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- SPEAKERS:** **JOHN BELL AM** (Artistic Director, Bell Shakespeare)
& **KATHY BAIL** (Editor, *The Bulletin*) &
GERARD HENDERSON (Executive Director, The Sydney Institute)
- TOPIC:** *A Mate for Head of State? Why Australia Needs One*
- DATE:** Wednesday 18 January 2006 **TIME:** 5 for 5.30 pm
- VENUE:** Museum of Sydney Theatre, cnr Phillip and Bridge Streets, Sydney
-
- SPEAKER:** **ANUERIN HUGHES** (Author, *Billy Hughes: Prime Minister and Controversial Founding Father of the Australian Labor Party* [Wiley 2005]; former European Union Ambassador to Australia 1997-2002).
- TOPIC:** *Remembering Billy Hughes*
- DATE:** Tuesday 24 January 2006 **TIME:** 5.30 for 6 pm
- VENUE:** 41 Phillip Street, Sydney **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**
-
- SPEAKERS:** **MATT PRICE** (The Australian, Parliamentary Press Gallery)
& **MARGARET SIMONS** (Journalist & author)
& **STEPHEN MATCHETT** (Columnist, *The Australian*)
- TOPIC:** *The Gallery: Insular, Intrusive or Indispensable?*
- DATE:** Wednesday 1 February 2006 **TIME:** 5 for 5.30 pm
- VENUE:** Mallesons Conference Room, Level 60, Governor Phillip Tower,
1 Farrer Place, Sydney
-
- SPEAKER:** **PROF. JUDY LUMBY** (Nurse Educator & author *The Gift* [Pluto Press])
- TOPIC:** *That was Then; This is Now - Grandmothers and Grandchildren Today*
- DATE:** Tuesday 7 February 2006 **TIME:** 5.30 for 6 pm
- VENUE:** 41 Phillip Street, Sydney **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**
-
- SPEAKER:** **STEVE EMERSON** (Correspondent & Author *American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among Us* [Free Press]; Internationally recognised expert on terrorism and national security)
- TOPIC:** *Jihadism: Where Is It At?*
- DATE:** Wednesday 15 February 2006 **TIME:** 5.30 for 6 pm
- VENUE:** 41 Phillip Street, Sydney
-
- SPEAKER:** **PROF. GLYN DAVIS AC** (Vice-Chancellor, University of Melbourne)
- TOPIC:** *What is the Future for Australia's Public Universities?*
- DATE:** Tuesday 28 February 2006 **TIME:** 5.30 for 6 pm
- VENUE:** Clayton Utz Conference Room (Level 34), 1 O'Connell Street, Sydney
-
- SPEAKER:** **JULIA GILLARD MP** (Shadow Minister for Health, Federal Member for Lalor)
- TOPIC:** *to be advised*
- DATE:** Tuesday 7 March 2006 **TIME:** 5.30 for 6 pm
- VENUE:** Mallesons Conference Room, Level 60, Governor Phillip Tower,
1 Farrer Place, Sydney
-
- SPEAKER:** **DR JANE CONNORS** (Cultural Historian - PhD on the Royal Tour of 1954; Program Manager, *ABC Radio National*)
- TOPIC:** *Royal Tours: Then and Now*
- DATE:** Monday 13 March 2006 **TIME:** 5.30 for 6 pm
- VENUE:** 41 Phillip Street, Sydney **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**

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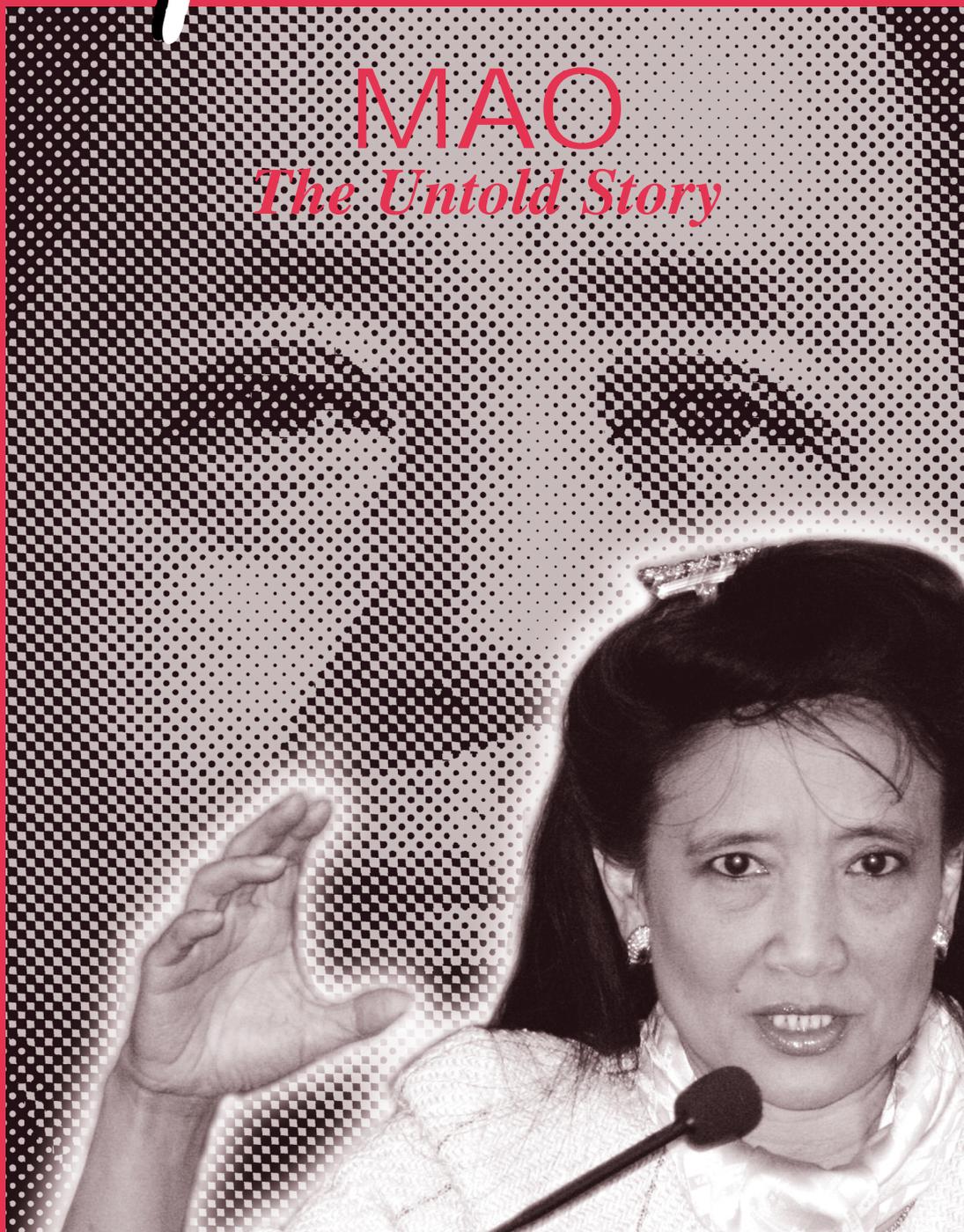
THE

