister on the defensive. In such a situation he is unlikely to say something which he does not want to say. And so it proved to be.

Liz Jackson's 2002 interview with John Howard was one of the most aggressive exchanges between a journalist and a political leader in Australia. It stands in stark contrast with Ms Jackson's final *Four Corners* interview (15 February 2005) – with Dr Rod Barton, who is critical of the Howard Government's handling of WMD with respect to Iraq. That was one of the softest interviews in Australian media history. Now Liz Jackson is the new presenter of the ABC TV *Media Watch* program in which she sits in judgement on journalists, editors, producers and presenters (like Ray Hadley). In her inaugural program, Liz Jackson opined that it was “about time” *Media Watch* had a female host. Fair enough. But it is also about time that it had a presenter who was not on the left of the political debate in Australia. There has been a certain sameness in the views of *Media Watch* presenters – Stuart Littlemore, Richard Ackland, Paul Barry, David Marr and (now) Liz Jackson. Why not try a political conservative sometime? – other than Mr Hadley, of course.

# AUSTRALIA AND JAPAN – MORE IN COMMON THAN WE THINK

Anne Henderson

One of the most enduring and remarkable relationships to have emerged in the wake of the Pacific War of 1941-45 has been that between Australia and Japan. Set in place in 1957 by the signing of the Australia-Japan Agreement on Commerce, it led to Japan becoming Australia's largest export market for over four decades, a reality that continues in 2005. In 1976, the 1957 Commerce Agreement was further developed by the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, or Nara Agreement.

Despite all that, by the end of the twentieth century, the healthy Australia-Japan trade figures belied a feeling that the relationship between Japan and Australia had become tired, a little static and in need of rejuvenation.

What's more, the relationship, based as it has always been on the deliberations of traders, academics and government officials, has often lacked the grass roots support of that between Australia and nations where there have been more informal links, such as the nations where large numbers of immigrants have resettled in Australia - like Vietnam or Italy, even China. And yet, there are many reasons why Australia and Japan should celebrate their grass roots connectedness, not least of all our shared open and developed cultures in a free market environment.

So it was with a new twist that Prime Minister John Howard, in his address to the Lowy Institute, 31 March 2005, threw the spotlight onto the Japan-Australia relationship by defining it in terms of the political character and security interests of the "three great Pacific democracies".

In the Prime Minister's words, "Today, the three great Pacific democracies – the United States, Japan and Australia – are working more closely than ever

on shared security challenges – especially terrorism and weapons proliferation. Our Trilateral Security Dialogue has added a new dimension to the value all sides place on alliance relationships. ... This quiet revolution in Japan's external policy – one which Australia has long encouraged – is a welcome sign of a more confident Japan assuming its rightful place in the world and in our region."

## BEYOND A TRADE RELATIONSHIP

The words of the Prime Minister described a relaxed maturity in the Japan-Australian relationship that has been a reality for some time. The strong trading relationship between Japan and Australia, begun out of pragmatism about markets and in the shadow of the Second World War, for decades has been much more. Linked by common experiences as strong market economies with stable governments and high standards of living, Australia and Japan have long been regional partners in many fields – economic, political, cultural and now security.

With the war on terrorism and the formation of the Coalition of the Willing, Australia and Japan both supported the US led Coalition forces in Iraq from the outset. In 2005, Australia's decision to deploy an additional 450 Australian troops to Iraq came after a request from British Prime Minister Tony Blair for Australian personnel to replace Dutch forces protecting Japanese personnel in Samawah, where they are engaged in building and repairing infrastructure and only allowed, under Japan's post World War II constitution, to initiate military action if fired upon. There was also a request for Australian troops from Japan.

The Australia-Japan relationship, in the words of Prime Minister John Howard, "continues to evolve in new directions off the back of our long and mutually beneficial relationship". Clearly, while trade is of utmost importance in the relationship, and Japan remains Australia's major trading partner, the Prime Minister has chosen now to emphasise that such a long term partnership, set around common security and economic interests, goes far deeper. It has in fact reached a new stage where its complementarities over decades define it as a regional force to be reckoned with. And, linked across the Pacific with the United States, at the heart of the Prime Minister's vision is our connection as great democracies.

It is just five years since John Howard and the late Prime Minister Obuchi initiated the Australia-Japan Conference project. This was started out of a belief that the two countries were tending to take their relationship for granted. Long time Japan scholar, Professor Peter Drysdale, in his keynote presentation at the thirteenth Biennial Conference of the Japanese

Studies Association in July 2003, described the Australian-Japan relationship in the 1990s as one marked by “neglect: Prime Ministerial visits cut short; Ministerial Meetings that do not meet; absence of diplomatic focus; retreat from commercial initiative”.

And all this against a backdrop of the newly emerging trade power of China with predictions that, by 2015, China’s economy would overtake Germany to become the third largest world economy behind the United States and Japan. Today, as discussion on the idea of a Free Trade Agreement between Australia and China grabs the headlines, it can be forgotten that discussions over the possibility of an FTA with Japan have been conducted for some years with minimal debate.

## **FRUITS OF THE CONFERENCE PROCESS**

In February 2005, Australia’s Minister for Trade, Mark Vaile, opened the Third Australia-Japan Conference and spoke of the many new initiatives that had sprung from the conference process. In July 2003, the prime ministers of Australia and Japan signed a Trade and Economic Framework designed to reinvigorate the economic and trade relationship. But, significantly also, Minister Vaile spoke of using “a closer trade and economic relationship to bolster our strengthening political and strategic ties”.

Australia’s trade with China has grown rapidly in the past decade and Australia recognises that China is quickly becoming a dominant player globally as well as regionally. Since 1996, Australia’s trade with China has trebled. Today it is our third largest trading partner. But simultaneously, alongside that newly emerging trade relationship, older partners like Japan have emerged in a stronger position as friends. In the past five years, the Australia-Japan relationship has clearly been refocused and emphasised in new ways. And the feeling is mutual.

Like Australia, and with a sense of the strategic importance of Japan’s alliance with the United States, the Japanese government has stood firmly in support of the United States action in Iraq. In spite of strong opposition from the public in Japan, Prime Minister Koizumi told reporters in the lead up to the invasion of Iraq that it was not a decision he took long to make. “I had made my decision a long time ago,” he said. Like Prime Ministers John Howard and Tony Blair, security interests and alliances were paramount in the decision taken. Old friends, in the Western democratic alliance, would not be abandoned.

## **A YEAR OF EXCHANGE - 2006**

But while security has refocused the Australia-Japan relationship in radical new ways in recent years, it

was at another level that the Australia-Japan Conference project, begun in 2001, hoped to rejuvenate the relationship. The first conference expressed the desire to connect up with citizens of each nation who were not specialists in the dialogue between the two countries, but who were representatives of organisations that could play a role in bringing the average person from each nation into more direct association; so that the relationship was not left to the traders, the politicians and the academics and their specialised discussions. It was felt that with more contact between like minded groups in each community, the relationship would begin to have stronger resonance with Australian and Japanese citizens as a whole.

From the conference project, a Year of Exchange is now being planned for 2006, the thirtieth anniversary of the Nara Treaty and, as Minister Mark Vaile put it when opening the Third Conference, with the “hope this will result in new and enduring networks between Australia and Japan”. The idea for the Year of Exchange came from Japan’s Prime Minister Koizumi and was readily agreed to by the Australian government.

Planning is well underway for the year. A high level meeting of business figures will be held in Canberra in May 2005 to discuss and identify sources of corporate funding for projects planned to happen in 2006 between Japan and Australia. A tour of Japan by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra is one such project proposed. The organisers of the Year of Exchange hope to woo corporate funding as there is no Australian government allocation of funds for the activities to happen throughout 2006.

DFAT’s Australia-Japan Year of Exchange co-ordinator Deborah Peterson sees the activities planned for the year as a “rebadging” of much that is already in place in cultural exchanges between the two countries. The year will be dotted with functions from talks at universities and exhibitions such as a planned “Ancient Futures” exhibition to visits by visual and performing arts groups.

## **AN AUSTRALIA-JAPAN DAY - 2007?**

The Year of Exchange is a good idea. It has the co-operation of the states and a Commonwealth-State working group will meet again in November. There is no doubt the Australia-Japan relationship will be revived during 2006. This is a step in the direction that was envisaged in 2001 when the Australia-Japan conference project was begun. And yet it does not really move the relationship to the grass roots in the ways it might. Instead, it is yet another attempt at dialogue and exchange through higher education and high culture, something that involves only a

minority, albeit a significant one, of the citizens of Australia and Japan.

To move beyond elite exchange, Australia and Japan need to find an avenue to carry the masses and involving, either as spectators or participants, the great majority of ordinary Australians and Japanese. To this end, the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1957 Commerce Agreement between Australia and Japan should be marked by something quite different.

An Australia-Japan Day should be planned for 2007 to commemorate this remarkable development, coming as it did just a decade after the end of hostilities between our two countries and whilst the White Australia policy still existed. It should be a day to be repeated on other future anniversaries. And it would be one that would involve a cultural exchange accessible to the majority of citizens.

Soccer and fashion are areas of great popular interest in both Australia and Japan. Especially now that Football Australia has moved out of the Oceania soccer confederation and joined the Asian Football Confederation, a massive grouping of 45 members reaching from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. Soccer and fashion are modern industries that have evolved and prospered in recent decades in both countries. And they have huge grass roots appeal.

As the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry put it recently in a paper promoting the idea of an Australia-Japan Trade and Investment Framework, in spite of the success of the Australia-Japan relationship over decades, outdated perceptions still remain. ACCI argued that "Australia is still viewed by many Japanese as an attractive holiday destination rather than a key business partner, while Japan is seen by many Australians as 'too hard' a place to do business."

Clearly there is a long way to go to convince the average Australian or Japanese citizen that we are more alike than different. And yet, in so many ways, we are. An Australia-Japan Day based on a popular celebration through football and fashion would certainly demonstrate how close the two nations have become in many ordinary ways.

*Anne Henderson is Editor of The Sydney Papers*



# MR BALDING'S DENIAL

Gerard Henderson

When the Coalition was elected to office in March 1996, it soon became clear what John Howard and his Cabinet was expected of the taxpayer funded public broadcaster. John Howard led it be known that the ABC needed a "right wing Phillip Adams". This was an unfortunate phase which, in time, was turned against the Howard Government – principally by Phillip Adams himself. However, the Prime Minister's message was reasonable enough – he wanted the ABC to reflect a greater plurality of views, especially on political and social issues. Richard Alston, the Howard Government's inaugural Communications Minister, also had a straight-forward agenda. He wanted the ABC to overhaul and improve its dispute handling procedures. Once again, this was a reasonable request which – if implemented – would have improved the public broadcaster.

The Howard Government appointed ABC chairman Donald McDonald and all the members of the current ABC board – except for the staff-appointed director, Ramona Koval. The ABC Board, under the leadership of Donald McDonald, appointed Russell Balding as managing director. Russell Balding, and his senior executives, run the ABC on a day-to-day basis – not the Board.

It is a matter of record that the ABC Board has not overseen a significant increase in the plurality of opinion voiced on ABC TV and ABC Radio over the last nine years. In late 2004 the ABC made a gesture in this regard by announcing that commentator Michael Duffy would present the *Counterpoint* program on ABC Radio National at 4 pm on Mondays. On 31 January 2005, Michael Duffy referred to *Counterpoint* as "the Radio National alternative" and as "Radio National's right-wing alternative". It is weird that Michael Duffy should proclaim that his 55 minute program is an alternative to an entire ABC Radio network. But that is what he said. It seems that Russell Balding and his senior executives believe that the Howard Government will accept that its long-time criticism of a lack of political pluralism among the public broadcaster's presenters and producers can be resolved by the appointment of one commentator to a low rating timeslot on Radio National on Monday afternoons. How about that?

## ALSTON, WILLIAMS AND COONAN ON THE ABC'S COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The ABC managing director seems equally naïve concerning the public broadcaster's response to the Howard Government's on-going criticisms of the ABC's complaints procedure.

On 24 June 2004, *The Age* ran a letter from Russell Balding in which he wrote:

**Over the past two years the ABC has enhanced its complaints handling processes to the point where they are now, without doubt, best practice in terms of Australian standards and second to none internationally...**

This suggests that the ABC managing director is in denial about the Howard Government's attitude to the public broadcaster's complaints procedure. On 31 July 2003 Russell Balding actually wrote an article in *The Australian* which was critical of the view expressed by Richard Alston that the ABC's complaints procedures were inadequate. Clearly, in July 2003, Russell Balding understood that Richard Alston did not share his view that the public broadcaster's complaints procedure amounted to best practice and clearly, the ABC managing director should have been aware of this fact.

On 24 June 2004 Darryl Williams (who succeeded Senator Alston as Communications Minister) addressed the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) and made the following comment with respect to both the ABC and SBS:

**In relation to our national broadcasters, we have been looking at ways to ensure that the community's legitimately high expectations are met by establishing greater rigour and independence in the handling of complaints. The boards of both the ABC and SBS have a responsibility to ensure that the national broadcasters meet their legislative and Charter obligations, particularly in relation to news and current affairs. An important component of this is the operation of a rigorous and independent complaints-handling process in which the public can have confidence. Details of the proposed changes are the subject of ongoing discussion between the Government and the broadcasters.**

As Daryl Williams made clear during his address to the ABA, circa 2004 the Howard Government was not satisfied with the ABC's complaints procedure. Mr Williams confirmed this in a private conversation on

23 July 2004 with *The Sydney Institute Quarterly*, shortly after he announced his forthcoming resignation from politics. Daryl Williams was succeeded as Communications Minister by Helen Coonan. In her first interviews since her appointment was announced, Senator Coonan spoke to ABC TV *Insiders* presenter Barrie Cassidy on 18 July 2004. The following exchange took place:

**Barrie Cassidy: And do you occasionally find yourself getting agitated watching the ABC as some of your colleagues do and say they do – that they detect occasionally some bias?**

**Senator Helen Coonan: Well, look, I do think that the national broadcaster and the ABC is of course very important and it is important to all Australians. It is important for public confidence that there is not a perception of bias about the ABC and in the past, of course, I along with others of my colleagues have got a big agitated about some aspects of it. However, there are some previous communications with my predecessor ministers, both Alston and Williams, with the ABC board and with SBS. And I would very much like to encourage a better response, perhaps a better external review process (emphasis added).**

## ALSTON'S COMPLAINT

In fact, successive Howard Government Communications ministers have not been satisfied with the ABC's complaints handling procedure – despite Mr Balding's assertion that it is world best practice. For an illustration, there is no need to go beyond the ABC's handling of Richard Alston's complaint about the ABC Radio AM program's coverage of the Second Gulf War.

On 28 May 2003 Senator Alston wrote to the ABC managing director seeking "an urgent investigation into the AM program's coverage of the recent Iraq conflict". He attached a 17 page document setting out, on a case by case basis, his 68 specific complaints. On 30 May 2003 Mr Balding announced that he had referred the matter to the ABC's very own Complaints Review Executive (CRE), which is based on Melbourne and headed by senior ABC executive Murray Green.

## MURRAY GREEN'S (ABC) RESPONSE

On 21 July 2003 Murray Green released his report. He upheld the Alston complaint on two matters – but even here the decision was of the grudging kind. In rejecting 66 of the 68 Alston complaints, Murray

Green went out of his way to lecture the complainant in a manifestly hectoring and unprofessional tone. Senator Alston was accused by Mr Green of (i) “selectively quoting” (i.e. intellectual dishonesty), (ii) advocating his own “evaluative assessments” for the ABC (i.e. double standards), (iii) pressing...for partisanship” (i.e. bias), (iv) not possessing “a full understanding of the forms of analysis that are part of political reporting” (i.e. ignorance), (v) “lacking an awareness of the international debate” (i.e. ignorance, again), (vi) “not being straightforward” (i.e. dishonesty, again) and (vii) engaging in “value judgment”. And more besides. Some of Murray Green’s public criticisms of Richard Alston were made without any supporting evidence whatsoever.

So, how did the ABC respond to the CRE report?

Murray Green was not the only ABC employee and/or contractor to debunk Richard Alston’s complaints at this time. David Marr on 2 June 2003 (then the presenter of the ABC TV *Media Watch*) ridiculed one of Richard Alston’s complaints – almost two months before the Green Report was released. It was a sign as to what was to come. No one, not even the Minister for Communications, can demand an on-screen right of reply on the ABC TV *Media Watch* program.

Richard Alston did receive strong endorsement for his critique of the *AM* program’s Second Gulf War coverage from Gerald Stone (an SBS board member, a former executive producer of *60 Minutes* and editor of *The Bulletin* and a one-time ABC journalist and producer). In an article published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (3 June 2003) and *The Age* (4 June 2003) Gerald Stone commented:

**Richard Alston has been widely ridiculed for his attack last week on the *AM* program’s Iraqi war coverage. ABC defenders insist that what the federal Communications Minister saw as anti-American bias was really nothing more than a healthy journalistic scepticism. There’s a big difference, however, between sceptic and septic: the toxic sneer that infects some reports to the point where an audience can no longer separate fact from prejudicial innuendo. As a former senior producer and editor, I must say I didn’t find Alston’s dossier of 68 alleged offences as far-fetched as some of my colleagues.**

**I noted at least 20 instances where, as an ABC news executive, I would have called *AM* staff members to task for making smug and gratuitous comments blatant enough to bring the program’s impartiality into question.**

**That’s apart from the issue of what tone of voice they may have used in delivering some of the suspect lines. Inflection or facial expression can be crucial in determining the degree of bias within the electronic media.**

Gerald Stone continued that, throughout the Coalition of the Willing’s military campaign, “*AM* presenter Linda Mottram frequently laced her introductions and back announcements with dripping sarcasm”. He also referred to *AM*’s “perpetual sneer” in its war coverage as being embodied by the program’s journalist John Shovelan.

Gerard Stone concluded his article by commenting:

**Once any news organisation allows such sophomoric sarcasm to creep into its reports in place of legitimate scepticism, it undermines its entire reputation for fair and irresponsible coverage.**

## ON TO THE ICRP

On 21 July 2003, Richard Alston issued a statement in which he criticised Murray Green’s findings. On 25 July 2003, without consulting Richard Alston, Russell Balding referred the Alston complaint to the ABC’s Independent Complaints Review Panel (ICRP). The ICRP report was released on 10 October 2003. Two of the original complaints had been upheld by Murray Green – and the ICRP agreed with Mr Green’s assessment in these instances. The ICRP also upheld an additional 12 of Richard Alston’s complaints and found that a further four complaints had identified breaches of an ABC editorial practice covering the use of “emotional language or editorialisation” on the part of presenters or reporters. This was a significant result for Senator Alston, in spite of the fact that he had not taken his case to the ICRP.

So, how did the ABC respond to the ICRP report?

- Linda Mottram – in her (then) capacity as “Compere, *AM*” wrote to *The Australian* (14 October 2003). She accused the ICRP of lack of “due process” and a denial of “natural justice”. Ms Mottram also accused the ICRP (i) of displaying “a complete lack of understanding of the job of journalism”, (ii) of not understanding “dictionary definitions of words” and (iii) of lacking the necessary “scholarship” and “forensic research” capacity. Subsequently Linda Mottram (*The Weekend Australian* 18-19 October 2003) confirmed that she did not accept the ICRP’s findings and declared that, following the ICRP report, “nobody” at the ABC was telling her to “do anything differently”.

- David Marr then used the ABC TV *Media Watch* program on 3 November 2003 to comprehensively bag the ICRP report. Mr Marr described the ICRP's findings as "not good enough".

In an article which he wrote for *The Australian* (31 July 2003) on another matter, Russell Balding had described "any questioning of the integrity and credibility of ICRP members" as "nothing short of offensive". Yet the ABC manager remained mute when Linda Mottram and David Marr publicly questioned the integrity of the ICRP report on Richard Alston's complaints.