Sydney Institute

QUARTERLY

MAO

The Untold Story



with Gerard Henderson's

MEDIA WATCH

ISSUE 27,
VOL. 9, NO. 4,
JANUARY 2006

The Dismissal & what
really happened - from
DAVID SMITH

TED RULE analyses
Jung Chang's Mao

The Voyager Disaster -
new insights from
TOM FRAME

Motherhood myths,
Anne Manne and
the professors - with
ANNE HENDERSON

STEPHEN MATCHETT
on the Latham legacy
and its record

Black Inc's
unprofessionalism
documented

What's happening at
The Age?

JOHN McCONNELL on
Muslims in Australia
and Harold Holt

MEDIA WATCH
tackles Guy Rundle,
Mungo MacCallum,
John Hewson and
Frank Moorhouse

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THE ABC AND 1975

Writing in the *Weekend Australian Magazine* in December 2002, the normally considered Paul Kelly declared his "love" for one-time Labor leader Gough Whitlam. It was an embarrassing example of how some intelligent and normally sceptical commentators have been affected by the very phenomenon of Gough Whitlam. This was evident again in the lead-up to 11 November 2005, the thirtieth anniversary of the dismissal of the Whitlam Government by the Governor-General Sir John Kerr. The constitutional deadlock of late 1975 was caused by Opposition leader Malcolm Fraser's determination to block supply and by Gough Whitlam's determination to govern without supply. Both were very stubborn men and the Governor-General decided to end the deadlock by dismissing the prime minister and appointing Mr Fraser as caretaker prime minister on the understanding that he would call an election for 13 December 1975. For this, John Kerr has not been forgiven by some – especially among journalists at the publicly funded ABC.

On Monday 7 November the ABC kicked off its coverage of The Dismissal's anniversary. On the ABC AM program, presenter Tony Eastley asked Mr Whitlam the following soft question: "As you say in your book, the Constitution was subverted; when it comes to that time, what hurt you the most?" Then Catherine McGrath put it to Malcolm Fraser that some impropriety was involved in The Dismissal because his "shadow attorney general Bob Ellicott" and the Chief Justice Sir Garfield Barwick "were cousins". How about that? What neither Tony Eastley nor Catherine McGrath mentioned was that John Kerr's decision to dismiss the Whitlam Government was regarded as constitutionally proper at the time by not only the (then) Chief Justice Garfield Barwick but also by the (then) Justice Sir Anthony Mason. Also, the current Chief Justice Murray Gleeson, who was then a QC, wrote an opinion which was consistent with the action taken by the Governor-General. In other words, the Governor-General did not subvert the Constitution in 1975. Not unless you maintain that neither Garfield Barwick, nor Anthony Mason nor Murray Gleeson know anything about the Constitution. When he interviewed Gough Whitlam on the *7.30 Report* (10 November 2005) Kerry O'Brien neglected to put it to Mr Whitlam that Anthony Mason, whom Whitlam much admires, supported John Kerr's decision at the time.

The influential ABC TV *Lateline* program also got into the act. On 8 November 2005, Michael Edwards concluded a piece-to-camera with the comment: "Sir John Kerr died a bitter and broken man". It turned out that the youngish Mr Edwards came to this conclusion without consulting any of John Kerr's family or any of his surviving friends. Rather, the matter was workshopped in the *Lateline* office. One senior *Lateline* producer approved the analysis before it went to air – based on his recollection of conversations with a well connected relative. It turned out that the relative in question was an octogenarian at the time of The Dismissal and that John Kerr outlived him by over 15 years. So the said relative was not an authority concerning John Kerr in any sense of the term.

For the record, John Kerr was neither bitter nor broken at the time of his death. Rather, he was proud of the fact that he had acted decisively in 1975. It is understandable why members of the Whitlam Fan Club, who still inhabit the ABC, want to present John Kerr as someone who acted unconstitutionally in 1975 and who died, bitter and broken, in 1991. But it is (yet more) publicly funded mythology.

MAO'S STORY - AS TOLD BY JUNG CHANG AND JON HALLIDAY

Ted Rule

The Economist didn't like this book. It said that Jung Chang and Jon Halliday had been too extreme in their judgment of Mao and hadn't given him a fair go. It also said that the true verdict on Mao would have to wait until the secretive Communist regime in Beijing made available all the suppressed records.

The first of these accusations is curious; possibly the sort of accusation that could reasonably be made of a political biography of a moderate politician; someone like Kim Beazley or Billy Mackie Snedden. Nobody, neither his greatest enemy nor his most forgiving apologist, has ever accused Mao of being a moderate. Mao said, "A revolution is not a dinner party.....it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous.....A revolution is.....an act of violence by which one class overthrows another". Not too much baby-kissing here, not even, as the book demonstrates, of his own babies. So a rather "extreme" view of such a subject does not seem unreasonable.

The second criticism is more invidious because it demonstrates that *The Economist's* reviewer is either a novice at Chinese history or that he didn't read the book. The practical problem in reading this book is that, even though it is a cracking good "easy" read, it takes an inordinate time to get through. This is because every few lines the reader is suddenly struck by some astonishing statement of opinion or revelation of fact. This calls for careful time-consuming checking of the 128 pages of sources and references at the back of the book.

This is the most widely researched book of modern Chinese history in the English language. Chang and Halliday interviewed just about every person who could possibly be of interest. Mao's remaining great-grandchildren (his sons all died in difficult circumstances); Li Na, the daughter of Mao and Jiang Qing; the Russian wife of Li Lisan, former party chief

and later splittist, anti-Leninist and putschist; Lin Biao's daughter, the vacuous Dodo; Liu Shaoqi's wife, Wang Guangmei who was paraded in her pearls before the Red Guards; the son of Wang Ming, Mao's nemesis and the author while in exile in the Soviet Union of some of the most interesting anti-Mao work. The list seems endless. From Taiwan there is Zhang Xueliang, the "Young Marshal" who kidnapped Chiang Kai-shek in they so-called Xi'an Incident of 1936 (they must have just caught him in time before his death a couple of years ago at the age of 102).

As in so many other books on modern Chinese history, Russian archives play an important part in this book. We need only name a couple; the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation and the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History. No more making up details of conversations between Stalin and his Chinese counterparts, so long a staple of commentary on Chinese politics and history. The references and transcripts are all there.

The most exciting and the most frustrating material in this book comes from an outstanding range of Chinese archives. Exciting? The names speak for themselves. "Party History Studies" periodical. "Documents on the Guangdong Peasant Movement Institute". "A Collection of Documents and Interviews on the Early Communist Groups and the Party's First Congress" (People's University). "Documents for Researching the Cultural Revolution" (PLA Defence University). "Reference Documents for the teaching of Party History" (PLA Defence University).

The question is how they got access to this sort of material. Party history materials are heavily controlled; you never know when you may have to rewrite history. Perhaps there are still some advantages in one of the authors being the daughter of a former provincial Party Secretary.....

This is frustrating since the closed nature of these archives means that Chang and Halliday's access is privileged and it is unlikely that independent researchers will be in a position to check their references, at least in the near future. But in the meantime let's give them the benefit of the doubt. Their analysis is highly plausible and plausibility is a determining element in any good history.

The result is the most gripping book on Chinese history ever to appear in a form accessible to English-speaking readers and one which gives a new and generally accurate picture of events. Not that it is faultless, but more of that later.

MAO - AND THE SOVIET UNION

The book shines in three respects. These are the role of Stalin and the Comintern in the history of China in

the early days, the Soviet Union's key role in the Civil War post World War II and Mao's relationship with Stalin and Khrushchev in the forties and fifties.

In the first place, Chang and Halliday demonstrate conclusively that the Chinese Communist Party was the child of Stalin and the Comintern to a greater extent than anyone could have imagined. Stalin founded it. Although there does not seem to have been a Comintern representative at the first CCP meeting, from 1921 on nothing was done without the agreement of the Comintern representatives Joffe and Maring – a nicely colonialist touch in keeping with a time when the British ran the Chinese Customs Service.

Stalin funded the CCP. He armed it. He provided ideological guidance and heavy discipline so that Trotskyism never had a strong following in the Chinese party. He educated its sons in Moscow at the "University of the Toilers of the East" or "Sun Yat-sen University" under the tutelage of Karl Radek and Pavel Mif. On 6 April 1928, when the warlord Zhang Zuolin raided the Soviet Embassy in Beiping (the modern Beijing), all the major documents relevant to Communism in China were found there including the Comintern's plans for Bolshevizing China, plans for establishing Communist nuclei in the National Revolutionary Army and receipts for six million Roubles from the warlord Feng Yuxiang.