## ON TO THE ABA'S DRAFT REPORT

Richard Alston resigned as Minister for Communications on 7 October 2003. On 23 January 2004 he wrote to the Australian Broadcasting Authority stating that he was not happy with the response from the ABC to his complaint. Richard Alston asked the ABA to investigate a remaining 43 matters which, he maintained, breached the ABC's *Code of Practice*. The ABC Complaints Review Executive (the Green Report) had upheld two complaints and the Independent Complaints Review Panel upheld another 15 complaints – 17 in total. Richard Alston asked the ABA to consider only the matters not upheld by Murray Green or the ICRP – i.e. 51 in total. Richard Alston then withdrew eight matters – leaving 43 complaints for the ABA to consider.

In late 2004, the ABA issued draft findings concerning Richard Alston's complaint. It found five instances in which the ABC had breached the ABC Code of Practice in its Iraq War broadcasts on the AM program in March and April 2003. These draft findings were not released publicly. Rather, the ABC was invited to respond to the ABA's draft findings. In the event, the ABA's report was leaked – presumably by a person or persons within the ABC – to the media.

So, how did the ABC respond to the leaked report of the ABA?

On 1 November 2004 the ABC TV *Media Watch* devoted almost its entire program to bagging the ABA's draft findings. David Marr introduced the segment with a comprehensive bagging of the ABA's draft report:

**Welcome to *Media Watch*, I'm David Marr.**

**More shots have been fired in Richard Alston's 17 month campaign against the ABC, this time by the Australian Broadcasting Authority. *Media Watch* has been leaked a copy of their chunky 136 page effort. I've had to read a stack of ABA reports in the three years I've been**

**presenting *Media Watch* but this probably the silliest so far.**

David Marr then continued the attack by asserting that "not for the first time in our experience, the ABA has shown it doesn't really know how journalism works". He went on to accuse the ABA of being both "slovenly" and "dishonest" and of delivering "comical findings". David Marr concluded his debunking of the ABA – which he described as "this mob" – in the following terms:

**Richard Alston's complaints are perhaps the most sustained assault ever made on ABC reporting. They should be judged independently by a fearless panel that owes nothing to the ABC or the government – and knows how journalism works. This mob doesn't – but it's only a draft report, thank God. You'd like to think that the ABA might try to get it right before their final report comes out.**

## AND ON TO THE ABC FINAL REPORT

On 1 March 2005, Lyn Maddock (the ABA's acting chair), released the ABA's *Investigation Report No. 1362*. In its final report, the ABA upheld four of Richard Alston's extant complaints. In other words, it confirmed all but one of its draft findings. This meant that, inter alia, Richard Alston had succeeded in establishing the validity of 21 of his original 68 complaints – a success rate of around one third. In the media release which accompanied the release of the ABA's report, Ms Maddock commented:

**The Australian Broadcasting Authority has confirmed four out of five of its draft findings of late last year that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) breached the ABC Code of Practice in its Iraq war broadcasts on the AM program in March and April 2003. The four breaches all related to clause 4.2 of the code, which says every reasonable effort must be made to ensure that programs are balanced and impartial.**

**The code requires that ABC news and current affairs programs make every reasonable effort to ensure that they are balanced and impartial. While AM presented a range of views and perspectives during the period in question and was therefore balanced, the language and presentation styles used in some programs would have caused an ordinary reasonable listener to think that the programs were predisposed to particular views on some issues.**

The ABC plays an important investigative role in analysing and commenting on significant community issues and studio presentation teams play a key role in setting the tone of news and current affairs programs. While scepticism and probing questions are a useful way to explore issues, when a program uses tendentious language in connection with a controversial matter, listeners are likely to understand that the program favours a particular view of the issue...

The ABA considers that the findings of 17 breaches of editorial standards by the ABC's internal complaints handling process plus the 4 code breaches found by the ABA compromised the quality of AM's coverage of the Iraq War. The ABA expects the ABC to take note of its findings and review its procedures to prevent further breaches of the ABC code. The ABA notes that the ABC's Editor-in-Chief instructed senior news and current affairs management to take note of the Independent Complaints Review Panel's review, particularly in relation to the upheld complaints.

So, how did the ABC respond to the ABA's final report?

Once again Linda Mottram, who had presented most of the editions of AM which led to the Alston complaint, simply refused to concede that she or any of her colleagues had made any mistake whatsoever. Ms Mottram sent a submission to the ABA and – guess what? - it was leaked to the media. This time to *The Australian's* Errol Simper who published reports of Linda Mottram's angry response on 3 March 2005. She complained (i) that the ABA had not acknowledged that Richard Alston had been a minister in the Howard Government (as if this were some kind of secret), (ii) that, in making its decision, the ABA was "outside its skills base and remit as regulator" (in other words, the ABA does not know what it is doing) and (iii) that "the ABA needs advice and possibly expert evidence as to the very mechanics of covering this type and quality of information" (in other words, only journalists like Ms Mottram can properly assess the work of journalists like Ms Mottram).

## RUSSELL BALDING'S RESPONSE

On 1 March 2005, Russell Balding responded to the ABA's report on behalf of the ABC. In the public broadcaster's very own exercise in media spin, the ABC managing director asserted that ABA had

actually supported AM's coverage of the Second Gulf War. Mr Balding's statement read in full:

The ABC welcomes the ABA's finding, after its thirteen-month investigation of AM's coverage of the war in Iraq, that AM was balanced. The ABC notes that of the 43 alleged breaches of the ABC's *Code of Practice* submitted to the ABA by a former Minister for Communications, the ABA found 4 breaches - which related to a few minutes out of many hours of coverage of the war.

I note the ABA's comment that "the ABC may wish to consider whether the *Code* should more clearly differentiate between news programs and current affairs programs". I will ensure the ABA's comments are taken into consideration when the *Code* is reviewed shortly. The ABC, however, continues to be concerned that the basis upon which the ABA seeks to justify its conclusions is flawed. These concerns were set out in the ABC's submission to the ABA in January 2005 and in the interests of informing public debate on these matters, I am releasing this submission.

**I remain of the view - as I have said on a number of occasions - that AM's extensive coverage of the war in Iraq was professional, comprehensive and balanced."**

What was noticeable about Mr Balding's spin on this occasion turned on what the ABC managing director managed to ignore about Richard Alston's complaint.

- The ABC's very own CRE, headed by Murray Green, found for Senator Alston on two counts out of 68 – a success rate of just over three per cent. Yet Richard Alston succeeded overall in establishing 21 out of 68 complaints – a success rate of over 30 per cent. Mr Balding declined to comment about how it was that the ABC's internal complaints procedure was so dismissive of Richard Alston's complaints compared with the findings of both the ICRP and the ABA.

- Mr Balding welcomed the fact that the ABA had dismissed 39 of Alston's 43 complaints. This led him to conclude that the ABA had found that "AM's coverage of the war in Iraq...was balanced". But the ABC managing director effectively dismissed the ABA's upholding of four of the complaints, maintaining that they "related to a few minutes out of many hours of coverage of the war". In other words, according to Mr Balding, when the ABA supports the ABC its position is to be welcomed – but when the

ABA finds against the ABC, its position is of little moment. How convenient.

- Like Linda Mottram, Russell Balding's response to the ABA Report was evidence of his state of denial. He asserted that the basis on which the ABA had reached its conclusions was "flawed". And he re-stated his view that "AM's extensive coverage of the war in Iraq was professional, comprehensive and balanced". The ABC managing director simply refused to address the fact that Richard Alston succeeded in establishing a third of his complaints against AM and that this, in itself, seriously challenged the ABC's assertion that the AM program was, in fact, professional in its coverage of the Second Gulf War.

### DAVID MARR'S (ALTERNATIVE) VIEW

David Marr stepped down as *Media Watch* presenter at the end of 2004. Now a journalist on the *Sydney Morning Herald*, he is willing to concede what Russell Balding attempts to deny. Namely, that Richard Alston's complaint is "the most serious challenge ever mounted to the fairness and balance of ABC reporting". Writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 5 March 2005, David Marr continued:

**If there were a football match, the ABC would be celebrating a convincing victory. But in a contest of this kind the only clear win for the ABC would be exoneration of just about every count. That's not what's happened. The former minister for communications, Richard Alston, has seen more than a third of his complaints upheld.**

### DENIAL - AND IT'S (COUNTERPRODUCTIVE) EFFECTS

Russell Balding is a fine accountant and was a good second-in-command at the ABC. However, he is out of his depth as the ABC's editor-in-chief – which is one of the functions of the ABC managing director. Mr Balding cannot understand why the Howard Government maintains that there is a lack of pluralism within the ABC. And he refuses to acknowledge that the Howard Government remains unsatisfied with the way in which the ABC handles complaints. More seriously, Mr Balding declines to acknowledge any fault when the existing (limited) complaints procedure finds against an ABC program.

There is little doubt that a clear majority of ABC personnel are pleased with the Donald McDonald-Russell Balding management team. Phillip Adams said as much in a recent column in *The Australian* (1 March 2005) where he welcomed the fact that Mr McDonald has emerged as "a champion of the ABC" in its current (unreformed) form.

Yet the fact is that, contrary to Phillip Adams' urgings, the Howard Government was re-elected on 9 October 2004. As the elected government, the Coalition has the responsibility for spending taxpayer money. Russell Balding may believe that he should approach Canberra each year requesting more funding for the ABC and that he will be successful – without meeting the Coalition's wishes with respect to the public broadcaster's evident lack of pluralism and its inadequate complaints procedure. But then, the ABC managing director and his senior executives may also believe in the flying of pigs.

# REFLECTIONS ON THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT'S FIRST YEAR

Geoffrey Luck

On 1 January 2005, the National Archives of Australia gave Australia its best possible New Year present with the release of the 1974 cabinet records. Those records revealed the behind-the-scenes infighting between Treasury and Cabinet and drove the final nail in the coffin of the Whitlam Government's economic credibility.

Ian Hancock, the National Archives' historical consultant, suggested an uninhibited reappraisal of that government, especially Whitlam's own accounts in *The Truth of the Matter* and *The Whitlam Government* when he wrote in *The Australian*:

**Political memoirs are written before they can be independently tested against official records. With few exceptions, they are self-serving, self-laudatory exercises. Even when they are packed with detail and supported by substantial research, they tend to gloss over awkward episodes, abdicate personal responsibility and distract attention by dwelling on peripheral issues. The 1974 records suggest that Whitlam was adept in all three areas.**

On that last point, history repeated itself when the only response to the documents by Mr Whitlam was a diversionary attack on the loyalty of Treasury officers.

As the Archives documents make clear, the scandal of the 1974 “Khemlani Loans Affair”, coming at the end of a disastrous year of stagflation, balance of payment problems and a wages explosion, shocked the nation into realising the government had lost control. But the realisation was a long time coming. The task of creating Australia’s Camelot in a period of world wide economic upheaval would always have been difficult. The risks and warning signs had been obvious, and well-documented, before the Whitlam Government came to office. The alarm bells had sounded even more shrilly as the country moved through 1973.

I had taken up the post of the ABC’s Economics and Finance Correspondent early in 1972. The reporting role also included writing and presenting *The Week in Business*, a program broadcast late on Friday nights, and repeated on Saturday and Sunday mornings. TWIB, as it became known in the ABC, set out to record the major impacts of the week as finance, economics and politics intersected. It was the first program to attempt this and it made much use of interviews and actuality. Re-reading the scripts and re-playing the tape excerpts bring back those voices - uncensored, unvarnished, unapologetic – speaking to us of a nation grappling ineffectually with economic adjustment in a world in transition. They reveal the ideological zeal, pig-headedness, hatred of business and bad advice which all contributed to the economic collapse in 1975.

1972 had opened, hopeful but nervous, after the currency crisis of the previous year had culminated in the Smithsonian Agreement, hailed by President Nixon as “the greatest monetary agreement in the history of the world”. The US devalued 10 per cent against European currencies and pledged to maintain fixed rates within a tight band, but abandoned the backing of gold. In January that year, everything seemed topsy-turvy. Steel prices were falling everywhere, but the West Australian government was hopefully opening up more exploration areas in the Pilbara. Lang Hancock said the world recession was temporary, and the Reserve Bank reported a high level of liquidity in the community. Treasurer Billy Snedden said it would not be responsible to give way to pressure to provide a “major stimulus” to the economy. But for the first time I heard the word “stagflation”. The prospect of Britain’s entry into the Common Market in a year’s time sent a tremor through rural industries, and the main index of business confidence fell to 26 per cent.

Britain was half-way through a 12-month voluntary agreement to hold price and income rises below 5 per cent, and President Nixon was thinking along the same lines. But, as the year wore on, his successive anti-inflationary initiatives were overshadowed by Watergate. Currency instability dominated - the dollar floated, the yen trembled. We didn’t realise it at the time, but it was the birth of free market capitalism, and it unleashed a wave of inflation for which the world was unprepared and ill-equipped. Asset-stripping corporate raiders like Slater Walker arrived on the scene, helping raise the emotional temperature over foreign ownership. The government set up a Senate select committee on foreign investment, an issue that would echo loudly in the Whitlam years. It foreshadowed a wide-ranging public inquiry into tax; Trade Minister Doug Anthony found himself defending Australia’s undervalued dollar and export surpluses.

Car companies were suffering. GMH sacked 1200 workers and Chrysler closed its Port Melbourne plant. A mini-budget in April failed to enthuse investors. Uranium moved to the centre of the debate on mineral ownership and export when three companies began negotiating forward sales. The former Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Sir Philip Baxter, warned that all Australia’s uranium could be mined and sold in a few years, thus starting the “leave-it-in-the-ground” debate. Mid-year, the National Wage case gave workers only 2.5 per cent, less than half the previous rise, and regarded as so low as to threaten industrial stability.

The government finally decided to set up a Monopolies Commission and foreign takeovers became an hysterical issue over the defence of a national icon, the Chiko Roll. The Prime Minister, William McMahon, sought to calm the Liberal Party, which was becoming increasingly fractious under his leadership: “We will not allow monopolies to destroy the healthy competition which Liberals believe is part of a free society.”

A 5 per cent devaluation of the British Pound caught Australia unawares with nearly half its reserves in Sterling. And as if the country didn’t have enough problems, Ralph Nader arrived, to launch consumerism, and incite anti-business sentiment.

The 1972 budget was framed within Treasury advice to encourage private spending, welcome since the McMahon government knew that with unemployment and inflation rising, it needed a political lifeboat for the coming election. So the pockets of the nation were warmed with tax cuts of \$80-million a week - ineffectual, because tax revenues rose by more, and “bracket creep” entered the language. But before the budget, Labor started

flexing its electoral muscles. Its first shot was a major speech by Shadow Treasurer Frank Crean to the Securities Institute in Sydney. The audience was dismayed by his poor grasp of business principles, disdain for the profit motive, and misconceptions about interest and exchange rates. It was a sign of what was to come:

**Australia could well emulate Japan, who has been able without much direct foreign investment to absorb technology from abroad rapidly, and to develop its own technology. The success of Japan's policy illustrates that perhaps the direct investment package can be broken and technology can be separated from control.**

Asked if Labor would seek to define a fair return on assets, Crean's response was: "To decide whether 5 per cent, 3 per cent or some other rate on funds employed is fair – I don't think is any easier to adjudicate than what is a fair day's work for a fair day's pay."

Before the government could announce its foreign investment policy, Labor threw down its challenge, declaring that in office "The government will act, as necessary, to retain and regain maximum Australian ownership and control of industries and resources." The government, in turn, announced a 4-pronged investment regulation, and banned natural gas exports. A dispute that was to have its reprise thirty years later saw Australia claim seabed rights up to the Timor Trough in secret talks in Jakarta in October. And with the Prime Minister promising legislation for the new takeover authority "soon", the market and foreign investors tried to appear calm, while inwardly rattled.

As the curtain came down in Canberra in preparation for the federal election, the Withers Committee emphasised the need to develop Australia's own capital resources, with a National Companies Act and a national stock exchange as starting points. Sterling fell again and the Heath Government in Britain imposed a statutory freeze on wages and prices, the policy that seemed to be reducing unemployment in the US, but not curbing inflation. The major parties' policy speeches left the electorate swimming in a sea of dollar promises and the market worrying how to pay for them.

This then was the economic background to what proved the most cataclysmic electoral change in Australia's history. Labor won office on a swing of only 2.5 per cent, and its majority of 9 was only two more than Gorton's three years earlier. But it was brimming with confidence and had a smorgasbord of plans. I wanted to know how the new government

would simultaneously achieve its ambitious aims of reduced unemployment, a real growth rate of six or seven per cent, and a brake on inflation. Three days after the election I flew to Melbourne to ask Frank Crean. These were his replies:

**Frank Crean:** *In the forefront of our objectives is a system of price justification, where no change would be allowed in the price of an item that was significant in the flow-on process in the economy, no increase would be allowed unless it was first referred to this body for justification.....now most of the organisations whose prices we think are significant in this situation at least are trading organisations and surely the success or otherwise of a trading corporation in the finish is the price it charges for its product, and the margin of that over its total cost."*

**Q:** *How do we determine what is a fair return then, on the assets of a corporation or company?*

**FC:** *Well I think they're criterion (sic) that will have to be established as the tribunal works – I mean, in some respects we're supposed to do that now in respect to tariff protection given to certain industries, that there shouldn't be more than a certain return on capital, when the tariff is given."*

**Q:** *In the field of government-business relations, you're planning a federal Companies Act, supervision of the securities industry, and other measures. How do you ensure that they're merely regulatory and not restrictive?*

**FC:** *I think at least it ought to be acknowledged now that by reason of the size and extent of corporate activity, which likes to take to itself the name 'public company' that at least there is a case for some kind of public intervention into their activities...their operations in no sense can be called merely private. They impinge upon the public. I think the Americans have a very good doctrine. There they say that certain things are charged with the public interest. Now I believe that corporate activity in Australia is charged with the public interest, but it has not been subject enough to any kind of public regulation."*

**Q:** *Do you see this tying up with economic planning?*

**FC:** *Yes. Well, we're believers in economic planning, and in fact I think we're the last of the Western countries that in a sense hasn't got some semblance of planning. And I think one thing that has interested me particularly in the last several months is that large sections of industry would be happy to see something in the nature of several years forward planning as far as the totality of an economy is concerned.*

**Q:** *Do you want to go further than the temporary McMahon legislation on foreign takeovers?*

*It would be better if there were certainty about what can come in, and what can't come in, and the terms on which that can come in is allowed to come in under."*

**Q:** *What sort of areas would you see needing particular protection?*

**FC:** *I mentioned in the last couple of days that we wouldn't allow any existing Australian finance company to be taken over, nor any of the insurance companies that still remain wholly Australian, to be absorbed. But other cases would be looked at on their merits, and it seems to me that this is the sensible sort of thing.*

**Q:** *[Mr Crean was on record as saying that Australia ducked the question of the correct dollar parity the previous December and must face up to currency readjustments in the near future.] Did you see the solution in floating the dollar?*

**FC:** *I think floating isn't quite as easy in the Australian context as some people believe. I mean we are much more dependent on international trade, export and import than many other countries. And I think one has to examine this very very closely. I believe, at least for a long time, that we've got to have management of this central question via the central bank. We've got to be able to keep our own control on whatever we do."*

**Q:** *Can we now turn to the money front? You've said before that you'd like to see interest rates reduced, and there's a general feeling in business that you may take stern measures to reduce them. How do you see yourself going about this?*

**FC:** *I'm at least on the side, at this stage, of those who suggest they shouldn't rise. However to allay any sort of fears, I'm also aware of existing institutional arrangements and rigidities in structures that you just can't suddenly make any dramatic change one way or the other. I think one tends to get pilloried for being a cheap money man, and all that I say, and I repeat it ad infinitum if you like, that more people in a community gain when interest rates are low than are advantaged because interest rates are high, but I acknowledge the difficulty of getting rates down from an existing level quickly, and if it can't be done quickly, then maybe certain interests have to be protected by selective interest rates.*

**Q:** *The money supply has been growing very rapidly in Australia recently, and this would seem to be a big potential for inflation. What action do you think is necessary there?*

**FC:** *Well of course the money supply does increase when you have inflation. This is always one of the difficulties that in a way you promote the inflation by allowing it to be financed by creating more money. But on the other hand, if inflation does exist, you cause a great number*

*of economic problems also if you don't increase the supply of money. How you balance real growth against the puff of inflation, I think is the most difficult task that faces an economy, and I've at least got a certain humility in taking over this task that in other parts of the world great minds have applied themselves to this problem without any apparent success. And I hope that too much is not expected of me, too quickly.*

The same day I talked with the incoming Trade Minister, Dr Jim Cairns. The last shipment of Australian butter to be admitted to Britain duty-free was about to leave Melbourne, underlining the impact of the UK's entry into the Common Market. What would Australia's attitude be to such monolithic trading blocs?