When Stalin did a deal with Sun Yat-sen to make the KMT his primary revolutionary vehicle in China, CCP members meekly did his bidding and joined the KMT. He sent his man Borodin to run the KMT and completely reorganize it on Leninist lines. (Borodin seems to have been chosen for his good English. He had lived and worked in Chicago for ten years). Stalin sent Blücher, the CIC of the Soviet Siberian Army, to command the KMT army.

Chang and Halliday deal well with the period immediately after Chiang Kai-shek's purge of Communist elements in 1927. Because the CCP is embarrassed about this period, most official accounts of this time are confused and obscure. The problem is that Chiang's sudden purge caught Stalin on the hop and it was unclear how the CCP should react. Most of the security apparatus was destroyed and Communist-led units either lost their leadership or were forced into a semi-bandit existence in the mountains of Jiangxi and Fujian.

Serious ideological differences as to how to deal with the new situation led to two abortive uprisings. Zhou Enlai and adviser Kumanin's Nanchang Uprising and Mao's Autumn Harvest Uprising (at the direction of the Soviet Consulate in Changsha) put paid to plans for a real Soviet government of two or more provinces and the rag-tag army retired to the hills. This is an important period in party history – the many

differences gave birth to some of the more extravagant "isms" in the Chinese political vocabulary, such as "splittism" and "mountain-topism". Chang and Halliday cut through the cant to give a clear picture of what was actually going on. They demonstrate that the objective was to carve out a territory which could be supplied by Soviet ships from the Fujian and Guangdong ports. They enumerate the various Communist forces and show how small and weak they were. Mao started off with just 1000 troops; Zhu De was little better off with just 4000 ill-disciplined poorly supplied troops.

The authors visited the region and talked to people who were there, not party hacks but ordinary people who saw the events eighty years ago. They give interesting details such as the party's predilection for taking over Catholic churches as the best available meeting halls. There are some nice touches – the Communists clothed themselves at random and one Italian missionary was concerned that Communist troops had confiscated his Fascist black shirt to use as a uniform.

Chang and Halliday also put into context claims that the Communist forces were distinguished from other political forces in China at the time by their empathy with local people. They show that the Communist armies took power by collaboration with brutal local bandits and ruled by terror. During the period of the Ruijin Soviet in Jiangxi (1927-1934) the population of the area dropped by 20% as people fled the terror. In the last days of the Soviet as the KMT moved in, whole villages rebelled and attacked the retreating Communists with any weapons which they had to hand.

The authors tell the story of Mao's foray into the Fujian port of Zhangzhou, to get supplies from Soviet ships and, on Mao's part, to collect Soviet cash for future personal contingencies. The expedition was only partly successful. It captured the port but was quickly forced to retreat. Foreign gun boats had gathered at nearby Amoy to harry Soviet supply ships, and Cantonese troops, alarmed at the Communist advance so close to their borders, fought fiercely to cut their supply lines. But most of all, the Communist troops weren't up to much when they finally went into battle.

This expedition finally convinced the Communists that there could be no Soviet supplies through Fujian or Guangdong. The nearest Soviet guns were in Xinjiang and Mongolia, which were Soviet occupied. Thus the Long March towards these supply sources began.

MAO – AND THE LONG MARCH

Chang and Halliday are at their most controversial when they write about the Long March. The Long

March is the Via Crucis of the Chinese Communist Party; great heroism, a spirit of equality, victory against impossible odds. The picture painted by Chang and Halliday is quite different. Controversially they contend that the march took place with the acquiescence and assistance of Chiang Kai-shek. They say that he did this because he was in the process of negotiating a deal with Stalin for the return of his son Jiang Jinguo who had been held hostage in the Soviet Union since 1925.

Certainly it is difficult to see how such an irregular force could have broken through a strong cordon and avoided annihilation over a three thousand mile march. These troops had no supply lines. Some of the KMT actions against the Communists were amazingly incompetent and this was a period during which Stalin believed that he could use Jiang Jinguo as leverage to help his forces in China (Jiang Jinguo returned to China in 1937 as the Communists were consolidating themselves at Yan'an).

But Chiang's own position was increasingly difficult. He was fighting on at least two fronts (despite subsequent Communist claims, the Japanese were his priority) and his control of Western China was spasmodic at best. Chang and Halliday's claims are interesting and worthy of further investigation when we are finally able to check some of the archives which they quote as evidence. In the meanwhile, they leave us with a vivid picture of Mao, the saviour of his people, being carried on a litter throughout the march as his comrades die of exhaustion and disease around him.

The authors also deal well with the Soviet role in the Communist victory in the 1945-1949 Civil War. I have written elsewhere about this ("Taiwan and Jiang Jinguo's Legacy", *The Sydney Institute Quarterly*, Issue 26, August 2005). Basically the claims that the Communist victory was due to guerilla warfare, superior morality and great discipline do not stand up to scrutiny.

The Communists fought unenthusiastically at best against the Japanese and their victory over the KMT was the result of complete rearming and rebuilding by the Soviets of the Communist forces into a modern army capable of winning set-piece battles. Whole battalions of Manchukuo puppet troops together with modern Japanese equipment were handed over to the Communists and assistance was given by the Soviets to the CCP in setting up People's Governments in the North-East and even in drafting troops from Dalian which remained under Soviet control after the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1946. As the Communist troops marched south, the supply lines from Soviet territory were opened. Between 1927 and

1945 there had been only limited supply from the Soviet Union to the Chinese Communists. By 1947, the Soviets had restored the North-Eastern railway system, linking the Chinese Communists with the Soviet Union. In 1948, as the CCP moved south, Stalin sent his Railways Minister, Kovalev, to oversee the repair and construction of supply railways, a major factor in the Communist victory.

Chang and Halliday bring some interesting new material to this debate. On the basis of Russian archives, they reflect on how poor the quality of the Communist troops was in 1945. When the first Communist forces arrived in the North-East, the Soviets took them for bandits and noted their inability to handle modern weapons. To bring them up to scratch, the Soviets opened up sixteen military training institutions. The supply of Japanese weapons to the Communists is well known – less well known is the fact that the Soviets supplied them with the whole of the Guandong Army's Japanese Air Force including Japanese pilots. Japanese medical staff also gave the Communists for the first time a modern medical service.

North Korea's role is interesting. North Korea was a complete Soviet colony at this time. There weren't enough indigenous Communists in Korea to establish a credible regime – stories of a young Kim Il-sung waging guerilla warfare against the Japanese are fantasy. The Russians ruled the show. Chang and Halliday do not mention the divisions of Korean "volunteers" which fought with the Chinese Communists; they do mention how, when the KMT split, for the Communist forces in the North-East, communications were kept up via North Korea which had borders with both sides. Shades of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

MAO – AND WORLD DOMINATION

The other area where Chang and Halliday give a wealth of detail is in the manoeuvring in the international Communist movement during the 1950s. Sadly their treatment suffers from a basic misconception as to Mao's motivation. The authors rightly accuse Mao of wanting world domination – the misconception is that this is related to China's position as an emerging world power and to personal megalomania.

The reality is more complex. Mao was a Communist internationalist first and a Chinese nationalist a long way second. He believed in large-scale semi federalist Communist government as a stage on the road to true communism when the state would wither away. He had read Stalin's most famous published work on the nationalities question. There seems no doubt that he and Stalin had done a deal splitting suzerainty over

the world – Stalin got the existing Soviet Union and Europe, Mao got Asia. There are extant maps showing “Chinese control” right down to Indonesia and Burma. This however does not imply a nation state dominated by China but rather something on the lines of the Soviet Union with autonomous regions for differing nationalities, much like the ideal situation foreseen for Tibet, Xinjiang, Guangxi and Ningxia (of course the reality in both China and the Soviet Union turned out bitterly differently).

Mao believed implicitly in the victory of international communism. He couldn't cope with the realities of mutually assured destruction and the clear implication of compromise with the West. This, along with Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation, was the cause of his break with the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, with the above caveats, Chang and Halliday are correct in flagging Mao's absolute belief in Communist world domination and the conviction that if the Soviets under Khrushchev were not willing to provide leadership, he would have to.

MAO'S FORCED FAMINE

The book has a number of shortcomings, some of which are serious. In his biography of Stalin, Simon Sebag Montefiore paints a compelling picture of a tiny Communist ruling class which lives together in comparative luxury in a small group of residences. Everybody lives together in an incestuous relationship. They eat together, their children study together in special schools, they holiday together in special resorts, they have affairs with each other's wives. They never touch money. They are totally dependent for their physical and economic welfare on the whims of the leader. They can be subjected to high degrees of personal scrutiny from security forces loyal to the leader. They have almost nothing to do with the reality of the outside world.

An appreciation of this situation is critical to understanding how some of the more extreme manifestations of the system work. It explains how Stalin could wield power so totally over his upper echelons. It explains how the leadership can be totally ignorant of major catastrophes happening outside the walls of the compound.

The Stalin situation had direct parallels in Mao's China. The top leadership lived together in the walled compound of Zhongnan Hai. Their children went to school together at the Yu Ying (Educate Heroes) School. They holidayed together at the old missionary resort of Beidaihe. They never saw cash except as Chairman Mao doled it out. They never went out into the real world.

Chang knows this. She was part of the system in Sichuan where she was brought up as daughter of the

provincial party secretary. She mentioned it during her discussion at the Sydney Institute on 21 July 2005. But she does not explore this in her book.

Because of this she fails to come properly to grips with the famine which killed so many people after the Great Leap Forward. Chang and Halliday paint a deeply cynical picture of Mao: basically they say that he knew about the famine but that he didn't care. The real picture is probably quite different. There is plenty of evidence that, although people were dropping dead on the streets, the leadership in their isolation either didn't know about the famine or didn't trust the people who were telling them the truth. This was why Defence Minister and hero of the Korean War, Peng Dehuai's report at the 1959 Lushan Party meeting describing the full extent of the famine caused such a sensation. Peng had broken ranks and actually gone out into the countryside to see for himself. It also explained why the personal consequences for Peng were so drastic – he was dismissed from his office as Defence Minister and died in gaol during the Cultural Revolution.

In fact Chang and Halliday's explanations of the causes of the famine are just plain silly. They say that the famine was caused by poor harvests combined with a cynical Mao policy of exporting grain. Under their analysis, the amount of grain exported represented just enough calories to feed the hungry in China and if it hadn't been exported nobody would have died.