**Jim Cairns:** *It's sometimes believed that the future of international trade is more and more freedom of trade, and we're being advised about this from all sides, but of course, it isn't. One of the characteristic features of world trade today is increasing national autonomy, increasing national identity. This is also going to be true of the developing and under-developed countries. They will have to develop a national identity and a national power or they won't get anywhere. Now this is going to be a feature of trade in the next 25 years, not increasing freedom of trade, but increasing significance of national groups of various kinds.*

**Q:** *So what sort of attitude would Australia be taking at forthcoming GATT negotiations?*

**JC:** *Well, an Australian attitude. We are anxious to help in every way we can in the development of world trade, but we can do this best by putting humanely and rationally, Australian interests first. We can trade more with the world if we are developing at the rate of six or seven per cent a year, than if we are developing at two or three per cent a year. And this is a message I want Australians to understand, and that we tried to make the world understand at the formation of the United Nations in 1945, and this is still basically our method. We want to trade in every way we can with the outside world, but we want to have a high rate of growth ourselves.*

Not much scope for optimism.

Rather, the future economic direction of the new government was better indicated by the advice of Melbourne University's Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, which seemed to have Labor's ear. The Prime Minister made no bones about going outside Treasury for alternative ideas, thus sowing the seeds of major conflict the following year. The Institute's Dr Duncan Ironmonger was already boasting that it had closer contact with economic theory than the Treasury, and could "think in a bit more depth about in which direction a policy

should be moving.” He was confident the economy could be stimulated and inflation curbed, simultaneously:

**We believe it can. We believe one of the problems of the previous policies was to try to stimulate without having an effective wages restraint and prices restraint policy. This needs to be conducted to some extent in the political arena, rather than in the strictly economic arena, although there are some economic management proposals in our package such as our proposals about company tax, and so on, which are direct fiscal policy measures, to try and do it. No, we believe it can be done. Certainly though, 1973 will be a year when the Labor Party will be starting to initiate its policies for areas such as health and taxation and education and this will start to result in expenditures of money in '74, and it's an important part of our proposal that the measures in it, a large number of them, anyway, perhaps some of the biggest ones, are things that can be turned off again to allow some room for the economy in twelve months' time.**

As the New Year dawned, business was already concerned at the pace of change. The 7 per cent revaluation of the dollar on Christmas Eve was quickly followed by Frank Crean announcing moves to plug tax loopholes for what he termed “bogus” mining companies, and controls on finance houses and building societies. Within a week the Prime Minister struck the first chord of economic nationalism:

**Cabinet authorised the Minister for Minerals and Energy to defer consent under the Petroleum Submerged Lands Act with respect to farm-in agreements between Burmah-Woodside consortium and Mount Isa Mines. Cabinet authorised the Minister....to confer with the state mines ministers with respect to the construction and operation of a national pipeline system.**

The market asked what was to become of privately owned and financed gas lines, and how the government was to maximise Australian participation in the North-West Shelf. It seemed that a company's Australianism would be the criterion for getting exploration subsidies, and would need to be shown to be more than skin-deep.

Then came a raft of welfare measures – on war and old age pensions, education benefits, as well as

housing and other spending programmes. At the time they were described as “a mini-budget in weekly instalments”, a direct stimulus to consumer spending, and under-cut the anti-inflationary benefits of the devaluation. By contrast, the new US budget cut back hard on social and welfare programmes as President Nixon tried to reduce inflation from 3.4 per cent to 2.5 per cent. But the full inflationary effects of US spending on its Vietnam war had yet to hit these shores. Come February, there was a complex set of foreign exchange controls to shut off unwanted capital inflows, and federal supervision of all mineral export contracts.

The government seemed to be pursuing its agenda oblivious to world events, and was caught flat-footed by a new currency crisis. After massive deutschemark and yen losses trying to maintain their dollar parities, the U.S. devalued 10 per cent. And Australia? This is how Treasurer Frank Crean explained it:

- **There's been no change.....if there'd been a change it would have gone to the Cabinet.”**
- **So there's been no decision?**
- **No, exactly.**
- **Well, when will the decision be made?**
- **The only decision made was to reopen the Australian exchange market, and in my view we'd have been the laughing stock of the world if we'd been the only one that had remained closed until we made our decision. Now that primarily is a technical exercise, there had been no alteration of the Australian exchange rate.**

It was true that Australia did not opt to change its parity with gold, so it didn't need to notify the IMF. But the “non decision” meant the Australian dollar automatically appreciated 11 per cent against the U.S. dollar; it strengthened against almost every other currency except the yen, \$300 million was wiped off reserve assets and the Reserve Bank lost \$130 million on the forward currency cover it had provided in recent weeks. The government even delayed announcing its “non decision” seven hours to keep the news out of the morning newspapers.

Confidence was shaken. Mining companies faced losses of \$60 million and the Japanese steel mills were quick to point out their contracts did not contain currency protection clauses. The Sydney Metals Index was slashed. With half the world's currencies floating, Australia was being drawn steadily into the deeper waters of international finance, and as one Sydney money market expert observed, “It seems to

have come as a surprise to some that our currency is worth what someone else is prepared to pay for it.”

After its first one hundred days, the Whitlam government had full employment and higher GDP (dividends from the policies of the previous government) but also tightening liquidity and increasing inflation. Yet its priority was for action on taxes, housing and social services. The Housing Minister, Les Johnson, reported the pressures:

**Already in some regions, the shortage of carpenters and bricklayers is flashing danger signals too important to be ignored. The second area of concern is the upward movement in the costs of certain basic building materials, which will be brought under close government and public scrutiny as soon as it's possible to do so, and as effectively as it's possible to do. The government is determined that its desire to create favourable conditions for the home building industry should not be exploited by any greedy minority. And it seems to me that there's a need for some wing-clipping in certain directions.**

After freezing further overseas investment in real estate, and planning new companies' legislation, the Prime Minister turned his guns on the mining industry:

**We have much to share and much to gain in our trade with the rest of the world. But it must be clear that in regard to minerals, Australia henceforth intends to be the mistress of her own household.....large companies with interests crossing many national boundaries may conduct their business in a way which while maximising returns for themselves will be to the detriment of a particular country. We must ensure the greatest possible measure of Australian ownership and participation in the mining industry. The industry is already 62 per cent foreign owned. We do not want that figure to go higher.**

And in what became a trademark inability to resist an acidic play on words: “We shall do business and we shall do it with honour. But we do not regard the rape of our resources as inevitable, and we certainly do not intend to lie back and enjoy it.”

The same day the Treasurer went on the attack against the stock market and export incentive schemes. He took aim at investment allowances: “It's an expensive form of assistance to begin with. My view is that some people get it who don't need it, and

that their exports would take place even without the incentives.” But the sensation of the week came from Rex Connor, Minister for Minerals and Energy – all foreign capital for national developments must be funnelled through the Australian Industries Development Corporation:

**Where capital is needed for Australia, yes, we will issue the securities and they will be backed by the pledge, the unbeatable pledge of the Australian nation. In turn, that money will be channelled into such particular forms of national development as are beyond our own competence. But the deeds – the title deeds – will remain exclusively in Australian hands. If it is indicated in particular cases that an investing country or corporation might have a desire for the funds to be channelled in a particular direction with a view to particular contracts. That will be, of course, a matter for negotiation. We will be the last people in the world to deny our friends, who are our trading partners, a particular share of our resources. But firstly, and paramountly (sic) we will ensure that our present and future needs are fully catered for.**

By mid-year, liquidity was tightening sharply and the Reserve Bank revived the trading banks' statutory reserve deposit ratios as a monetary tool. The stock market reflected alarm at the economic direction of Labor policies – a year's growth had been wiped off the index. . Inflation was up 2.1 per cent a quarter, yet the government supported the union claims in the national wage case, saying an appreciable increase in wages would not have undesirable inflationary consequences. Treasury disagreed. A trade mission to China won regular access to that market for Australian wheatgrowers and graziers. The Chinese expressed the desire to sell us more textiles and were soon rewarded with the 25 per cent across the board tariff cuts. As the need for more revenue sources to fund its reforms pressed on the government, the Treasurer foreshadowed a budget move:

**We're altering the definition of income so that any increment – whether it's land, shares, any other sale of an asset, but as long as the buying and selling have been within the twelve months – that will be regarded as income just the same as rent or interest or dividends are.**

Unemployment reached an all-time low, and the cost of money was rising. So were doubts about the “buying back the farm” policy. CRA's Rod Carnegie

pointed out any hope that major changes could be made quickly was unrealistic and would imply less money for roads, schools and houses. The 1973 ALP conference endorsed Rex Connor's plans for a National Fuel and Energy Commission, thrilling to his tirade against "hillbilly mineral tycoons" wasting public money on incentives to find oil and gas when "they were there all the time." But Dr Cairns was having more difficulty planning the future of secondary industry. It was made even tougher by the tariff cut, and Mr Whitlam's assertion:

**It cannot be repeated too often that at a time of full employment and labour shortages, as will be the case soon, no serious threat to jobs is involved in prodding industry into greater resilience and adaptability to change, by exposing it to a more competitive climate. It becomes for government much more a social problem than an employment problem.**

The Prime Minister was speaking at a seminar on Future Shock – Alvin Toffler's book was then all the rage. He had begun with ironic self-deprecation: "We Labor men, crude, rough, inexperienced, unpolished as we are, do not have that finesse and elegance and balance that you naturally came to expect from our predecessors who were born to rule." But soon a hard ideological edge emerged:

**It's not a pretty sight in a country like Australia, so rich in natural resources, and with such a potentiality for growth, to see the instant ossification which sets in, in so many enterprises and indeed in whole industries. As soon as an industry has come into existence, too often it considers its very existence entitles it to a certificate of immortality and changelessness, to be guaranteed, by way of government subsidy and protection, through tariffs, or even worse, permanent quantitative controls of imports, a safe and easy life.**

Rex Connor raised the spectre of resources diplomacy when he declared: "The major policy aspects of future mineral and energy negotiations with Japan will take place at a government-to-government level, with details to be settled by discussion between the industries of each country and their counterparts. Henceforward, Australia and Japan will meet at the conference table as equals with mutual respect and understanding." Although assuring that he did not want to hoard Australia's minerals, he did not clarify the role for the private sector in oil search and mining adding: "I want to assure you that this authority...will not be charging

recklessly into mineral and petroleum exploration, which can be a high risk area. We will certainly avail ourselves of available technology, and with suitable partners where appropriate, under reasonable arrangements."

Then came the 1973 Budget, notable for drawing on advice from outside Treasury – the Coombs Task Force, with 33 ideas for extra revenue, and the Melbourne Institute's approval of further expansion. Outlays rose by 16 per cent, producing a deficit of \$600 million, yet the budget said little or nothing on inflation. As the Treasurer said, lamely: "Inflation is still a major problem in Australia, and the budget as such can do very little to overcome it, and what is required is co-operation with all levels of government and all sections of the community, and I hope we'll get that."

We now know, from the 1973 Cabinet papers, that statement disguised a huge disagreement between ministers, and between the government and Treasury. Whitlam and Crean had opposed a 23 per cent increase in expenditure and had told the Cabinet: "We face a budgetary problem of major magnitude...the truth is that no level of savings that can realistically be derived from acting upon the possibilities of the Coombs Report can fully meet our needs in any case." Dr Cairns was plumping for growth, while Treasury recommended tax increases or expenditure cuts, as it did even more vehemently the following year.

The next month, inflation reached 10 per cent, the figure implicit in the budget papers as necessary to reach the government's revenue goals. But the erosion of monetary value would soon threaten its commitments, and resuscitate the stagflation cycle. Ironically, the correct policies to control inflation – the ones applied today, were being urged by a visiting economist to the Reserve Bank, Professor Michael Parkin: "What I would like to see is that the government tells the Reserve Bank to slow down the rate of inflation by slowing down the rate of monetary expansion, by floating the exchange rate and by allowing the bond rate on government bonds to rise to the market equilibrium rate."

But instead of listening, the Treasurer returned to one of his pet subjects, credit extension. Something had to be done about building societies, merchant banks and the like: "It is necessary to bring some of the other areas of credit extension in the community under social regulatory device as well....I hope to do something about those areas, whether by legislation or by relaying on moral persuasion – and there's nothing wrong with moral persuasion, even in a secular age."

Trade Minister Jim Cairns had ideas of a new overseas trading organisation, specially to deal with the centrally planned economies of China and the Soviet Union, but in the end nothing came of it. Suddenly the Reserve Bank moved lending rates up to 8 per cent, there was a 5 per cent revaluation of the dollar, and the market found the government was promoting a credit squeeze. The debate began on the referendum to give the government control over prices.

Ten months after taking office, the Prime Minister reaffirmed his government's commitment to the maintenance of strong and prosperous Australian industries. But the next day Rex Connor announced the nationalisation of the North West Shelf's gas and oil reserves, transferring the responsibility for development, costing more than one billion dollars, to his shoulders. The Metals and Minerals Index of the Sydney Stock Exchange was now half its level of February. The Prices Justification Tribunal cut its teeth on BHP, agreeing a 9.5 per cent increase was justified, then granting 5.5 per cent, to curb inflation.

The Yom Kippur War brought the first OPEC oil shock – an increase in the crude price from US\$3 to US\$5.11. Which caused Mr Connor to talk about conserving the North West Shelf reserves. On a visit to Tokyo, the Prime Minister's statements assuring the Japanese that Australia would supply minerals and energy resources after its own requirements were met failed to satisfy:

**In so far as natural gas is involved in the development of the Pilbara, the objective will be to have wholly Australian ownership, and ...or control, ownership, and the AIDC may be one of the implements for achieving that and accordingly any overseas participation in the natural gas would have to be through the AIDC. On the other hand, iron ore is clearly a component in any development of the Pilbara, and this may be at various degrees – either a complete steelworks, or say, pelletisation. In neither case, would total Australian ownership be required.**

A small sidelight on the inflation problem – the Post Office's letter rate shot up from seven to 15 cents, and the cost of mailing books by as much as 220 per cent. As the year drew to a close, the Prices and Incomes referendum went to the people and was lost. The government adopted a policy of stimulating imports to counter inflation. Setting tariffs on electronic imports at 35 per cent would draw in cheaper television sets, but also sounded the death knell for local manufacturers and their component suppliers.

The oil crisis however frustrated this as the world recession deepened, the shortage of bunker fuel laying up shipping and delaying mineral exports.

This was the stocktake after the first full year of the Whitlam Government:

- Over-full employment constraining production
- A public service doubling in size
- A wages explosion developing
- Inflation up from 4.7 per cent to 12.9 per cent
- The A\$ up 24 per cent v the US\$ and 30 per cent against Sterling
- The bond rate above 6 per cent. Consumer interest rates 9 per cent and increasing.
- Australian business crying out for clarification of policies on resources, manufacturing industry, exports and investment.

Abroad, the USA was under an Arab oil embargo that lasted five months, crude prices jumped further to US\$11.65 a barrel, causing a global recession, worst in our major trading partner, Japan. It was an ominous scenario. The government's ambitions, if unmodified, could not have been more inappropriate for the circumstances. Things could only get worse. And in 1974, they did.

Australia's white hope Prime Minister was to be left lamenting, like Hamlet:

*The time is out of joint; O cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right!"*

*Geoffrey Luck was an ABC journalist from 1950 to 1976*



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# OBITUARY SIR NOEL FOLEY (1914-2005)

Gerard Henderson

I first met Sir Noel Foley in early January 1987. I had just taken up the position of executive director of the organisation which became The Sydney Institute and he was a member of the Institute's board; he was also chairman of Westpac. Soon after, Sir Noel invited me to morning tea at the Westpac's chairman's office in Martin Place. He poured tea from a fine tea-pot into bone-china cups; the table was adorned with doilies and serviettes made from the best linen and there were plenty of petite sandwiches.

The atmosphere was distinctly old fashioned but my host was a very modern man. During the course of our conversation, I mentioned how much I appreciated the fact that someone so influential in the Sydney business community was a member of the Institute's board. In reply, Sir Noel was very direct. He acknowledged that he was an important figure in Australian business but added that this would not be the case for long. Due to the bank's retirement policy, the chairman was required to step down by age 72 and Sir Noel was in his final weeks at Westpac. He told me that he was influential as Westpac chairman but that the situation would change once he retired. People would be friendly and respectful but he would no longer be able to call-in favours. And so it turned out. Sir Noel was a very practical man who had a realistic understanding of the world and his place in it.

Noel Foley was born in Townsville, Queensland, on October 19, 1914. His father, Ben was a school teacher who married Grace Warren. Noel was their only son and he had two younger sisters Coral and Olwyn (both deceased). In 1916 the family moved to Childers (south of Bundaberg) where they purchased a cane farm and, later, two newsagencies. Noel, a fine scholar who was also a

good sportsman, won a scholarship to Brisbane Grammar where he finished the final two years of his schooling. Subsequently, Noel won a scholarship to Queensland University where he completed a B.A. (Hons) in history in 1936. This was supposed to lead to a law degree. However, noting that so many barristers were what he subsequently termed "starving" in the immediate aftermath of the Depression, he decided to study commerce – finishing his second degree in 1939.

In 1936, at age 22, Noel Foley took up a position with the tobacco company W.D. & H.O. Wills in Brisbane. As part of his terms of employment, he was able to undertake his commerce degree. He commenced work in the drying rooms, moved to the auction floor and later to invoicing. Speaking at the funeral service, Noel's son Derek said that his father "almost quit" at this stage but was moved to sales – a position which he enjoyed and which involved travelling throughout Queensland. In 1940, at age 26, he was promoted to the position of sub-manager of the Brisbane sales branch. A brilliant business career beckoned.

But the struggle against Nazism was already under way and the Pacific War was soon to commence. Noel Foley wanted to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force but was initially rejected on medical grounds. He underwent a hernia operation and joined the AIF in 1942 – seeing service in the Torres Strait Islands and Papua New Guinea. Noel Foley attained the rank of captain and was twice mentioned in dispatches. At the end of the war he was in charge of some 40,000 Japanese prisoners-of-war on Bougainville. Like many of his comrades, Noel Foley rarely talked of war-time experiences. His widow, Jean, recalls a few late night conversations between Noel and some war-time colleagues, discussing their horror at the reality of combat. Until his death, Noel Foley was a member of the Westpac RSL Sub-Branch.

In 1945 Noel Foley married Lorna Watkins, an Army nurse, while on leave in Australia. They had three children – Deborah, Karen and Derek. The family moved to Sydney in 1948 where he worked for the parent company British Tobacco Company (Australia) Limited. He was appointed a director in 1951, became finance manager in 1953 and chairman and managing director in 1955, a position he held until 1977. Noel Foley oversaw the diversification of British Tobacco's businesses into the pastoral industry, soft drinks and manufacturing and changed the company's name

to Amatil. Former Amatil managing director John Elfverson describes this as a “brilliant move”.

The Foleys separated in the mid 1960s. According to Derek, his father was “always generous in spirit and financially” to his mother until her death in 1995. In 1972, Noel married Jean Duncan Laing, then the associate registrar at Sydney University. Derek describes their relationship as “two halves that made a whole – soulmates”. A very private man, Noel Foley only gave a few interviews in which he discussed his business life. He told Roland Markham (*Daily Telegraph*, September 21, 1956) that when at British Tobacco’s Sydney factory he relieved on every job – from unpacking the tobacco leaf to operating cigarette making machines. Profiled by Frances Stow in *The Australian Director* (December 1984), he said that he had once been a cigar smoker but had discontinued for health reasons.

Noel Foley was invited to join the Sydney board of the (then) Bank of New South Wales in 1964, becoming chairman in 1978. He was appointed to the board of CSR Limited in 1966 and was its chairman from 1980 to 1984. Frank Conroy recalls Noel Foley’s ironic comment that, of all the CSR board members, he was the only one with any first-hand knowledge of the sugar industry. The company diversified into mining during his time on the board. Noel Foley’s board positions were many and varied – including periods with Qantas and the NSW Electricity Commission. He was also, for a time, president of the World Wildlife Fund Australia and from 1976 to 1979 served as a member of the Prime Minister’s Economic Consultative Group during Malcolm Fraser’s prime ministership. He was also a chairman of the Graduate School of Management at Sydney University and a member of The Sydney Institute’s board where his contributions demonstrated good judgment based on common sense.

Noel Foley was a life-long political conservative but he was not a Liberal Party member. His one important intervention in politics occurred in September 1985 when he publicly supported John Howard – whose position as Liberal Party deputy leader had been challenged by Andrew Peacock’s supporters. Noel Foley gave a rare interview to the influential ABC Radio AM program on the eve of the contest. He did not advocate a vote for Howard but described him as a good thinker and said it would be a shame for the Liberal Party if he

were to go to the back bench. The then Westpac chairman certainly got his message across, albeit in a considered way. When Howard retained his post, Peacock stepped down and Howard became Liberal leader (for the first, but not the last, time). John Howard very much appreciated Noel Foley’s gesture of support.

Noel Foley was most prominent in business during his time as Westpac chairman. While a social conservative he was not opposed to change. At Westpac, Noel Foley presided over the shareholders meeting where the company’s name was changed from the Bank of New South Wales, following its merger with the Melbourne based Commercial Bank of Australia. In their book *Australia’s First Bank* (UNSW Press, 2004), L. Sharon Davidson and Stephen Salsbury record that “the meeting went on for some three hours with shareholders vehemently expressing their dislike of the new name”. In time, however, “Sir Noel Foley...succeeded in winning its acceptance by a narrow majority”.

There were quite a few gongs in Noel Foley’s distinguished career. He received the CBE in 1967 and was made a Knight Bachelor in 1978. Yet he was not at all pompous and treated everyone in a courteous fashion. Former Westpac chief executive Bob White recalls that the senior staff called the Westpac chairman by his first name. Frank and Jan Conroy fondly remember a trip from Seoul to their then home in Hong Kong where Frank headed Westpac’s Asian operations. Noel Foley carried Jan’s two extremely large brass giraffes on and off the plane. Frank Conroy (who became chief executive of Westpac) recalls that Noel Foley was “a thorough gentleman”. Jan Conroy looks back on a kind man who “was not at all stuffy”.

In retirement, Noel Foley continued his life-time involvement in farming and property along with his passion for golf. The last time I saw him was at The Sydney Institute where he listened, with evident pride, as Lady Foley spoke about her book on the history of the Quarantine Station at North Head. Sir Noel Foley died on January 30. He is survived by his widow, three children and five grandchildren.

An abridged version of this appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald*



# DOCUMENTATION

## THE ABC AND JOHN HOWARD'S (ALLEGED) "DEAL WITH GOD"

In his syndicated column (published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, and *The West Australian* on 8 February 2005) Gerard Henderson made the following reference to a comment by Toni Hassan on the ABC Radio National program *The Religion Report*.

**It appears that contemporary Christians face a contempt in sections of the media which is not extended to other religious, or secular, faiths. For example...on the ABC Religion Report last year (September 29), presenter Toni Hassan referred, mockingly, to "John Howard's deal with God". It's most unlikely that she would have been so dismissive of the beliefs of, say, a committed mainstream Muslim. There are many such examples of double standards in both the electronic and print media.**

David Busch (Executive Producer, ABC Religious Radio) wrote a letter to the editor criticising Gerard Henderson's column. The version published below appeared in *The Age* on 10 February 2005:

**Was Gerard Henderson being mischievous or just sloppy with his out-of-context quote of Toni Hassan on ABC Radio National's *The Religion Report* in his latest column? He writes that, in an item on the Family First party's preference deal with the Liberal Party in the last federal election, Toni Hassan "referred mockingly" to "Howard's deal with God". He says such dismissive treatment would not be given to Muslim beliefs, and it's one of many such examples of double standards in the print and electronic media.**

**Yes, Toni did open her item with the words "Howard's deal with God" - but the very next sentence makes it clear she was reporting on newspaper coverage of the time, and not commenting: "That's what the press were saying when it was reported that the Prime Minister had personally brokered a deal . . ." It was not mocking. It was reporting and analysis. That's our job. Gerard might be more careful with his source material in doing his.**

- David Busch, executive producer, ABC Religious Radio, Brisbane

Printed below is the full exchange which took place between Gerard Henderson and David Busch

following the publication of David Busch's letter. The correspondence is unedited, except for the correction of one small typographical error.

## FROM GERARD HENDERSON TO DAVID BUSCH - 10 FEBRUARY 2005

Dear Mr Busch

I refer to your letter published in today's *Sydney Morning Herald*.

In your letter you acknowledge that, during the *Religion Report* on 29 September 2004, Toni Hassan opened her item with a reference to "Howard's deal with God". Your letter continued:

**...but the next sentence makes it clear she was reporting on newspaper coverage of the time: "That's what the press were saying when it was reported that the Prime Minister had personally brokered a deal." It was not mocking. It was reporting and analysis. That's our job.**

I note your claim that Toni Hassan's reference to "Howard's deal with God" was not "mocking" but, rather, "reporting". In view of this, I assume that Toni Hassan and/or you have the relevant references in "the press" to the Prime Minister doing a "deal with God" - as distinct from, say, Family First or the Religious Right or whatever.

Maybe my memory is faulty in this instance. However, I do not recall one serious commentator - in the print or electronic media - maintaining that the Prime Minister was doing a "deal with God" concerning preferences in the lead-up to the 2004 Federal election.

If, as you claim, Ms Hassan's comment was not gratuitous mocking but, rather, mere reporting - then you will have the relevant newspaper reports. I would be grateful if you could advise as to precisely what was the "reporting" which Toni Hassan used to lead to her "analysis".

Yours sincerely

Gerard Henderson

## FROM DAVID BUSCH TO GERARD HENDERSON - 10 FEBRUARY 2005

Dear Mr Henderson

You might care to look at the *Weekend Australian* of 25-26 Sept 2004, Michelle Wiese Bockman's story: "Howard now has God on his side", beginning, "John Howard has personally brokered a deal ...". The thrust of this alone provides reasonable grounds for Toni Hassan's intro.

Beyond that (which is readily to hand), I am not inclined to invest time chasing old newspapers or radio/TV transcripts to fend off spurious charges.

Toni Hassan is a fine, professional journalist who does not mock people or view points. I refute your criticism of her performance in that program. Both in what she said and how she said it, Toni played a straight bat. As her editorial manager, I discussed aspects of the story with Toni in her preparation for that program, and I know that she carried none of the contempt, mockery or dismissiveness which you allege or insinuate.

The question remains - why didn't you use the rest of her opening paragraph in your article? This would have made it clear that Toni was not expressing any view of her own (totally inappropriate as that would have been), but rather offering a summary of other reportage. This would have rendered it useless to you as the example you wanted, but it would have been more honest. Even if you doubted the existence of such media reportage and commentary as the basis of her intro, you still deliberately took Toni's words out of context and inferred they were intended to express her attitudes or views, which they clearly were not.

This was a regrettable and unfair attack. Criticise all you like about Christians facing contempt from sections of the media, but don't project your agenda on to presenters who genuinely strive for fairness and accuracy.

Yours sincerely

David Busch  
Executive Producer  
ABC Radio - Religion

## **FROM GERARD HENDERSON TO DAVID BUSCH - 11 FEBRUARY 2005**

Dear Mr Busch

I refer to your email dated 10 February 2005 which I received this morning. I was surprised by the disingenuousness of your response to my note to you dated 10 February 2005.

As you will recall, you wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* (10 February 2005) claiming that Toni Hassan's reference on *The Religion Report* (29 September 2004) to "John Howard's deal with God" was not an act of mockery – but, rather, was based on the "reporting" of "newspaper coverage" at the time.

This is a most serious charge – which is damaging to my professional reputation. You alleged that I had quoted Ms Hassan out of context. Your line of attack was picked up by *The Age* which gave the following heading to your letter "Sloppy, Gerard".

The full context of Tony Hassan's introduction to *The Religion Report* on 29 September 2004 was as follows:

**John Howard's deal with God: that's what the press were saying when it was reported that the Prime Minister had personally brokered a deal to consult the Assemblies-of-God backed Family First party, in exchange for crucial preferences.**

In my email of 10 February 2005 I made the following point viz:

**I note your claim that Toni Hassan's reference to "Howard's deal with God" was not "mocking" but, rather, "reporting". In view of this, I assume that Toni Hassan and/or you have the relevant references in "the press" to the Prime Minister doing a "deal with God" – as distinct from, say, Family First or the Religious Right or whatever.**

In your reply of 10 February 2005 you wrote:

**You might care to look at the *Weekend Australian* of 25-26 Sept 2004, Michelle Wiese Bockman's story: "Howard now has God on his side", beginning, "John Howard has personally brokered a deal ...".**

**The thrust of this alone provides reasonable grounds for Toni Hassan's intro. Beyond that (which is readily to hand), I am not inclined to invest time chasing old newspapers or radio/TV transcripts to fend off spurious charges.**

This response is both intellectually sloppy and dishonest. You believe it is proper to accuse someone of failing to cite newspaper sources – yet, when asked to nominate the particular sources which were (allegedly) overlooked, you respond that you "are not inclined to invest time chasing old newspapers or radio/TV transcripts to fend off spurious charges".

In other words – there are no sources to back your claim. Except (allegedly) one – the text of which you distort. Michelle Wiese Bockman's article in *The Weekend Australian* on 25-26 September 2004 was headed "Howard now has God on his side". This was a sub-editor's heading – not a journalist's comment – and there was no reference to the Prime Minister doing a "deal" with God. Moreover, the first paragraph of the story made it clear that the reference in the heading was to the Assemblies of God. Ms Bockman's introductory paragraph read as follows:

**John Howard has personally brokered a deal with the Family First Party that would see the Coalition consult over policy with the Assemblies of God-backed party in exchange for preferences for most lower house candidates across Australia. (emphasis added)**

In your email of 10 February 2005 you deliberately deleted the words underlined above. Dishonestly, you attempted to give the impression that the newspaper report contained a reference to John Howard having “personally brokered” a deal *with God*. In fact, the reference was to the Prime Minister having “personally brokered” a deal with the *Family First Party*. This is a significant difference – and your version of the article amounted to a significant distortion.

Today I asked the Fairfax Library to check any reference in all major Australian newspapers to John Howard having brokered a “deal with God” in the period August 2004 to October 2004. The Library has advised that there was no such reference in any Fairfax or News Limited newspaper during this period.

In other words, there are no references to support Ms Hassan’s claim that “the press” had referred to “John Howard’s deal with God”. In view of this, the comment can only be interpreted as mockery – on Toni Hassan’s behalf.

I note that you were editorial manager with responsibility for *The Religion Report* when Tony Hassan’s mocking comment was made concerning “John Howard’s deal with God”. As previously stated, it is impossible to imagine *The Religion Report* making a similar mocking statement with respect to, say, a Muslim leader’s “deal with Allah”.

Yours sincerely

Gerard Henderson

## **FROM DAVID BUSCH TO GERARD HENDERSON - 16 FEBRUARY 2005**

Dear Mr Henderson,

In your email to me of 11/2/05, you accused me of being disingenuous, intellectually sloppy and dishonest. I do not accept the accusations or the reasons you make for them. Noting that this correspondence is assuming a tone and direction that obscures the original and central focus of our disagreement, I will, by way of conclusion, return to the two fundamental questions at stake - were you fair in your treatment of Toni Hassan’s quote in your article, and were you justified in concluding that her use of the phrase “John Howard’s deal with God” was necessarily mocking?

On the first question - were you fair in your treatment of Toni Hassan’s quote in your article? - I argue no. The entire opening sentence of Toni Hassan’s item makes it plain that her intent was not to make an editorial comment of her own but to acknowledge treatment of the issue by other media coverage. Your omission of the rest of her opening sentence failed to alert the reader to this crucial point. As I have

previously stated, even if you doubted the existence of media reportage and commentary as the basis of her intro, you still deliberately took Toni Hassan’s words out of context and inferred that she used them to express her own attitudes or views, which the context clearly shows they were not intended to do.

On the second question - were you justified in concluding that her use of the phrase “John Howard’s deal with God” was necessarily mocking? - as I understand your position, you essentially present an if-then-therefore argument:

- (1) IF ... there was no media coverage of the Family First preference deal with the Liberal Party in September 2004 which used the phrase, “John Howard’s deal with God”;
- (2) THEN ... on *The Religion Report*, Toni Hassan had no basis for justifying her use of the phrase by saying “that’s what the press were saying when it was reported ...”;
- (3) THEREFORE ... Toni Hassan necessarily must have “referred mockingly” to “John Howard’s deal with God” when she used that phrase.

My response is that there is a logical fallacy in the argument. Any absence of the phrase, “John Howard’s deal with God”, in those exact words in media coverage of the time, does not therefore necessarily mean that someone using that phrase in reporting on the issue is unjustified in so doing, or that they would do so in order to mock. The real issues are - are there reasonable grounds for the phrase having been used as describing the tenor of media coverage of the issue; and even if evidence offered is disputed, does this necessarily lead to a conclusion that the phrase was used to mock?

On the first issue, I argue that media coverage at the time does give justifiable grounds for Toni Hassan alluding to the issue in this way. *The Weekend Australian* article of 25-26/9/04 alone - with its reference to the Prime Minister brokering a deal with a church-backed political party, and carrying the headline (which is part of newspaper reportage), “Howard now has God on his side” - gives a journalistic tone and angle which forms a reasonable basis for Toni Hassan to refer to the issue in the way she did as an opening phrase to her story, in good faith and without mockery.

On the second issue, I argue that even if you reject any evidence put forward about the basis for her phrase, this still leaves us a long way from a conclusion that Toni Hassan was therefore mocking. In the audio world of radio, mocking would be revealed more in tone of voice and style of delivery than in the written word. One could put any number of inflexions on the phrase “John Howard’s deal with

God” to convey any number of meanings. In this instance, it is a matter of record that both in what she said and how she said it, Toni Hassan played a straight bat.

For these reasons, I have contended that your attack on her was regrettable and unfair. Your reference to charges being made which are damaging to one’s professional reputation is relevant here.

No doubt you would refute my points and have more to say about yours, but I see no fruitful purpose in continuing this correspondence and will conclude my involvement now.

Yours sincerely,

David Busch  
Executive Producer  
ABC Radio - Religion

## **FROM GERARD HENDERSON TO DAVID BUSCH - 17 FEBRUARY 2005**

Dear Mr Busch

I refer to your email of 16 February 2005 in reply to my note of 11 February 2005. If this is the best you can come up with, then it does not say much for the standards of intellectual honesty currently prevailing at ABC Radio – Religion.

### **TONI HASSAN’S REFERENCE TO “JOHN HOWARD’S DEAL WITH GOD”**

As your email makes clear, you continue to deny that Toni Hassan’s reference to “John Howard’s deal with God” was necessarily mocking. Well, if it was not mocking – how would you describe it? As ABC Radio Religion should be aware, it is impossible for the Australian Prime Minister to “do a deal with God”. How could he do this? With whom would be negotiate? What could Mr Howard offer God? And what could God (assuming such a deity exists) offer Mr Howard in return?

Clearly, Ms Hassan’s put-down reference to “John Howard’s deal with God” was not a serious statement. Since it was not a serious statement – then, clearly, it was mocking. That was all I wrote in that part of my syndicated column of 8 February 2005 which quoted from Ms Hassan’s introduction to *The Religion Report* (on 29 September 2004).

### **TONI HASSAN’S (NON-EXISTENT) EVIDENCE**

As your most recent email makes clear, you still regard Ms Hassan’s reference to “John Howard’s deal with God” as justified on the basis that she claimed that this was “what the press were saying when it reported that the Prime Minister had personally brokered a deal to

consult the Assemblies-of-God backed Family First Party, in exchange for crucial preferences”. The use of the word “were” in Ms Hassan’s introduction – as in “the press were” - implied that there were multiple sources for her claim. Otherwise, why use the plural when a singular would do?

The fact is there were *no* such references “in the press”. In neither your letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* (published on 10 February 2005), nor in your emails to me, have you been able to produce the name of even one journalist/reporter/commentator who referred to John Howard’s (alleged) “deal with God” – or words to that effect. Not one. As I have indicated, the Fairfax Library had advised that there are no such references in the Australian press during the period August 2004 to October 2004. None at all.

Initially you claimed that you were “not inclined to invest time chasing old newspapers or radio/TV transcripts to fend off spurious charges” to support your assertion. How convenient. Now you assert that Toni Hassan’s reference to “the press” in general can be justified by the citation of a one sub editor’s headline. This despite the fact that the first paragraph of Michelle Wiese Bockman’s story in *The Weekend Australian* (25-26 September 2004) makes it clear that the sub-editor’s heading referred to a deal negotiated between John Howard and the “Family First party” – which was also described as the “Assemblies of God-backed party”. There was no reference in *The Weekend Australian* story about John Howard doing a “deal with God” because the Prime Minister could not do a deal with God – even if he wanted to. *The Weekend Australian* clearly understands this – even if ABC-Religious Radio does not.

Of course, Toni Hassan’s reference to “John Howard’s deal with God” was a mocking reference. However, it comes as no surprise that those who are in denial deny the obvious. Especially since (as you acknowledge in your email of 10 February 2005) you were involved with *The Religion Report* at the time Ms Hassan’s comments were made – in the capacity of her “editorial manager”.

I note that you will not be continuing this correspondence. I also note that you have avoided responding to the accusation about *The Religion Report*’s evident double standards. That is, you refuse to state whether it would be possible to imagine *The Religion Report* making a (mocking) statement about a Muslim leader’s (alleged) “deal with Allah” – irrespective of whether or not there had been such a reference in the media. Your silence in this instance is most telling.

Yours sincerely

Gerard Henderson

# BOOK REVIEWS

John McConnell

## THE POWER OF SPEECH: AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTERS DEFINING THE NATIONAL IMAGE.

By James Curran.

Melbourne University Press, pb 2004

rrp \$34.95

ISBN 0 522 85098 7

In *The Power of Speech*, James Curran examines Australia's five most recent prime ministers in their role as national storytellers. The five Prime Ministers are, of course, Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser, Bob Hawke, Paul Keating and John Howard.

The author includes an important statement on page 235 of *The Power of Speech*. This concerns his primary purpose: "to use the intellectual lives and political language of the featured prime ministers as a means of exploring and explaining the general problem of nationalism in Australian political culture". Elsewhere, the author comments that his basic premise "is that the language of the prime ministers offers a unique and compelling view of the nation's transformation in the post-Menzies era."

*The Power of Speech* analyses how five Australian prime ministers (and their speechwriters) have defined the national image as they sought to relate their understanding of the national story. The book therefore constitutes rhetorical history. However, it is not a formal analysis of rhetoric nor is it an examination of the effect of rhetoric on policies or on the wider Australian community.

Rather, it is a history of elite political rhetoric. James Curran has worked as a policy adviser in the NSW

and Commonwealth Public Service. During 2004, he was the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library Visiting Scholar. Central to Dr. Curran's argument is the idea that the notion of British Australia survived up until the 1960s. The author challenges the viewpoint that Australians came to perceive themselves as a distinct people during the years in which John Curtin and Ben Chifley occupied the Lodge. Dr Curran argues that the national identity was incorporated within a concept of British race patriotism beyond the Curtin and Chifley years.

The notion of British race patriotism, he believes, was central to Australia's national self-image and survived essentially until the time of Sir Robert Menzies' resignation. James Curran argues that the belief that Australia was part of a wider British world prevailed as far as the mid-1960s.