An enormous number of people died but whatever the number was, it wasn't the number calculated so carefully by Chang and Halliday. And although exporting grain was a stupid and evil thing to do in these circumstances, it wasn't the cause of the famine and keeping the grain may not have resulted in many fewer deaths.

Statistics in China are notoriously unreliable. This is true now and was much truer in the fifties and early sixties when production statistics were state secrets and important material in the propaganda war. The insoluble problem with their calculation of how many lives could have been saved by stopping grain exports is that each element of the calculation, grain production, grain exports, food production and deaths by starvation, is extremely unreliable and any final calculation is meaningless.

All we can say is that official Chinese statistics say that the population of China dropped by 20 million in 1960 so the real number must be much larger. And it must be remembered that grain transportation and markets were seriously deficient. If the Chinese hadn't exported grain, there is no guarantee that surplus grain could get to where it was needed. If there had been no exports of food, there would still have been millions of deaths in China in 1959-60.

The cause of the famine was collectivisation. If you don't reward people for producing, they won't produce. It has happened with frightening regularity in every Communist country which has tried it, in the Ukraine after dekulakisation, in China in 1958-1960 after the establishment of the People's Communes, in Ethiopia in the 1970s, in North Korea today. For some reason they don't get it.

The other cause of the famine was the insane policy of surpassing Britain in steel production in one year. This meant that people who would normally be producing food were wasting their time melting down their knives and saucepans to produce steel to make – more knives and saucepans. As Lord Keynes said, the ultimate objective of all economic activity is consumption, a lesson which successive Communist regimes failed to learn.

MAO'S CHARACTER

The coverage of the 1970s is inadequate. This was a period of clear ideological splits in the Chinese leadership. Anybody who watched the first Tian'an Men incident in Beijing in 1976 or the riots in Shanghai at the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Cultural Revolution, or who watched the ever-changing faces of the military units occupying Beijing in the mid 1970s would have no doubts about this. Chang and Halliday, on the other hand, seem to take the position that Mao was in charge and that any differences amongst the other ranks either didn't exist or were irrelevant. In particular this analysis leads the authors into serious misinterpretation of the Lin Biao incident of 1971.

Lin Biao, Mao's anointed successor, died in mysterious circumstances in 1971. It was put about that he had been a passenger in a Chinese Trident jet which crashed in Mongolia while he was trying to flee to the Soviet Union after an attempt on Mao's life. Chang and Halliday's version of this episode is based on extensive interviews with participants including Lin's daughter Dodo.

The problem is that there are some incidents which are so sensitive that it is unlikely that interviewees will give anything but the acceptable line and this is one such incident. Chang and Halliday's version repeats an unlikely line published in 1983 as the "Conspiracy and Death of Lin Biao" by one Yao Ming. I don't know how Lin died but I'd be willing to lay a small bet that Zhou Enlai was intimately involved. He wasn't the wimp portrayed by Chang and Halliday.

The authors make some fundamental mistakes about Mao's character. For instance they accuse him of being uninterested in ideology. His works show that

he was ideological to a fault. Jasper Becker's brilliant account of the famine "Hungry Ghosts" demonstrates clearly that ideology in multitudinous forms caused the famine, from Marxist economics to an unquestioning belief in Stalin's favorite biologist Lysenko who said that deep ploughing and close planting cured all ills.

For the rest, my criticisms are all minor. Stories of Mao's love life deteriorate into *Women's Weekly* novel style and even get a bit screechy at times. And the authors have an annoying habit of conferring nicknames on well-known characters.

My own *bête noir* is their treatment of Chen Duxiu, a fascinating character. He was one of the founders of the New Thought Movement, a pioneer of colloquial Chinese writing, the real founder of the Communist Party, one of the few Trotskyites in the Chinese party (he was expelled) and a subsequent democrat. Chang and Halliday insist on labeling him "the Prof" (well, he was a professor), funny the first time but immensely irritating the twentieth.

But these are trifling criticisms. This is a great book which anybody with even a passing interest in China should read. Its insights are real, its research is unparalleled and we look forward to an easier day when all the Chinese sources can be verified and new truths uncovered.

ENDNOTE

[1] Chairman Mao himself wasn't short of cash. In her 1975 interviews with American author Roxanne Witke, Jiang Qing said that Chairman Mao was rich because of the royalties from the *Little Red Book*. It is hard to say which is more breathtaking, the cynicism of taking the royalties or Jiang Qing's naïveté in not recognising the fundamental contradictions implied by this admission. Mao's bodyguard Quan Yanchi recounts how Mao made regular payments of cash to inner-circle comrades in need. He says that if the cash came from Mao's pay, he (Quan) would handle it, if it came from his royalties. Mao's secretary would handle it.

- *Ted Rule has lived for most of the past 35 years in Beijing, Taipei and Hong Kong where he was intimately involved in China's economic, financial and commercial life.*



BREAKING RANKS OR DISTORTING THE RECORD?

DEBATE OVER THE HMAS VOYAGER TRAGEDY CONTINUES

Tom Frame

Authors are sometimes criticised for reviewing books that might seem to be in retail "competition" with their own work. Several years ago I was taken to task by a colleague for reviewing a new account of the sinking of HMAS Sydney (II) when my own study of the light cruiser's final action (HMAS Sydney: Loss and Controversy; Hodder, 1993) was still on the shelves. A fear that commercial considerations might take precedence over intellectual integrity is apparently widespread.