This concept then collapsed. Britain was turning its attention towards the European Economic Community. The declining relevance of Britain to Australia opened up a political void that led to "a crisis of national meaning". Meanwhile, new issues were

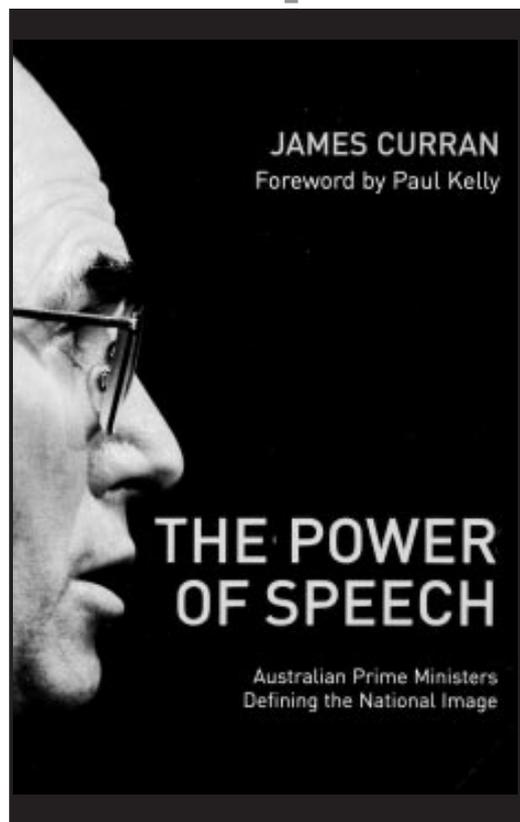
soon to gain prominence in the public discourse of Australia – multiculturalism, reconciliation with Australia's indigenous peoples, Australia's engagement with its Asian neighbours and an Australian republic.

James Curran argues therefore that "the central challenge for prime ministers in the post-Menzies period has been whether or not they could offer an alternative myth of community that would preserve social cohesion in the new era." Harold Holt, John Gorton and William McMahon all struggled to make sense of the changing times and context. Each was unsuccessful.

The major focus of Curran's book, however, is on the prime ministers who followed after Holt, Gorton and McMahon, beginning with Gough Whitlam from 1972. Gough Whitlam, the author argues, articulated a

"new nationalism" characterised by mildness and tentativeness, not to mention uncertainty in definition.

Dr Curran sees unresolved tensions between Gough Whitlam's "new nationalism" and a multicultural Australia. Malcolm Fraser, he believes, shared with Gough Whitlam a belief in the importance of a British



institutional heritage. Both harboured a mistrust of the nationalist idea – particularly if taken to excess. Where Gough Whitlam placed emphasis on the potential role for the United Nations, Malcolm Fraser saw hope in the (British) Commonwealth. Dr Curran argues that Malcolm Fraser was unable to resolve fully the tension that existed between liberalism and realism in his “world-view”.

Bob Hawke brought to the Lodge a consensus view of politics placing high value on the UN and the Arbitration Court. Paul Keating then intervened, with his “big picture”. According to James Curran, Paul Keating was the prime minister most closely associated with the “radical nationalist myth”.

Keating was the first Prime Minister, argues Curran, who displayed an aggressive Australianism and who gave expression to provocative anti-British statements. Paul Keating’s construct of national self-realisation incorporated a republic, engagement in Asia, Aboriginal reconciliation and international competitiveness. The latter element was to test core values held by a number of Paul Keating’s colleagues.

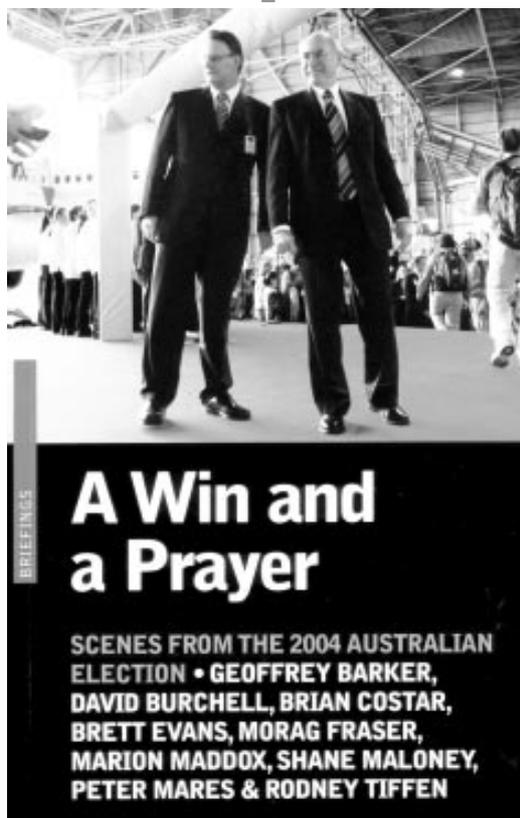
Finally, John Howard enters the Prime Ministerial scene directing his emphasis towards continuity in the Australian tradition. Australia, according to John Howard, need not choose between its history and its geography. John Howard sees the constitutional monarchy and the nation’s British heritage as a central and continuing source of national cohesion. He seeks to avoid what he regards as a perpetual seminar or endless navel gazing about the Australian identity.

While he proclaims that discussions about national identity amount to a needless distraction, John Howard has injected his values and views on the subject into the public arena when opportunities have arisen to do so. He blends a particular view of mateship and the ANZAC legend into his sense of continuity in the Australian tradition. According to Dr. Curran, John Howard is the Prime Minister who is least at ease with the “new Australia” of the post-Menzies era.

For a book that began life as a PhD thesis and which sets out to examine prime ministerial statements over

time, *The Power of Speech* is surprisingly interesting to read. The author seeks to provide historical context throughout his analysis. Nevertheless, a demanding assumption reigns that readers possess extensive historical knowledge.

The author highlights views unique to each of the five prime ministers, the early influences operating to shape their views, inconsistencies and unresolved tensions within their viewpoints as well as changing perspectives over time. James Curran’s analysis is constructed on carefully-documented research. He concludes that an emotional muddle and a rhetorical dilemma have accompanied the identity debate in Australia. A second edition some years hence, following a Costello or Beazley government, may make for particularly interesting reflection on the Howard years and the Australian identity.



### **A WIN AND A PRAYER : SCENES FROM THE 2004 AUSTRALIAN ELECTION**

**Edited by Peter Browne  
and Julian Thomas**  
UNSW Press, pb 2005  
rrp \$16.95  
ISBN 0 86840 936 7

*A Win and a Prayer* contains personal recollections of the 2004 federal election campaign. Various journalists and academics contribute

eleven chapters in just 132 pages. Peter Browne of Melbourne’s Swinburne University of Technology and Julian Thomas have edited the contributions.

Brett Evans, a producer and reporter on the ABC *Lateline* program writes on the battle for Wentworth in NSW where Peter King lost preselection and subsequently his seat in the House of Representatives to Malcolm Turnbull. Peter King was to receive less than one in five of the primary votes cast in Wentworth last year. Three-quarters of his preferences were to flow to Malcolm Turnbull.

*Financial Review* columnist Geoffrey Barker laments that short-term provincial politics trumped long-term global thinking in 2004. Marion Maddox writes on the role of religion and Family First in the election. David Burchell discusses the electorate of Macarthur in Sydney’s west and its present classification as a member of the Coalition’s camp.

Peter Mares, a senior research fellow at the Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University and a journalist with Radio National, focuses on the Victorian Mallee region and the valuable economic contribution that refugees are making there to the rural workforce. To Mares, this represents an intersection between compassion and practical self-interest. He contrasts this perceived intersection with the viewpoint expressed in ALP electioneering material in the Queensland marginal seat of Hinkler.

In Hinkler, Labor party campaign material lamented that illegal foreign workers were stealing Australian jobs. If the mood in the Mallee is any indication, Mares observes, then the Labor Party may have failed to recognise important changes underway in rural and regional Australia.

Rodney Tiffen, Associate Professor of government at the University of Sydney observes that John Howard's campaign spending risks moving Australia in a direction that is unsuitable financially in an ageing society.

Morag Fraser, adjunct Professor in the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty at LaTrobe University, writes about Brian Deegan's candidature in the South Australian seat of Mayo, held by Alexander Downer. Shane Maloney writes of Laborites and Greens in inner-suburban Melbourne. The foregoing chapters offer personal insights written mainly during the campaign.

The final two chapters, however, offer some thoughts in retrospect. Brian Costar, Associate Professor of Politics at Monash University and Peter Browne of the Swinburne University of Technology identify a number of problems confronting the Opposition – leadership (written before Mark Latham's resignation) and policy challenges, Labor's historically low primary vote and the party's chronic under-performance in Queensland. They argue – quite reasonably – that a change of government in 2007 should not be ruled out.

In the final chapter, Professor Tiffen hones in on one major tactical and one major strategic error in Labor's 2004 campaign. The former was the party's Tasmanian logging policy. The latter was Labor's lack of an effective response to the Coalition parties assertion about the parties respective economic credentials.

Professor Tiffen appears to underplay Mark Latham's role in the electoral defeat and concludes on a sour anti-John Howard note: "Politics have a way of bringing down those it exalts." Maybe so. But the Labor Party would be unwise to rely on the political cards automatically falling its way.

*John McConnell is the author of several senior textbooks*

# REVIEW OF THE REVIEWERS

Stephen Matchett

**Trying to record everything that matters in any period of the past is harder than it looks as Stephen Matchett learned from reading Alan Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia: A History, volume two* (South Melbourne, Oxford University Press), Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (second edition) (Port Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Frank Welsh, *Great Southern Land: A New History of Australia* (Camberwell, Penguin, 2004)**

The very idea that all aspects of a national story can be caught in a narrative history may seem presumptuous to academic historians. The guild's tradecraft emphasises analytical specialisation rather than the broad sweep of the generalist. In addition, many practitioners write as if history was an armoury of evidence to support their own ideologies, applying to the past the values and interests of the present. The endless argument over the number of indigenous Australians killed in frontier contact with settler society has as much to do with the personal values on our present debt to Aborigines as it does with the verifiable facts of the matter. Some experts are even unsure if there is enough hard information that all sides can agree on to provide the foundation of a meaningful debate.

The idea of a narrative incorporating the salient facts of national political and economic progress and the social situation of all citizens at a macro level was once the norm. But even if right-thinking scholars, and their regiments of research assistants, could get across all the detail to write a comprehensive narrative of Australia since the start of European settlement whose tale would they be telling? The great multi-volume narratives of the past, the Cambridge histories, Bancroft on the United States, Gipson on the British loss of its American colonies, were a bit light on detail of the lived experience of the powerless, and they ignored the staples of the cultural studies crowd - gender and sexuality.

The assumption that the conditions and attitudes of segments of society are so distinct and that what divides people is greater than what unites them

makes any attempt to compress the experience of all Australians into a single story problematic. If people of different ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations, and for the old fashioned, from different classes, were motivated by distinct values and experiences how can it be possible to produce a narrative that explains everything that went on?

Probably it is not, at least in a way that captures the experience of all segments of society in any era. These three narratives are all unsatisfying to varying extents because they only provide the bare bones of their Australian stories, albeit in Welsh's case at 718 pages it is a fairly full skeleton. However, while his big book is full of facts it has no themes at its foundation dealing with what has made Australians the people, in whole or part, who they are. Atkinson certainly does not suffer from this problem. His structure is held together by the themes he believes were central to shaping Australian society in his era of interest. But, unlike Welsh, his focus means far from everything is included.

As writer and reader, you pay your money and make your choice in how to engage with a period of Australian history. Yet, the condition of these two texts demonstrates how hard it is to do.

## HISTORY AS STORY

In contrast, Professor Macintyre's book demonstrates it can be done if an author is prepared to sacrifice engaging ideas of why Australia has become the nation it has in the interests of a utilitarian narrative that covers all the basics. While not a diverting book, it is an extremely professional one. Macintyre makes writing narrative history look deceptively easy. He covers all the issues and provides an overall sense of changes in Australia and Australians since 1788. Only scholars with a special obsession are likely to find fault with the way he has packed all the data in.

For anybody who wants a single volume history of Australia this is it. But does it meet any actual need? In the days when books were costly and the only

permanent source of information, a work such as this would have been used as a trusted source in school and community libraries for years.

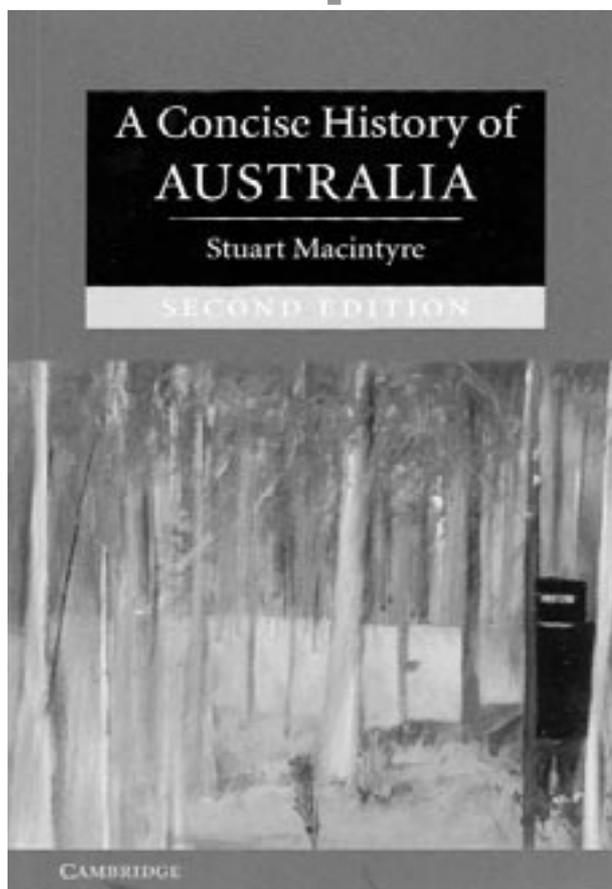
However, the borderless world of the web ensures experts can provide endless information on all aspects of the Australian past, easily updated at negligible production and distribution cost. The present generation of senior scholars grew up in an environment where books on their CV mattered most in academic promotion rounds. They are not likely to realise the potential of on-line resources in setting down a comprehensive record. But, over the next generation, comprehensive and authoritative projects will create Australian national histories on the web that cover as many issues and includes as many historical viewpoints as there are scholars to write. Within a generation printed histories like these will not be sources, they will be artefacts.

A suggestion which likely will not surprise Atkinson because it would reflect the complete change he argues occurred in nineteenth century Australia when it switched from an oral to a written culture.

## ACADEMIC SHORTCOMINGS

But if Atkinson had any thoughts of making this theme the basis for a book that sets out the comprehensive history of the era that interests him, his academic instincts got the better of him. This could have been an entertaining book for ordinary readers interested in their country's past. How Europeans shaped, and were shaped by Australia in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, has a resonance for our own age. Atkinson writes about an era when Australia saw the end of a stratified social order, where government was supposed to direct development and shape society, to a more egalitarian culture, where individuals were left to sort out their circumstances.

Certainly there were aspects of that age which were not all that different to our own. The old authority of the public sector was replaced by an independent culture where people expected the right to prosper



according to their own efforts. Atkinson is especially interested in the way the values and ideas of the age evolved. This is an interesting enough issue - it sets the context for the development of the popular image of Australian character at the end of the nineteenth century, a theme Atkinson will presumably address in his next volume.

But not necessarily in a way the generality of potential readers will find easily accessible, if his approach in this volume is any indication. Atkinson takes interesting themes and makes them obscure. Perhaps he was looking for a new way to explain the nature of an Australia on the threshold of modernity. Perhaps he simply sought to pursue ideas that intrigued him. Whatever his intent, Atkinson's approach makes this book tangential to the traditional themes of narrative history; the political and economic development of Australia and the physical circumstances in which people lived. This is a very academic effort and, as such, could be far worse. It is not especially badly written. The presentation of sources is disciplined and the practice of failing to provide documentation for polemical claims, sometimes committed by even senior scholars, is utterly absent. And Atkinson is clearly in command of his material, while he does not seek to show off the depth and breadth of his learning, there is clearly not much about nineteenth century Australia he does not know.

Sadly, neither does he do much to share his learning, certainly not with readers who like their history presented in the form of a straightforward narrative that describes and interprets the past. Moreover, from the way he writes it seems he is not much interested in what ordinary readers will take from his book. Much of the material he uses to illustrate his argument is obscure. Such as the book's conclusion, suggesting that his Australians were less like well-organised white ants than optimistic crimson crabs. This demonstrates an author whose desire for profundity exceeds his ability to communicate complex arguments in simple language. There are also occasions when common folk may mistake his subtle style for showing off, such as the comparison between Ludwig Leichhardt and Edgar Allan Poe (213). And he has a tin ear for anecdotes to explain ordinary people's lives.

At times, it seems he is less interested in how Australians made a new society than in the philosophic framework of their age. There is as much, probably more, on how the rights of indigenous Australians were fitted into philosophic frameworks as there is detail on the physical circumstances of their dispossession. And he seems more interested in the way ideas shaped Australia than economics or the exercise of political power.

Atkinson is writing social history but the context he creates emphasises ideas and the way the changing spirit of his age shaped society. This is all well enough. But it makes for a frustrating book that at times tells us why men and women thought as they did, rather than how they lived. Capturing an alien mindset is no easy task and for anybody not focused on spiritual and psychological dimensions of life Atkinson does not always achieve it.

## HISTORY AS MORAL EXPERIMENT

However, as Inga Clendinnen's superb study of first contact between indigenous Australians and the occupiers from 1788, *Dancing With Strangers*, demonstrates, it can be done by scholars with the ability to capture the meaning of ordinary events without burdening the analysis with erudite emphases that reflect their own personal fascinations. Clendinnen sought to illuminate the psychological experience of Sydney at its foundation as all the inhabitants lived it, with judging. In contrast, in his *Black Kettle and Full Moon* Geoffrey Blainey described the sheer slog of daily life in nineteenth century Australia, for people who shared a moral universe recognisable today but whose experiences were completely different.

Atkinson does not reconstruct the past to mirror his own era. But he certainly focuses on themes that appeal to him in analysing the way Australia grew and changed. This makes him less observer and more critic, deciding what his subjects should have found most interesting about their age, regardless of what they thought themselves. One of the book's core themes is the power of the written word, both in creating an orderly state and giving people the power to express their beliefs. But his admiration for the era of print dates from the digital age when the printed page needs defending. Nor does Atkinson's argument, that the belief among reformers that mass literacy could make for a more moral world (25), matter all that much in explaining the motivation of all but a handful of activists. For the vast majority of Atkinson's subjects, the written word was less a form of moral power and more the equivalent of electricity, a utility that was fundamental to life.

Atkinson's fascination with Australia as a laboratory for moral experiment necessarily means this book has very little to say about the way people lived. It is not that Atkinson lacks for material. His evidence of the ability of bushrangers to secure the tolerance of bush communities is extraordinary. In the hands of an historian with a storyteller's gift, it alone would make for a marvellous book. For Atkinson, however, such stories are just incidents to illustrate his argument over the way the Australian zeitgeist changed.

A model of the sort of social history Atkinson could have written already exists in the volume in the Bicentennial history series that looked at Australian society in 1838 and was co-edited by Alan Atkinson. Despite its coffee table format, all gloss stock and lavish illustrations; this was an excellent exercise in social history that has worn well. For a reader not deeply versed in the sources it seems comprehensive and it is certainly entertaining. And it provided a foundation for this volume, even providing some material, such as the illustration of a Hobart flogging from a Cornish paper (*Australians: 1838*, 376 and *Europeans in Australia*, 111).

While Atkinson does not ransack the past for examples of arguments that apply today, he does find very contemporary themes buried in nineteenth century Australia. Inevitably, there is the relationship between indigenous Australians and settler society.

Atkinson's emphasis on the deprivation of Aborigines is a reflection of current historiography. He endorses "the parameters" laid down by Henry Reynolds and Lyndall Ryan and dismisses Keith Windschuttle's contrary conclusions as having "barely affected the tradition followed here" (xxi). When added to Atkinson's argument that the writing of history should be even handed but underpinned by compassion (xviii-xix) he is giving fair warning that he looks for no explanations other than avarice in the way most settlers treated the Aborigines.