It is for this reason that I declined all invitations to review *Breaking Ranks: the true story behind the HMAS Voyager tragedy* by Peter Cabban and David Salter (former producer of ABC TV's *Media Watch* and producer of the 2003 tele-documentary *Unfit to Command*) which appeared recently. I have written two books – *Where Fate Calls* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1992) and *The Cruel Legacy* (Allen & Unwin, 2005) – about the subject.

The latter is still in print. While I believe it is possible to review a "rival" work critically and fairly, in this article I want simply to take issue with several of the statements and claims made in *Breaking Ranks* for the sake of the public record.

First, some background to the story. In preparation for service in the Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve from mid-1964, the carrier *Melbourne* and the destroyer *Voyager* were engaged in a night flying exercise 20 miles off Jervis Bay in the early evening prior to the re-embarkation of the air group following *Melbourne's* refit.

After experiencing some difficulty in "finding the wind", *Melbourne* ordered *Voyager* to a new flying course and to assume plane-guard station. *Voyager's* subsequent movements were inexplicable. At 8:56 p.m., *Melbourne* collided with *Voyager* at high speed. *Voyager* was cut in two; the bow section sank quickly

with the stern section remaining afloat for three hours. Eighty-two men serving in the destroyer lost their lives in what became the greatest peacetime disaster in Australian history.

Prime Minister Robert Menzies established a Royal Commission to inquire into the circumstances of *Voyager's* tragic loss.

After 50 days of public hearings, the Royal Commissioner, the Honourable Sir John Spicer (Chief Justice of the Industrial Court who sat alone as Royal Commissioner), found that *Voyager* was to blame for the collision. But he also criticised the actions of three officers who were on the carrier's bridge at the time of the collision – Captain R.J. Robertson (the commanding officer), Acting Commander J.M. Kelly (*Melbourne's* navigator) and Sub-Lieutenant J.A. Bate (a young officer-of-the-watch). These criticisms were unexpected, unjustified and unreasonable.

When the "Spicer Report" was tabled and debated in federal parliament in September 1964, Prime Minister Menzies outlined a number of reforms in naval operations and administration that were already in the process of implementation while many others were planned. There would be no repeat of this terrible tragedy.

In a motion moved by Opposition leader Arthur Calwell censuring the government for the succession of naval accidents after 1956 that had culminated in the loss of *Voyager*, Victorian Liberal backbencher John Jess was critical of the government's handling of the tragedy. He was disappointed with the conduct of the Royal Commission, the quality of its report and the treatment of Captain Robertson after he was appointed in command of the Sydney shore training establishment HMAS *Watson*. Considering his posting to be a demotion and effectively an expression of no confidence in his ability, Robertson resigned from the Navy on 28 September 1964. The circumstances of his departure meant he was ineligible for a pension.

As part of his campaign to challenge Sir John Spicer's Royal Commission findings, Robertson obtained information from Peter Cabban, *Voyager's* executive officer throughout 1963, about the health and general well-being of the destroyer's commanding officer, Captain Duncan Stevens.

After a tumultuous year serving alongside the volatile Stevens, Cabban retired from the Navy and became a management consultant. Following *Voyager's* loss, Cabban had spoken with several of the survivors and been told that Stevens had consumed a triple brandy shortly before the collision. He was stunned. Cabban

was just as surprised when he was not called to give evidence at the Royal Commission.

In a dictated background statement, originally intended for Robertson, Cabban reported a number of incidents during the year prior to collision when Stevens had consumed excessive amounts of alcohol and become unwell as a result. This information found its way into the hands of several Liberal backbenchers in Canberra who pressed the Holt Government (Sir Robert Menzies had retired in January 1966) for a fresh inquiry.

After a dramatic parliamentary debate in May 1967, the Cabinet agreed to a second Royal Commission to be conducted by three judges: Sir Stanley Burbury, Kenneth Asprey and George Lucas. Over 85 days, almost every aspect of the Navy's corporate culture was analysed and assessed. The royal commissioners found that the sole cause of the collision lay with *Voyager* and that no blame could be attached to any person serving in *Melbourne*.

Peter Cabban became a central figure in the *Voyager* controversy when his "Statement" became news. He has spoken publicly before about his part in the *Voyager* story. The publisher's "blurb" for *Breaking Ranks* (usually drafted by authors) claims that Cabban "finally tells the full story of *Voyager* and its scandalous aftermath" in *Breaking Ranks*. It is said to be "a saga of duplicity, dishonour and corruption at the highest levels of government and the public service".

The central allegation, according to the blurb, is that the second Royal Commission found that Stevens was "unfit to command". It also states that "Stevens was a chronic drunkard".

But both the blurb and the narrative are misleading and inaccurate in several crucial respects while Cabban fails to make his readers aware of comments made about the reliability of his evidence and criticisms of his judgment by the Royal Commissioners and others that would have influenced the reader's willingness to accept his account of why *Voyager* was lost. Given the constraints of space, there are five statements of "fact" in Cabban's account that need to be corrected or clarified.

The Royal Commission did not conclude that Stevens was a "chronic drunkard". The Commissioners concluded that he "was not a drunkard nor an alcoholic. Nor did he periodically become intoxicated when *Voyager* was in port". They believed Stevens exacerbated a stomach ulcer condition by "drinking far too much" and that his alcohol consumption was "unwise and undisciplined". But this is some distance from declaring him to be a "chronic alcoholic".