The moral case for this approach is set out in his essay, "Do good historians have feelings?" in Stuart Macintyre's recent anthology, *The Historian's Conscience* (Melbourne University Press, 2004) where he argues,

**...writing history, or presenting it in any form, is a social activity. It depends on an assumption of shared humanity. That assumption involves feeling, and not just an ornament and selling point. It follows that historians who fail to register the importance of feeling, whether explicitly or**

**not, cut themselves off from the roots of their discipline. (21)**

## A DARK SIDE

But what happens if wrong-thinking writers have feelings too? It is a self-serving argument, but it shapes the moral context of this book.

At the heart of Atkinson's endeavour is the way the democratising spirit brought with it murder. A great deal of the book focuses on how the ideals of the Enlightenment, that assumed the humanity of Aborigines was replaced by settlers' greed that needed little excuse to steal their land and murder them at will.

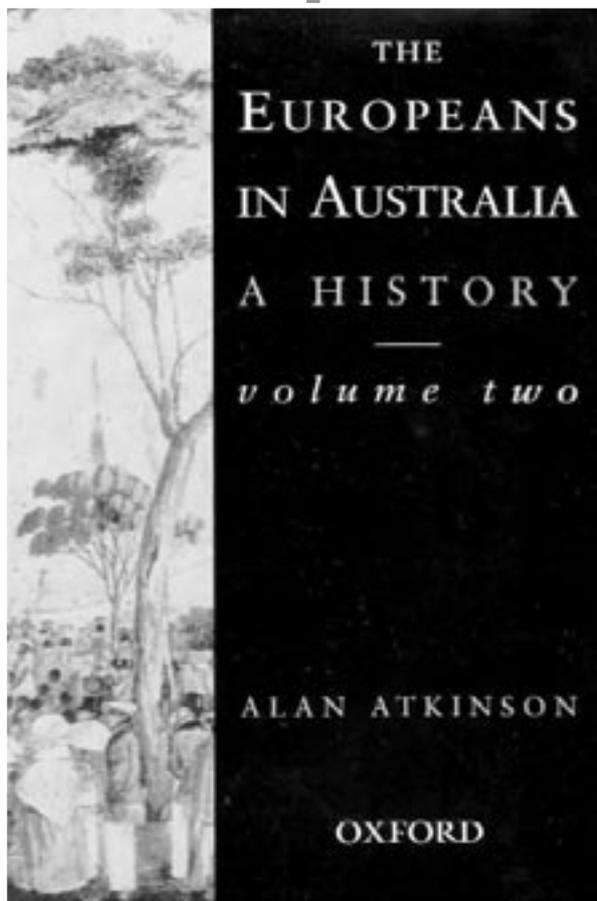
The way it happened is central to Atkinson's interest in the development of a democratic culture in Australia. It also allows Atkinson to engage with

another preferred theme of the intellectually orthodox – the way ordinary Australians were brutal and racist. Atkinson makes no comparisons between his own era and that of his subjects. But the moral middle class, the self-appointed keepers of the national conscience in the media, universities and public service who deplore the refusal of ordinary Australians to share their concern with asylum seekers and Aboriginal Australians will find examples in Atkinson's arguments of the long tradition of racism in Australian history.

And they will also find evidence that it was their occupational ancestors, the Imperial public servants who tried to defend both convict and black Australia from the rapacities of

private enterprise settlers. Atkinson's explanation of how the impetus of a humanitarian government was defeated in the 1830s could equally apply to the decline of public sector regulatory power in our own age:

**There was a new understanding of the way individuals ought to work and live together, a new scheme for social life, new methods of reflection. Power, including the**



**power of conscience, was to be more dispersed. Government was to be less self-sufficient and less centralised. (125)**

Atkinson is on the money in focusing on how the transformation of Australia from a collection of colonies run like government agencies to the precursors of parliamentary democracies laid the foundation for the way we live now. But his overall interests have less to do with the aspirations of ordinary people and how they developed into an Australian style as with the moral failings of his subjects. Atkinson does not condemn the ordinary people who are the extras in stories of spiritual struggle, but it is easy to get a sense, perhaps incorrect, that he would have preferred a modern Australia run by morally upright bureaucrats to the one we live in.

While Atkinson struggled to create a structure that explained mid nineteenth century Australia at least he had a go at analysing the morals and changing ideas of his chosen age. It is certainly more than Frank Welsh did in *Great Southern Land*. Writing narrative history is a great deal harder than it looks, at least if it is to be something more than a grab bag of facts and dates, which is what Welsh provides.

Academic historians will welcome this book. It supports the suggestion that history is discipline with a tradecraft that takes years of experience and formal training to acquire and that not everybody who spends time in an archive and writes up what they find is an historian. Not that there is anything that offends in Mr Welsh's work. His judgements are cautious and always supported with evidence. In a well-turned footnote (601) he succinctly puts the debate over the nineteenth century casualty rate among indigenous Australians in conflicts with the occupiers in the context of other settler societies without all the ideological opportunism that motivated some of the participants in the Windschuttle debate. However, he also pulls no punches in describing the outright racism that shaped the attitudes of politicians and most people in the nineteenth century.

Race is a theme he could have done a great deal more with, and there are times in the text when it seems about to emerge as a central theme. As with Atkinson, Welsh recognises that the core difference between nineteenth century popular opinion in Australia and the Imperial Government was the latter's dislike of the former's racism and that the idea of white Australia formed then was to continue for most of the next century. While his language is temperate, he makes it quite clear that indigenous Australians were simply dispossessed of their land:

**As British enthusiasm for protecting native peoples waned, their future looked precarious, and as power passed progressively to the colonists themselves, the very existence of Australian Aborigines became questionable as the tides of settlers, respectable and otherwise, swept into their ancient hunting grounds. (103).**

But Welsh is also impressed with what nineteenth century Australians achieved, especially the creation of a parliamentary political system based on a wide franchise in the middle of the century, followed a mere 40 years later by the creation of an elected national government:

**It could have been disastrous; very few of the African governments hurried into independence after the Second World War did not degenerate into corrupt oligarchies or blatant dictatorships, but the Australian colonies, (although corruption was not, and is not, unknown) shook down into self governing states within a very short time. In some respects, they became exemplars of democracy: adult male suffrage without property qualifications, equal electoral districts, votes for women, secret ballots, payment of MPs, were all achieved in some Australian colonies well before they were effected in the United Kingdom. (190).**

The distinction between communities that could lead the world in creating democracy while dispossessing the original Australians without a thought is an incredibly complex conundrum, one that overwhelmed Atkinson. But while Welsh is aware of it, he leaves the reader to infer the theme. This makes the book far less interesting than it would have been if Welsh had tried to explain rather than allude to the issue. Especially given his overall judgement that we, or at least the people who presume to tell us all what we should think, are too tough on ourselves:

**No country is without reproach, many much more serious, but it seems that Australian opinion-formers are reluctant to accept that they live in what is indeed a lucky country with an exceptional record of achievement. (xxxvi)**

## **HEAVY WITH FACTS, LIGHT ON THEME**

Sadly, it seems Welsh decided not to write a book that set out the ledger of national achievements and failures, both practical and moral. Instead, he read his

way through a prodigious pile of secondary sources and distilled them into a text that is always clear and concise. His fact checking for the most part is superb, although his editor was sufficiently challenged by the geography of the southern hemisphere to have Captain John Hunter sail west from Sydney toward Cape Horn (45) and for Governor King to gaze on the “desolate aspect” of the western side of the Blue Mountains in 1806 (75). However, these are minor matters and no reader will go far wrong by relying on Mr Welsh’s overall accuracy.

But without a big idea, an author has to work especially hard to make a long narrative worth the effort. And the absence of an overall argument means that all issues are treated as equally important and jammed in together. The result is that the structure of the book collapses under its own weight as Welsh works hard to ensure he does not leave anything out. His discussion of federation, for example, ends on page 307 and starts again on 320, after digressions on divers subjects, including bush-rangers and cricket. A summary of the politics of post World War I reconstruction includes a par on the abolition of Queensland’s Legislative Council (389). And his abrupt treatment of the years since the end of World War II reads like the work of a man who just wants to stop writing about Australia with errors creeping into his otherwise meticulous text. The Australian Democrats become the Australian Democratic Party, (349). Don Willesee was minister, not “head” (presumably meant to mean departmental secretary) of Foreign Affairs (520) Liberal politician Peter Shack becomes Richard (538). And he quotes Phillip Knightley’s claim that the CIA may have had a role in Governor General John Kerr’s dismissal of the Whitlam Government, while stating there is no source for the suggestion.

Certainly Welsh works hard to include everything that a general reader needs to know and obviously has a great sense that he is writing for the record. The problem is that his sense of the issues that matter dates from an age where lists of British

governors, which he includes, details of colonial premiers and where explorers went, were the stuff of proper history. His treatment of federation does not explain why the colonies united, simply setting out what the politicians said at meetings. And the book just ends when he runs out of history to write, concluding with the 2003 Rugby World Cup and a generalised conclusion that demonstrates, that for all his reading, Welsh still does not have much sense of the country Australia is becoming.

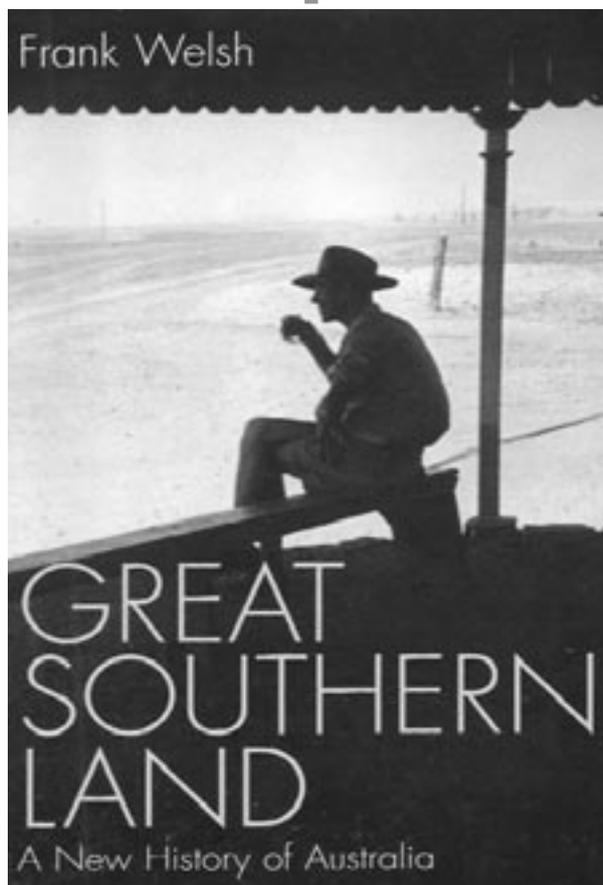
Perhaps having taken Knightley’s expatriate attitudes too seriously, Welsh writes that “Australians formed in a European tradition” are spiritually isolated – although we may not know it. In addition, Australia he adds “sits uneasily” near “Asian countries of different cultures” (571), Presumably we get on fine with people whose native games are Rugby and cricket and beer is brown. For a people uncomfortable with Asia, our emerging trading patterns and immigration policies demonstrate we are not doing too badly. And our response to the tsunami disaster was hardly the work of a nation uncomfortable with the neighbours.

The lack of an overall theme, and an understanding of modern Australia, is obvious with Welsh’s final advice. What we need to make the country the best it can be is a popular movement based on the thinking of elder statesmen that addresses our national ill - too much politics (572). Oh goodie! A call for an inquiry! Perhaps Mr Welsh spent so much time here he went native.

If there were no other narrative histories of Australia, this book might be useful. But without anything especially intriguing to say the time taken to plough through its 700 odd pages pays a doubtful return on investment.

## HOWARD HATING CONTINUED

For readers with little time to invest in a single volume history of any, or all, eras of European



Australia Professor Macintyre's short book provides a good return. It is not especially well written and no one will ever accuse the author of ever entertaining his audience. Yet as a scholar of decades standing, he is a manifest master of his material, and as Atkinson and Welsh both demonstrate, writing narrative history is harder than it looks. But like Welsh, he doggedly slogs through the decades, in a way that makes the book read like notes prepared by an academic with a lot of history to cram into too few lectures. And like Atkinson, he is obviously anxious to demonstrate he is no mere grubber of facts by putting his own spin on the past.

This may account for Macintyre revising the book, first published in 1999 and discussed in SIQ (2, IV August, 2000). The publisher's puff assures us that the second edition, "incorporates the most recent historical research on frontier violence between European settlers and Aborigines and the Stolen Generations". But readers who part with their \$30 for the benefits of Macintyre's wisdom may be surprised at how little he has to say on the most recent research debate on these, or other issues. The occasional new half page and toned down pars hardly qualifies as new material and one major work Professor Macintyre appears to have missed altogether is Inga Clendinnen's remarkable book.

Or how mildly he says it. Professor Macintyre is an enthusiastic advocate for the guild of university historians. He certainly has defended his colleagues against interlopers, especially Keith Windschuttle, who has disputed the academic orthodoxy on the fate of Aborigines over the past two centuries of Australian history. However, in this second edition, Macintyre is positively pacific in his treatment of Windschuttle's contentious claim that some academic treatments of indigenous deaths were less than rigorously researched.

Rather than report, let alone endorse, the comprehensive criticisms of Windschuttle's research Professor Macintyre is positively polite, providing a fair description of his argument. The fault in fact, lies less with Windschuttle than those "conservative publicists" (59) who seized on his argument and used it for their own evil ends. This is a good deal more reserved than his denunciation of Windschuttle in his 2003 book, *The History Wars*, where he wrote, "it is the absence of any sense of this tragedy, the complete lack of compassion for its victims, that is the most disturbing quality of Windschuttle's rewriting of Aboriginal history". (170)

Certainly there is useful new material on other issues, on the lack of a role for the clergy in federation (137), the civil religion of Anzac (162) and an expanded discussion of the inability of

government to deal with the Depression (181). But none of it a new edition makes.

And there is coverage of those chosen subjects of leftist intellectuals who have lost the argument on economics and retreated into moralising - the condition of indigenous Australians and the treatment of asylum seekers. And here Professor Macintyre occasionally loses his grip. Thus, he writes of the Howard Government's keeping boat people out of continental Australia:

**This was the Pacific solution, a chilling title that the prime minister apparently devised without any awareness that Hitler had proclaimed a solution to his own problem of an unwanted people. (270)**

So if the phrase was innocent in its intent why sneer? Connoisseurs of Howard hating will remember William Maley pulled the same sort of stunt in an essay in Robert Manne's *The Howard Years* when he used language, which appeared to compare Australian voters who returned the Coalition in 2001 with the Germans who voted NSDAP in 1933. (SIQ 2, XVIII, 2004)

But for all the overt propagandising in his discussion of the Keating and Howard years most of Professor Macintyre's new material written for the second edition is fair and balanced. Overall it is far from a bad book, covering an enormous amount of territory in a limited text. It takes a great deal of learning to credibly say so little about so much. In the comprehensive, yet succinct way he deals with his subject Professor Macintyre provides a far greater return on investment than Welsh. Only general readers with time and a great deal of tolerance should invest in Atkinson's much bigger book on a much smaller subject.

## **MEDIA - (LACK OF) INTEREST**

None of these books excited much interest among the mainstream media. This may not upset Atkinson and Macintyre, who if they are typical of the academic history guild will not care what outsiders think, but it is hard for Welsh, who as an independent scholar has to find an audience where he can. Yet for all three books to be unknown to the mass of general readers interested in new ideas about the Australian past seems a sad return for such an enormous amount of work. And while reviews in the broadsheet media no longer make or break a book in the way they did a generation ago they remain the single easiest way for the merits of new works to reach a large audience.

But the literary editors were not having a bar of Macintyre or Welsh. Perhaps the former looked too

much like a textbook to appear of interest to general readers in search of informative entertainment. Certainly, the reviewers, having ignored the first edition were never likely to embrace the second. What little interest there was focussed on Atkinson, whose first volume made a mark with an admiring Nicolas Rothwell when published over seven years ago (*The Australian*, 29 October 1997).

Back then Rothwell wrote that what Atkinson was offering was a transformation in the way Australians understood their past. Rothwell was writing in the lengthening shadow of the Hansonite horror and he saw Atkinson as writing in an era of profound change for cultures and peoples:

**Power. The sacred. The clash of imaginations. No wonder Atkinson feel's Australia's present condition can be illuminated by the thinkers and shapers of its past. The same debates that held sway continue – debates over the interests of rival groups and races, the rights of the few and the many, the contest of idealism and principle versus mass democracy.**

But the years have not been kind to Atkinson's image of colonial Australia as it relates to the present. The issues of identity that seemed so important when Rothwell reviewed the first volume, race relations and the reshaping of Australia by the conquerors, exercise few participants in a popular debate now dominated by the practical, rather than ideological impact of indigenous dispossession. And Pauline Hanson's performance at the last election was, most kindly, a pathetic irrelevance.

Now it is Atkinson's methodology that excites praise. Mark McKenna (*The Age*, 11 September 2004) thought highly of the new volume for the way it stands outside the strictures of a traditional narrative history. (Although he appears to have intended the comparison with Manning Clark as a compliment.)

**In deciding to walk in the footsteps of Manning Clark and create his own multi-volume history of European experience in Australia, Atkinson avoids the trap of making the past behave itself. He is not one to smooth over cracks in evidence and argument until history is packaged in a neat linear narrative – either as a triumph of nationhood or a tragedy of lost opportunity. *Europeans in Australia*, structured thematically and conversationally in style is mercifully free of the constraints of a chronological run-through or colony-by-colony coverage.**

John Hirst (*Australian Book Review*, September 2004) was less convinced. Certainly he liked the way Atkinson was following the path of Manning Clark who “rescued Australian history from blandness and predictability”. And even better Atkinson refuses to see history through party political allegiance. “It does not look as if he is going to make Clark's mistake of thinking the quality of Australian civilisation depends on the party complexion of the government in office – for Manning, finally, it had to be Labor”.

Hirst also saw importance in Atkinson's emphasis on the change from an oral to a written culture, which “recast the standard events in our history”.

But he challenged Atkinson's argument on the foundation of our political culture, unsurprising from the premier scholar of the foundation of Australian political culture. Hirst says Atkinson is “very misleading” to call the men who introduced male suffrage “democrats”, saying that they were “solid bourgeoisie” who disowned the name “democracy”:

**It is a strange lapse in a scholar who generally is wary of all labels and who makes no attempt to defend this one. The point is not inconsequential: that there was only very limited talk (sic) about democracy throws doubt on Atkinson's characterisation of this society.**

And Hirst found some of the book's more elliptic announcements a chore: “The writing is generally open and accessible, enlivened by stories and episodes, but it is interspersed with Delphic pronouncements where the themes of the book are reduced to code”. His conclusion though more generous than some of the substance of his review was supportive:

**I prefer a more prosaic ordering, but I welcome the book. Atkinson is our most intrepid explorer and though I can't fully follow this report of his discoveries, I have been instructed by his fresh observations and novel theories, which repel that ever-returning blandness.**

Perhaps he was referring to narrative historians who play it straight, like Welsh and Macintyre, for example.

*Stephen4@hotkey.net.au*



## FROM ALGERIAN ARMY OFFICER TO WRITER

*Function co-hosted with the Sydney Writers' Festival*

Yasmina Khadra is the nom de plume of Mohammed Moulossehoul, an Algerian army officer. His first books were thrillers, set in today's Algeria – a country where over 50,000 people were killed in civil war after the elected fundamentalist party was removed by military coup. He is also the author of two other books published in English – *In The Name of God* and *Wolf Dreams*. He now lives in France.

When Moulossehoul was identified his loyal readers in Algeria and France were shocked. Yasmina Khadra – “Jasmine Green” – was a man. And also a former army officer who had spent eight years fighting armed Islamist radicals. He had lived behind barrack walls. His escape to freedom and literature was a mental refuge from the life he had led since his father had dumped him in a military academy at the age of nine. His novels are critical of both Algeria's Islamists and the politicians who run the country.

**SPEAKER: YASMINA KHADRA**

(Algerian army officer turned author, most recently, *Swallows of Kabul*)

**TOPIC:** *From Army Officer to Writer of Fiction*

**DATE:** Tuesday 24 May 2005

**\*\*Bookings from 10 May only\*\***

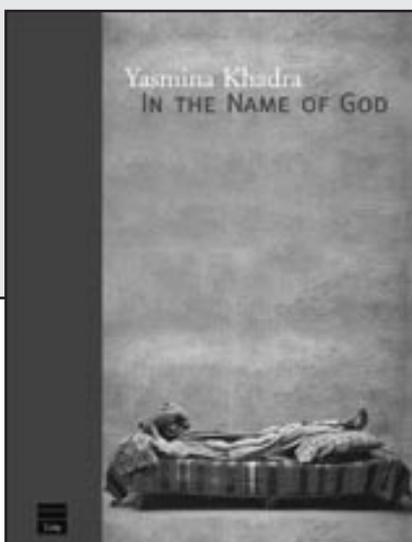
**TIME:** 6 pm for 6.30 pm

**VENUE:** Dixson Room, State Library of NSW, Macquarie Street, Sydney (*note time*)

**RSVP: Ph: (02) 9252 3366 Fax: (02) 9252 3360**

**OR mail@thesydneyinstitute.com.au**

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## LEADERS AND THE PAPAL LEGACY

**History made or in the making, Stephen Matchett reviews the scope of editorial opinion surrounding the death of Pope John Paul II.**

**W**ITH 26 years since the death of the last pope, what leader writer could resist using the departure of Jean Paul II to, ahem, pontificate? Which is exactly what almost of all them did, in editorials that, for the most part, were balanced and thoughtful, if very similar. This was predictable, probably unavoidable. The facts of the Pope's career led to inescapable arguments.

Some leader writers stuck to statements of the bleeding obvious. Like the *Herald Sun's* insight (8 April) that, “the death of John Paul II is a momentous occasion in the lives of the world's Catholics”. Which it followed with an explanation of what would happen next (9 April). “When memories fade of what must be the most remarkable religious celebration of death in modern times, the Pope's legacy will be more carefully examined”

But most of the leader writers did not want to wait. *The Mercury* (4 April) juxtaposed his role in defeating communism with his spiritual rulings low impact.

**... it was his spiritual teachings that proved difficult for an increasingly sophisticated western world. In the West, the Pope's words no longer rule the lives of rank-and-file Catholics. One only has to note the miniscule birth-rate in Italy – once the most conservative of Catholic countries – to realise that the Church's moral teachings on birth control have few adherents. In Australia, the Catholic Church nominally has more followers than any other religion. But few Australians await the views of the Vatican before making their own moral judgements.**

In Adelaide, *The Advertiser* (2 April) agreed:

**It is ironic that the first Pope of the modern ear, the global economic era, has welded the Roman Catholic Church to the values of the 1900s. ... His legacy as the most travelled and accessible Pope in history may be overshadowed by his refusal to move the theology of the church into the new century.**

The *Courier Mail* (4 April) was more forgiving. While the leader pointed to the Pope's conservatism on the “a to e” of reproductive ethics, (“artificial contraception, abortion, artificial conception,

ethanasia and embryonic stem cell research”) it also acknowledged the consistency of the Pope’s argument for “the sanctity and dignity of life from conception to the point of natural death”.

And while, according to the paper, John Paul’s teachings have not prevailed, “he leaves a framework for debate that will ensure the church is central to those issues for decades”. And the church in “stronger shape than he found it”, a judgement somewhat at odds with the supporting statement that Catholicism is growing in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe but “the picture is mixed in the US and Australia, where a determined fightback in terms of priestly vocations is bringing greater success in some places than in others”. Which can mean whatever readers want it to.

The *Sun Herald* (3 April) agreed that although the number of Catholics had increased, John Paul II had failed to control his flock: “Millions of Catholics daily exercise their own conscience and defy church teaching on artificial birth control”. And while the paper praised his “pivotal role in the demise of communism and the spread of democracy in Eastern Europe”, it saw him as losing the battle against materialism in the West:

**The Pope sees many Western nations, especially in Europe, as living in apostasy. The Europeans the Pope helped liberate from communist ideology have fervently embraced another Western capitalism much to his dismay.**

Even with poor punctuation, the message was clear enough.

So was that offered in *The Age*, (2 April) which admired John Paul II, albeit, it seemed, not without difficulty. The paper went hard on the dissension the pope caused by his opposition to ordaining women and married men:

**John Paul, a stern upholder of orthodoxy, resisted many of the liberalising theological currents that swept through the Catholic Church in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. During the Wojtya papacy, Rome resisted its authority over reform-minded bishops and dissenting theologians.**

It was instructive that the paper attacked the Pope on issues that appeal to the moral middle class before turning to more substantive concerns:

**The strict ban on so-called ‘artificial’ means of contraception remain in place, despite evidence that few Catholics comply with it and despite the fact that in Africa and other AIDS stricken parts of the world the use of condoms is as much a means of saving life as of preventing pregnancy. Also, demands by lay Catholics for greater accountability by the clergy in the wake of the pedophilia crisis have been peremptorily dismissed. To**

**the Pope’s critics, the intransigence reflects a failure to understand the modern world and threatens to make the church increasingly irrelevant with it.**

But after explaining his failings, the leader proceeded to celebrate his achievements:

**...the divisions within global Catholicism that are so apparent at this time will never be remembered as the whole of John Paul’s legacy. Only a year after his election he returned to his native land and, in a series of speeches and sermons to the crowds that flocked to hear him, threw down a challenge to Poland’s ageing communist leaders. The church, he reminded them, had always aided and encouraged the Polish people in their resistance to oppression and would not cease to do so. It was a clarion call that was followed shortly after by the foundation of solidarity ... and by growing movements of non-violent protest in other Soviet bloc countries. As former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev later said, almost nothing that happened in eastern Europe between 1979 and the final downfall of communism in 1981 (sic) can be understood without referring to the example set by the Polish Pope.**

That *The Age* stepped outside its inner-city ethos of social radicalism and public sector power long enough to say something positive about an enemy of socialism is impressive enough to excuse its being out by a decade on the end of communism in Europe.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* (4 April) also looked at the pros and cons of the Pope’s performance. In the process, the paper demonstrated what it thought mattered most in assessing his career. The Pope’s role in the final defeat of twentieth century tyranny was dealt with in less than a sentence, “John Paul II could take credit for having played a key role in the collapse of communism in Europe”.

However, the paper devoted far more space to “the many questions left hanging by this pontificate”. These included clerical sex abuse and contraception and the way the Pope had upset Catholic women as well as Asians and Africans, presumably of both genders:

**... he arguably alienated a generation of women – and their male supporters – by not only affirming the ban on the priestly ordination of women but also banning further discussion on the matter under any circumstances. His appeals to Catholic orthodoxy fell largely on deaf ears in the Western church; his insistence on the universal applicability of a distinctly Roman style of Catholicism caused deep and still unreconciled anguish among Catholics in Asia and Africa.**

# MORRIS WEST – THE WRITER

**M**orris West died at the age of 84 in 1999. His heyday as a writer was the 1960s and 1970s. He had the great good fortune to have one of his best known books, *The Shoes of the Fisherman*, published on the day on which Pope John XXIII died in 1963, an unforeseen publicity coup. Through the 1980s and 1990s, however, West's fiction became increasingly issues-driven and polemical. His stories became devices to link a string of sermons. While it was clear that West had big things on his mind, his fiction suffered as a result.

Morris West had a lot to say about tyrannies within the Catholic Church and came to enjoy a kind of guru status among Catholics who saw their rich tradition being atrophied by an institution too much concerned with its own status. He spoke a lot of common sense. Maryanne Confoy has just produced a biography of West that makes plain that there is much to ponder in the life of the man who generated so many words and yet remained something of a mystery, not least to himself.

**SPEAKER: PROF MARYANNE CONFOY RSC**  
(Professor of Practical Theology,  
Jesuit Theological College, and author,  
*Morris West Literary Maverick*  
[John Wiley])

**TOPIC:** *Remembering Morris West*  
**DATE:** Wednesday 25 May 2005  
**TIME:** 5.30 pm for 6 pm  
**VENUE:** 41 Phillip Street, Sydney 2000  
**LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**  
**RSVP:** (02) 9252 3366

**ENQUIRIES: PH: (02) 9252 3366**  
**FAX: (02) 9252 3360**

**OR mail@thesydneyinstitute.com.au**  
**WEBSITE: www.thesydneyinstitute.com.au**



But *The Sunday Telegraph* (3 April) was not willing to wear any idea of the Pope as an out-of-touch reactionary:

... in many ways, Pope John Paul II was a consummate progressive, even if he would not bow to the prevailing winds of political correctness and social fashions. For it was he who broke rules and reset the course of the Catholic Church in the modern political age.

And to great effect, according to the Monday edition of its stable mate (*Telegraph*, 4 April).

... he saw no human problem, no political impasse, no moral conflict as being outside the realm of his churchly influence. He took on the commissars of world communism and offered his prayers that those who suffered under their tyranny would be delivered, and so they were. He chastised the Western world for what he saw as its obsession with consumerism and capitalist accumulation – and world leaders took note.

*The Australian*, (2 April 2005) agreed, in spades, pitching the Pope as a great man, as much for his political as religious impact:

By the force of his extraordinary personality, the clarity of his message and his immense courage he has been a figure of vast consequence who shook the foundations of the world. While very few have agreed with every single thing he said or did, his influence on the world has been overwhelmingly positive. John Paul II has loved God, but he also loved human beings and regarded each human being as sacred and imbued with innate dignity, and above all deserving of freedom. His remarkable personality was forged in the crucible of the two monstrous ideologies of 20th-century Europe – Nazism and communism. He detested both, he resisted both, he understood both.

The paper also praised him for his moral message:

The Western world is awash with self-indulgence and the pursuit of instant gratification. It hardly needed a world leader to tell it that this was all OK. Instead John Paul II has taken the much harder road of trying to remind the West of God and the obligations of morality.

A leader can be a very bully pulpit.



# GERARD HENDERSON'S **MEDIA WATCH**

## **A BOTTLE A DAY KEEPS JOHN HOWARD AWAY**

**Q**uestion: Why does leftist (semi) retired journalist Mungo MacCallum drink so much liquor?  
**A**nsWER: John Howard, of course.

Now, this may surprise some former residents of Canberra who recollect Mungo's days as a member of the Parliamentary Press Gallery in the 1960s and 1970s. Assuming, of course, that they still can remember. Anyrate, journalist Glenn Milne can recall the days when – shall we say – Mungo drank for Labor and barracked, and then wept, for Gough Whitlam. As Milne wrote recently in the *Sunday Telegraph*: “MacCallum can be most kindly described as a broken down journalistic relic of the Whitlam era who, in his final days in Canberra, was an object of journalistic pity around the bar of Old Parliament House”. (*ST*, 12 December 2004).

However, another interpretation has been placed on your man Mungo's approach to liquids, of the intoxicating kind. Step forward Jenny Garrett, MM's partner of the past two decades or so. Interviewed by Stephen Lacy for the *Good Weekend* magazine's the “Two of Us” series, Ms Garrett spoke about her life with Mr MacCallum.

**He [Mungo] distresses me when he can't see beyond the depression of the immediate. After the election was lost, he was very depressed. We both literally cried. He's a very passionate man. He yells at the situation, he yells at the stupidity of the Australian populace, he yells at his journalist colleagues, who he feels have let him down terribly. Well he's depressed, he drinks to the point where I think it's endangering his health – at least a bottle of wine a day. We blame John Howard for a lot of things, and yes, John Howard drove him to drink. (Good Weekend, 12 February 2005).**

So it's official. Mungo MacCallum does not drink because he is thirsty. Not at all. No – MM drinks because John Howard drove him to drink. That's why. In view of Mungo MacCallum's hatred of the Prime Minister – and in view of his, er, past form – it is surprising that the Howard impact on MacCallum is only “at least a bottle of wine a day”, Rather than two or three. Anyone for half a dozen? But that is Jenny Garrett's story – as told to the *Good Weekend*.

## **MUNGO AND THE TOILET BOWL**

It may be that one-time publisher Michael Duffy, who currently occupies the chair of the ABC's “right-wing Philip Adams”, likes authors who can loosen up a bit during the day and into the night. In any event, Mr Duffy chose MM as the final author he would publish before closing down his Duffy & Snellgrove imprint. Duffy & Snellgrove contracted the Oceans Grove (on the New South Wales north-east coast) based MM to write an account of the 2004 Federal election. The tome, which is titled *Run, Johnny, Run: The Story of the 2004 Election*, was launched on 7 December 2004 by the (then) Labor leader Mark Latham.

As the principal publisher at Duffy & Snellgrove, Michael Duffy would have approved all Mungo MacCallum's words in *Run, Johnny, Run* as fit to print. So, let's have a peek at what the author said about John Howard – and what the publisher chose not to spike or to tone down. At times the author states his individual position. On other occasions he reports the collective (but not necessarily sober) view of the front bar at the Billindugel Hotel. Let's go to the text:

**Pages 3-4.** According to MM, the journalist Ian Fitchett once declared, during “the course of a well-lubricated conversation in the old Non-Members Bar at Old Parliament House: ‘That Johnny Howard is like an unflushable turd – you know, the one that floats around on top of the toilet bowl. You keep pulling the chain and just when you think you've got him around the S-bend, the bastard bobs back up again’”. Funny and perceptive, eh? Well, apparently, Michael Duffy thought so – and put John-Howard-As-Unflushable-Turd comment on the back cover of Duffy & Snellgrove's *Run, Johnny, Run*. Really. It was not a promising start.

**Page 9.** According to MM, John Howard's peers once “openly referred to him as ‘the little cunt’”. He provides no evidence for this assertion which, wait for it, is supposed to be clever.

**Page 17.** According to MM, Arthur Sinodinis (John Howard's chief of staff) has a name which rhymes with “penis”. How about that? MM even re-lives his undergraduate days by putting this thought to verse, of the ditty kind: “Howard's hatchet man, Art Sinodinis/ Of huge ego but miniscule penis.” What a wit.

**Page 27.** According to MM, presenting cricketer Steve Waugh with the Australian of the Year award

would “normally have had Howard creaming his jeans”. But, not on this occasion, apparently. Well, thanks.

**Page 30.** According to MM, John Howard resembles a “crotchety old man complaining about his hearing aid”. Incisive critique, this.

**Page 66.** According to MM, “Alan Ramsey in the *Sydney Morning Herald* revealed that Howard was now referred to by his colleagues as ‘the short chap’”. MM reflects: “Oh well, it’s better than ‘the little cunt’.”

**Pages 86-87.** According to MM: “As most drinkers will know, the three Great Australian Lies are: (i) the cheque is in the mail, (ii) some of my best friends are Aborigines, (iii) I’ll only put it in a little way, and if it hurts I’ll take it out again”. What, may you ask, is this all about? Just as well you didn’t. Nor, presumably, did Michael Duffy.

**Page 89.** According to MM, Arthur Sinodinis is the type of person “who’d prison his grandma’s verbenas”. Your man Mungo is a poet as well – or, almost so.

**Page 95.** According to MM, comparisons had been made between John Howard and a “shithouse rat”. He does not source the claim.

**Page 120.** According to MM, he and his friends have been working on a slogan to match the Howard Government’s line that Australia should not cut and run from Iraq: “The best anyone could come up with in response was a campaign showing Howard and Costello, and the slogan ‘Don’t vote for a cunt and a runt’.” Funny, eh?

**Pages 122-123.** According to MM, the front bar at the Billinudgel Hotel is of the view that Labor’s female “candidate in the seat of Richmond is an ex-bloodie-cooper, who seemed a rootable enough sort of sheila, but once a copper always a copper”. Now let’s have another drink with the blokey blokes.

**Page 144.** According to MM, the front bar at the Billinudgel Hotel refers to John Howard as “the little cunt”. See Pages 9 and 66.

**Page 151.** According to MM, when John Howard threw parties at Old Parliament House he ran a meat market, sanctioned the spiking of the fruit punch and acted as “a procurer and a pimp”. MM asks the Prime Minister to “apologise for his promotion of promiscuity, adultery, marriage break-up, unwanted pregnancies and abortions”. Apparently MM is serious. Which suggests that liquor can really damage the brain.

**Page 156.** According to MM, the leaders of the New South Wales Labor Government are “known locally as Bob fucking Carr and Michael fucking Costa”. The first reference (to Mr Carr) seems so amusing to MM that he repeats it at Page 160 and again at Page 283.

**Page 212.** According to MM, when he and his partner returned home from reporting a visit by the Prime Minister to the New South Wales north coast, Jenny Garrett became unwell: “When we got home my partner revealed that she had contracted a nasty rash but we could not decide whether it was caused by the proximity of the prime minister or of the nature reserve.”

**Page 257.** According to MM, the Liberal Party’s policy launch in Brisbane “had a touch of the Nuremberg rally, particularly in the enormous set, which dwarfed the already somewhat dwarfish protagonist”. In other words, according to MM, John Howard is like Adolf Hitler – or is it the other way around? Either way, it’s a huge insult to the memory of Nazism’s victims.

**Page 286.** MM concludes *Run, Johnny, Run* much as he had commenced it:

**And so ended the election of 2004, apocalyptically for the True Believers – pretty much the end of the world as we knew it. But the sun rose the next morning, and it appeared that life went on; clearly the vast majority of the population really didn’t give a shit. And on that reassuring note, the unflushable turd set out on a leisurely victory circuit of the toilet bowl.**

As publisher, Michael Duffy decided not to put the blue pencil through any of the above bad language. He also seems not to have engaged a fact-checker, who probably would have corrected a few obvious factual howlers in the book. But Michael Duffy did score a coup in getting Mark Latham to launch *Run, Johnny, Run* in Parliament House on 7 December 2004. The (then) Opposition leader described Mungo MacCallum as a “very, very funny man” and declared that the book was an example of MM’s “great sense of humour”. Mark Latham was particularly taken by MM’s rhyming slang based on the name Sinodinis. Remember? - it rhymes with penis. This was Mark Latham’s last public appearance before retiring as Labor leader. Enough said.

## **MICHAEL DUFFY’S REMAINDER OF YESTERDAY**

The launch of Duffy & Snellgrove’s final book was not the first occasion on which Michael Duffy and Mark Latham had done a book gig double act. The two got together at the launch of Michael Duffy’s study of Tony Abbott and Mark Latham titled *Latham and Abbott* (Random House Australia, 2004). This tome was subtitled: “The lives and rivalry of the two finest politicians of their generation”. In mid 2004 Paul Duffy readily went along with the description of Mark Latham as one of the finest politicians of his

generation. So, how did he respond to Labor's defeat and, more particularly, Mark Latham's resignation?

Labor lost the Federal election on 9 October 2004. Writing in *The Weekend Australian* the following Saturday (16-17 October 2004), Michael Duffy came up with two unique comments. The first was that "95 per cent of the post-election analysis is a waste of time, being unprovable or just plain wrong" – but added "the only thing is we don't know which 95 per cent it is". Clever to be sure – but what does it mean? And why 95 per cent? Why not 75 per cent or, indeed, 5 per cent?

Michael Duffy's second point was that while "Latham doesn't deserve much blame for the loss, Howard doesn't deserve much credit for the win". In other words, leadership does not matter much. Yet Michael Duffy's conclusion to his *Latham and Abbott* book was that both men possessed "many of the qualities of leadership required in the first decade of the twenty-first century". What's the need for leadership qualities if leadership does not matter? By the way, Michael Duffy did not engage in any self criticism by, say, analysing why about 95 per cent of his pre-election analysis of Mr Latham's leadership abilities proved to be wrong.

Mark Latham resigned as Labor leader on 18 January 2005. On 22 January 2005 Michael Duffy devoted his *Daily Telegraph* column to an analysis of the former Labor leader. He made no real attempt to explain why a politician, whom he had once described as one of the finest of his generation, had ended up rejected by not only a majority of the electorate but also by a large percentage of his Caucus colleagues. Certainly, Duffy wrote about Mark Latham's illness – pointing out that he was "physically ill and emotionally distressed". But that is about where the analysis stopped. In other words, Duffy overlooked the fact that Latham had scored a very bad result on 9 October 2004 following a campaign in which he seemed to be physically well. Michael Duffy concluded his reflections on Mark Latham with a reference to his resignation speech in a Sydney suburban park:

**One day we might find out just how sick Mark Latham is. But all we have is that last bitter statement, and him stalking off to his car, and driving away from public life. Alone.**

Oh yes. But we are also left with the unsold copies of *Latham and Abbott* – with a somewhat dated cover.

## **CRAIG MCGREGOR ON THE ELECTORATE'S ERROR**

So, how did the other Latham biographers react to the Labor leader's demise? Margaret Simons had the sense to remain silent. Not so Craig McGregor who, on the weekend before Mark Latham's resignation, urged the Labor leader to remain in the job (*Sydney*

*Morning Herald*, 15-16 January 2005). McGregor acknowledged that Mark Latham may have suffered from "post-election trauma" following the "traumatic experience" of leading the ALP to such a comprehensive defeat. Craig McGregor blamed the electorate and the Labor Party – but not Mark Latham himself.

**He fought a good campaign, won the debate against John Howard, came up with a series of philosophically egalitarian programs which gained respect and support, and until a week before the election itself some polls actually had him winning government. He made a few tactical errors, but every Opposition leader does. He was looking good.**

**Towards the end of the campaign I doubted he could win the election, but he deserved to. Instead he was rewarded with a swing against the Labor party and, through the stupidity of the party machine, the handing over of control of the Senate to the Government. Worse than that: the Australian electorate showed itself so conservative and so materialist it was prepared to re-elect a Prime Minister who had lied to it again and again, but promised to – er, keep interest rates down.**

In other words, but for the conservatism and materialism of the voters, Latham Labor would have won on 9 October. And, but for the stupidity of the ALP party machine, Latham Labor would not have lost its balance-of-power position in the Senate after 1 July 2005. In other words, don't blame Mark Latham for the debacle on 9 October 2004. After all, he was only Labor leader at the time. Craig McGregor even urged Mark Latham "to grit out the next three, and possibly six years" since "the need of the Australian people for a leader with heart, ideas and the will to push them through remains as urgent as ever". Really. If only the Australian electorate was not so conservative/materialist/stupid.

## **BARRY DONOVAN'S CIRCUIT BROKEN**

And then Barry Donovan proffered his opinion (*The Age*, 18 January 2005). Before the election, he had depicted the Labor leader as a "circuit breaker". But he was not so certain that Mark Latham would survive the election defeat. Yet he was at one with Craig McGregor in maintaining that it was not really Mark Latham's fault:

**The polls continued to look positive throughout the year but Labor was overwhelmingly outflanked during the election campaign itself and after election day it all became, unfairly, Mark Latham's**

**fault. Now the Boxing Day-new year Latham news fiasco has become, fairly, Mark Latham's fault.**

So Barry Donovan was willing to concede that Mark Latham had erred in failing to issue a statement in response to the Boxing Day tsunami. However, he maintained that it was unfair to blame the Labor leader for the party's electoral disaster. Barry Donovan concluded that Mark Latham was "floating, not drowning" but conceded that "it could be a perilous path to shore". It sure was. Mark Latham beached his political career soon after – thus proving the misjudgements of his several biographers.

## **ALAN RAMSEY ON LATHAM THE CRUCIFIED**

*Sydney Morning Herald* columnist Alan Ramsey did not write a biography of Mark Latham. But he was the leading barracker for the Latham cause in the Canberra Parliamentary Press Gallery. On the morning of the election Ramsey (falsely) predicted that Latham Labor "can get there" (*SMH*, 9 October 2004). Then, when his prophecy was unfulfilled, on the Monday after the election Ramsey blamed the electorate for its "ignorance", "greedy self-interest" and "idiocy". He went on to declare that "Latham's time will come; believe it".

When this particular prophecy also proved false, Alan Ramsey declared that Labor had been unkind to its leader:

**It was a public execution, not a resignation. A year ago Mark Latham gave the Labor Party heart and its voters hope. He was the political heretic who brought life to a dead Opposition. A year later, after he failed to deliver in 12 months the electoral gratification that the fumbings of Kim Beazley and Simon Crean had been allowed to bury, even deeper, across almost eight years, Labor did to Latham what in a more primitive age was done to heretics. It burnt him at the stake, in front of us all, to the applause of a mostly accommodating media and those interests, internal and institutional, that Latham's confronting leadership style had so offended. Now we have Beazley again, the first time in Labor's 104-year history of 17 federal leaders it has felt desperate enough to revive one of them (*SMH*, 29-30 January 2005).**

Ancient history tells us that heretics went to the stake unwillingly. Mark Latham, on the other hand, voluntarily announced his resignation as both Labor leader and MP for Werriwa. In a suburban park, no less. There were no fires evident on the occasion.

The following week Ramsey extended the historical analogy – this time referring to Labor's role in "the crucifixion of Mark Latham". (*SMH*, 5-6 February 2005). Again, who was the last heretic who volunteered to be nailed to a cross?

Alan Ramsey was so steamed up about Mark Latham's replacement by Kim Beazley that he went so far as to predict that Labor might lose the Werriwa by-election on Saturday 19 March. A week before the by-election, Ramsey devoted his column to arguing – assisted, yet again, by VERY LONG QUOTATIONS – that Labor had chosen the wrong candidate and that this might work against the ALP at the by-election. He concluded his column with a warning to Kim Beazley:

**...remember the Cunningham by-election? October 2002. Another "safe" Labor seat the Libs passed on. And, in the field of 13, the Greens swept up 75 per cent of preferences to dump Labor. It killed Simon Crean's leadership stone dead. Have a nice day Kim. (*SMH*, 12-13 February 2005)**

As it turned out, Kim Beazley did have a really nice day on 19 March. Labor's candidate polled a higher percentage of the primary vote (55.5 per cent) than Mark Latham did on 9 October (52.6 per cent). And what about the Greens? Well, the Greens candidate obtained a mere 5.6 per cent of the primary vote – finishing third. Alan – back to the crystal ball.

The only good news for Ramsey was that he was not the only false prophet on the day. In *Crikey* (15 March 2005), Stephen Mayne predicted that "if all the stars align" then People's First candidate Deborah Locke "could even pull off an upset" in Werriwa. Alas, in this day-time by-election, the stars did not align for Ms Locke – she received just over three per cent of the primary vote. Give Mr Mayne a *Sydney Morning Herald* column. Now.

## **PAUL KELLY ONLY CALLS ONCE**

Paul Kelly emerged from the 2004 Federal election looking somewhat worse for wear. The essential problem was that, through the period of Mark Latham's leadership, Paul Kelly could not quite make up his mind about the Labor leader. In his on-going defence of Latham, Alan Ramsey decided to support the Labor leader's position on Iraq against Paul Kelly's post-election critique. On the Saturday after the election, obviously after consulting with Mark Latham, Alan Ramsey challenged Paul Kelly's position on Latham Labor's policy on Iraq:

**In an article highly critical this week of Latham's campaign, Kelly claimed Latham's "list of mistakes was too long, beginning with his impetuous 'troops home from Iraq by Christmas' pledge, a**

populist stunt that backfired". Latham gave the pledge in an interview with Sydney radio's Mike Carlton on March 22. And what the Labor leader remembers very clearly is that Kelly, known to Latham's staff as The Professor, phoned next day to tell him: "Good one, mate. Good one. That'll keep the pressure right on Howard." (*SMH*, 16-17 October 2004).

Paul Kelly never denied Mark Latham's claim that, on 23 March 2004, Paul Kelly phoned him and supported the Labor leader's troops-home-from-Iraq-by-Christmas policy since it would put pressure on John Howard. This conversation is not mentioned in Paul Kelly's account of his opposition to the deployment of the Coalition of the Willing (United States, Britain, Australia, Poland) in Iraq – see Paul Kelly's letter to the editor, *Griffith Review*, Summer 2004-2005, pp 7-8. In which case, what Paul Kelly left out of his account in the *Griffith Review* was more interesting than what he put in.

## RACHEL GRIFFITHS BATTLES FOR BANJO

Much the same can be said of Gabriella Coslovich's account of her interview with the gorgeous, pouting Rachael Griffiths (*The Age Melbourne Magazine*, December 2004). It seems that the wealthy thespian is anxious to present herself as someone who grew up on the other-side-of-the-tracks in Melbourne and who is determined that her first off-spring, Banjo, will endure something of her life experience. As Gabriella Coslovich recorded The Thought of Rachel Griffiths:

**Moments ago, Griffiths was making small talk with stylists, discussing face masks and moisturisers, sunscreens and hair-dryers. Now she's wanting to discuss the pros and cons of private schooling and public education. "You know, are we going to send Banjo to Xavier with the crème de la crème, or are we going to send him to St Kev's, which is more of a battler school, or do we send him to a public school where he's with Iranians and Lebanese, the big mix?"**

Hold it there. The fact is that St Kev's (or St Kevin's) based in fashionable Kooyong, in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, is not one of Melbourne's "battler" schools. Rather, it is one of eleven GPS schools – i.e. one of the leading private schools in Victoria. Not every student at St Kevin's would come from a wealthy background but few would fit into a battler category. Moreover, some private schools are rather multicultural and educate Iranians and Lebanese. Yes. Now let's hear more from the Oscar award winning actor – as told to Gabriella Coslovich:

**"My feeling is that I don't want him [Banjo] to go to a school where pretty much everyone's parents earn over a hundred grand and have had the same experience. I want him to be in touch with a variety of people in his life, but it's very tempting to say, you know, send your kid to Cranbrook and he'll know the future heads of business. I can see the seduction of it." (Cranbrook is a privileged boys' school in the eastern suburbs of Sydney, alma mater of James Packer, somewhat removed from Griffiths' old high school, Star of the Sea, a "battler" school in the bayside suburb of Gardendale, which she dubs "Catholic Brighton").**

Hold it again. Star of the Sea college, when Rachel Griffiths was educated, was hardly a "battler" school. Rather, it was attended predominantly by the daughters of middle income Catholics who lived in Melbourne's bayside suburbs. It turns out that Rachel Griffiths (ex-Star of the Sea) married Melbourne artist Andrew Taylor (ex-St Kevin's). It's a familiarly boring "same experience" middle class Melbourne Catholic phenomenon.

If young Banjo goes to St Kevin's – he will probably marry a girl from Star of the Sea or Genazzano or Mandeville College or Sacre Coeur. If young Banjo goes to Xavier College – he will probably marry a girl from Genazzano or Mandeville College or Sacre Coeur or Star of the Sea. It was ever so. And as for the odds of Banjo mixing with hoi polloi at, say, Springvale High – don't waste your money.

## DR GREER AND MR TAYLOR

Rachel Griffiths is probably the second most famous Star of the Sea graduate – after the thespian-turned-polemicist Germaine Greer. In his reflections in *Memoirs of Melbourne University*, the playwright Jack Hibbert recalled GG at Melbourne University in the late 1950s/early 1960s:

**Germaine Greer was around Melbourne University in those early years. She ate men for breakfast. After her first tutorial with Chris Wallace-Crabbe, she accosted the poet and asserted that she would like to wrap her sexual organ around his. She went to Star of the Sea.**

Quite so. In any event, the Star of the Sea graduate continues to maintain a high profile. In January the Australian born shock-frock achieved even more fame with the showing of her documentary *The Boy* (it aired on SBS, 5 January 2005). It co-incided with the publication of Dr Greer's book *The Beautiful Boy*. The gist of GG's thesis in *The Boy* is that men are best when they are boys – in a sexual sense, that is. And

that, oh yes, the beautiful boy is central to artistic expression over the ages. To this end GG trailed through many an art gallery gazing at the private parts of young boys, as depicted by (male) artists over the generations. Her artistic findings included the observation that the sperm of boys “flows like tap water”.

*The Boy* opened with GG drooling over an 18 year old model, James Taylor, who was clad only in his underwear. It ended with GG lying next to young Mr Taylor – who was totally sans underwear – and trying to get a peek at his private parts, which were covered only by big rose petals. It is impossible to imagine SBS TV showing a documentary in which a 65 year old man tried to get an eye-full of the genitalia of an 18 year old girl. Which demonstrates that while GG may have gone quite batty, this has yet to be fully appreciated by the movers-and-shakers at SBS Television in Sydney.

However, perhaps even SBS heavies might have been convinced of GG’s essential battiness if they had watched GG’s performance on Britain’s *Celebrity Big Brother* reality television show. As it turned out, GG quit the Big Brother house within a few days – declaring that there “is no such thing as reality television” since “very little that is seen to happen actually happens and a great deal of what actually happens remains unseen”. (*London Sunday Times*, 16 January 2005). Apparently GG had to go inside the Big Brother house to discover this. After quitting, Dr Greer called the house a “fascist prison”. Overlooking the fact that those incarcerated in the real (fascist) thing were neither volunteers nor paid.

## AND NOW, A BRUSH WITH UNREALITY

Meanwhile, on the home front, reality seems an increasingly blurred concept. Just consider the following case studies:

- **Phillip Adams as Al Gore**

Writing in *The Australian* (14 December 2004) Phillip Adams – who wears his atheism on both sleeves – maintained that he was “personally responsible” for the creation of the Christian-based Family First Party. In a cult-of-personality column which was littered with the first person pronoun (the word “I” was used on no fewer than two score occasions), Adams told the following story.

He had been invited by “a friend who’s a Pentecostal minister” to address a “sort of Pentecostal jamboree in Melbourne”. Apparently, Phillip Adams made an opening remark which went something like this: “Christ, if you blokes could all get together, my [atheist] mob would be in big trouble.” According to Adams’s story – as told by Adams – his words had an “electric effect on the god-botherers who, afterwards,

got together and said: “Adams is right! We should organise ourselves. Get political.” In other words, Adams maintains that the creation of the Christian-based Family First party was his idea – a circumstance which he has come to regret since “it’s a threat to the future”.

So, how did Family First respond to Phillip Adams’ suggestion that, without his (secular) intervention, no Christian would have thought about creating a Christian based political party like the Family First?

On 15 December 2004 *The Australian* ran a series of letters debunking the Adams’ thesis. Peter Harris (Federal chairman, Family First) said that PA had crossed “the line of self-indulgence and importance”. He wrote that “Adams cannot take credit” for the creation of Family First “because he made cynical comments to a couple of so-called heavy hitters at the conference”. But he did. As Alan Anderson wrote to the editor: “Phillip Adams’s self-aggrandising column about how he started Family First is the funniest thing I’ve read since Al Gore invented the internet.” Right on.

- **Devine Wish-Fulfillment**

Also failing the reality check, in recent times, is Fairfax columnist Miranda Devine. In her *Sun-Herald* column on 13 February 2005, following the announcement that Prince Charles would marry Camilla Parker Bowles, MD referred to the “obvious conclusion” that “at 56, Charles has accepted that he will never be king”. Rather, according to MD, the Queen “will hang on for a couple more years before handing over to Prince William”. So MD predicted that not only will the Queen retire but that Charles will forego his succession to the throne. MD returned to the theme of her unreality in her *Sun-Herald* column on 3 April 2005. Here she suggested that Charles would renounce “his right to the throne” which would then “pass directly to the charismatic William”.

What evidence has Ms Devine got that (i) the Queen will step down as monarch and (ii) that Charles will then renounce his right to the succession in favour of William? None. Absolutely none. She wishes an event to occur and then convinces herself that it will. The fact is that monarchs reign and heirs succeed – and, on occasions, columnists throw the switch to unreality.

- **Paul Sheehan and the Bottler’s Daughter**

Paul (“I still drink Unique Water daily”) Sheehan still seems to hold the unreal belief that some water in southern New South Wales contains the elixir of life. Really. He first told his story in the *Good Weekend* (6 April 2002) in an article which was headed “Miracle Water?”. Since then, Mr Sheehan has returned to the scene of his delusion on two occasions. On 24 January 2005 (in which he wrote that he was still drinking buckets of the water but reported that

suspicion surrounded the death of its creator's wife) and on 14 March 2005 (in which he declared that he still consumed the stuff but now reported that its creator had run away with the bottler's daughter). How about that?

#### • Tony Kevin and the Dictator Mugabe

Retired public servant, and hyperactive whistleblower, Tony Kevin is experiencing his own particular encounter with unreality. Last November, following a technical hitch in a planned CNN International interview, Tony Kevin issued a statement in which he blamed Western intelligence for censoring his attempt to tell the world about (alleged) United States war crimes in Iraq. Declared Kevin: "This morning sophisticated technical means were used to disrupt a scheduled and pre-announced CNN International television news interview with me at 11.35 am Australian time that had been requested and arranged yesterday by CNN Hong Kong..."

Tony Kevin, in his latest brush with unreality, did not provide any evidence to back up his assertion that the US and/or Australian government had been involved in silencing him – as distinct from technical failure. But, then, Mr Kevin has frequently exhibited a certain unreality. Remember his defence of the brutal dictatorship in Zimbabwe, headed by Robert Mugabe? Writing in *The Australian* on 27 February 2002, Tony Kevin declared: "However much Mugabe may be guilty of [sic], Zimbabwe has enjoyed peace and security for more than 20 years". Tell that to the Zimbabweans.

#### • The Ramsey/Adams Plastic Quote

Have you heard the one about James Watt, the inaugural Secretary of the Interior in Ronald Reagan's administration? Writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 9 March 2005, Alan Ramsey declared – quoting leftist American commentator Bill Moyers – that Mr Watt "told the US Congress that protecting natural resources was unimportant in light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. In public testimony he said: 'After the last tree is felled, Christ will come back'".

Do you believe it? Well, Phillip Adams did – so much so that he repeated the James Watt (alleged) statement on his ABC Radio National *Late Night Live* program. A great story, to be sure. Except that the quote was manufactured and had been corrected by Mr Moyers before his claim was reported in Australia. James Watt never said what Moyers/Ramsay/Adams alleged. The *Sydney Morning Herald* issued a correction on Page 2 – but Mr Adams did not bother to correct this howler. Nor have Ramsey or Adams corrected their false claim of late 2003 that President George W. Bush entertained US forces in

Iraq with a plastic turkey. Both men need a reality check. Now.

#### • False Prophecy Corner

And, finally, some unrealistic predictions. On the ABC TV *Lateline* program, which went to air on the evening of Monday 19 April 2005, news reporter Jane Hutcheson and current affairs presenter Tony Jones asked the question of the moment – about who would succeed John Paul II as Pope. Ms Hutcheson interviewed Australian tourist Adrian Hawkes who was in Rome. Mr Hawkes went for Cardinal Ratzinger – commenting that "he's been one of the chief supporters or one of the chief theological thinkers behind Pope John Paul II".

It made sense. But not to Fr. Thomas Reese, the editor-in-chief of *America magazine* (a national Catholic weekly in the US). Asked by Tony Jones why Cardinal Ratzinger was not on his list of possible popes, Fr Reese replied that Ratzinger (i) did not want "the job", (ii) had "been trying to retire for the last two years", (iii) "is 78 years old" and too old for the job and (iv) would bring "a lot of baggage to the papacy if he was elected".

Within hours of Fr Reese's expert (and wordy) analysis on *Lateline* ABC TV's leading current affairs program, Cardinal Ratzinger emerged on the papal balcony as Pope Benedict XVI. Which suggests that in matters Vatican, *Lateline* would be well advised to focus on the realistic views of Aussie tourists rather than the unrealistic assessments of American experts.

And then there's the (continuing) saga of Matt Price's (continuing) false prophecies. Remember The Australian journalist's prediction about Latham Labor on Iraq. Before the Federal election, Matt Price predicted that Mark Latham would win the election on his Iraq policy. Then, after the election, Mr Price said that Labor had lost because of Mark Latham's Iraq policy.

Well, it seems that Matt Price has refocused his attention to interest rates. During the observation/prediction segment on the ABC TV *Insiders* program on Sunday 3 April 2005, Mr Price prophecised that the Reserve Bank would increase interest rates the following Tuesday. He then commented that the news would be smothered by coverage of the death of John Paul II and the Sea King helicopter crash. The Reserve Bank left interest rates unchanged – suggesting, once again, that most prophets are of the false genre.