CLIVE JAMES

THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE ANNUAL DINNER LECTURE GUEST SPEAKER FOR 2006

Clive James was born in Sydney in 1939, and attended the University of Sydney, where he was literary editor of *Honi Soit*. After graduating he worked for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, before moving to England in 1962. He attended Cambridge University and became a journalist, poet, novelist and reviewer.

Clive James has written more than 20 books, including three autobiographies titled: *Unreliable Memoirs*, *Falling Towards England* and *May Week was in June*; he has also published collections of literary criticism, television criticism, verse and travel writing. His most recent novel was *The Silver Castle*. In 2001 he published two books of essays, *Reliable Essays: The Best of Clive James* and *Even As We Speak: 1993-2001*. Shortly after that, he published a book called *Alone in the Café*. In 2005, James published *The Meaning Of Recognition: New Essays 2001-2005*

With countless appearances on television, Australians will especially remember James for *The Clive James Show*. As a television performer he appeared regularly for both the BBC and ITV in the UK, notably as writer and presenter of the *Postcard* series of travel documentaries.

James helped to found the independent television production company "Watchmaker", and is currently Chairman of the Internet enterprise "Welcome Stranger"

SPEAKER: CLIVE JAMES

(Author and TV personality)

DATE: Wednesday 5 April 2006

TIME: 6.30 for 7 pm

VENUE: Grand Harbour Ballroom
Star City, Sydney

RSVP: (02) 9252 3366 or email

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Cabban's description is highly exaggerated and most unfair to Captain Stevens who is unable to defend himself from this attack and the damning criticisms of his character mounted by David Salter in his 2003 ABC TV documentary "Unfit to Command". I appeared in this program and disputed the general line taken by both Cabban and Salter on the grounds that it was inaccurate and sensationalist.

Furthermore, there is considerable doubt that Stevens ever drank at sea. This is a critical issue given Cabban's forecast that if Stevens ever drank at sea "the ship would be lost". Claims that Stevens did consume alcohol at sea prior to the collision were the basis of feelings of guilt that have brought Cabban into a forty-year battle with depression.

But the evidence of Steward Barry Hyland that he served Stevens a triple brandy 90 minutes prior to the collision is open to challenge and Cabban is far too open to accepting as fact something that he should have challenged given its critical significance.

Reconstructing the events of 10 February 1964 leads me to argue that Steward Hyland actually served the drink in the evening the day before the collision. Blood samples taken from the three bodies recovered from *Voyager* all contained alcohol. It should not be assumed, however, that all three had been drinking.

There is no evidence that the navigator, Lieutenant Harry Cook, consumed any alcohol. In the case of Captain Stevens, his blood-alcohol reading was in excess of the amount of alcohol he is alleged to have drunk. Therefore, the alcohol in his blood may have found its way into the blood samples other than through the consumption of a triple brandy. It is most likely that the alcohol found in the blood of all three bodies was actually the result of clinical contamination as the GP conducting the post mortems had his instruments sitting in an alcohol bath. Cabban makes no reference to any doubt about Hyland's evidence or concerns about the accuracy of the autopsy.

The Royal Commission did not find that Stevens was unfit to command at the time of the collision. It did, however, find that Stevens was unfit to command as of 31 December 1963 - six weeks prior to the collision. The Commissioners pointed out that Stevens was rendered periodically unfit to command when his duodenal ulcer was active. As they were asked to make a judgement about Steven's health as of 31 December 1963 - the end of the period covered by Cabban's statement, they do not make any finding for the subsequent period. Cabban does not make this plain and misleads the reader as to the force and effect of this finding.

The Royal Commission did not link Stevens' drinking to the causes of the collision which it found to be inexplicable. Despite the strength of the claims and the extent of the fuss caused by those who agitated for a second inquiry, neither Cabban nor his evidence provided a link between the health and well-being of Captain Stevens and the causes of the collision. The Royal Commissioners over-turned the findings of the 1964 Royal Commission on the basis of navigational evidence and technical argument presented by Gordon Samuels QC on behalf of Captain John Robertson.

The Royal Commission found that Cabban was "an unreliable witness but not a dishonest one". The Commissioners felt he was "partisan to the cause" of Captain Robertson and that his "sworn evidence fell far short of supporting what he had dictated". Nor were the Royal Commissioners convinced there had been a cover-up in 1964. They concluded that Cabban's "evidence was not in any way improperly withheld from the [Spicer] Royal Commission". Indeed, they found that Spicer had known of Cabban's "evidence" and decided that it was not relevant to his inquiry. Cabban does not disclose this to his readers.

Of course, no author ever writes in a vacuum. While I did not expect Cabban (whom I interviewed extensively in 1990 and 1991) to agree with my version of the events described in his book, he might have at least mentioned that another detailed account existed and that some of his assertions have been contested. He might also, and this is the greater sin in my view, have been more frank with his readers by quoting directly from the 1967 Royal Commission in relation to his own evidence and the Commission's findings.

None of this would have detracted from a reasonable person's belief that Cabban is a man of truth and integrity which is what I believe him to be. But I firmly believe the Royal Commissioners were right in 1967 when they found that Cabban was an unreliable witness whose judgement was not always that of a reasonable person. For these reasons, *Breaking Ranks* is a flawed account of the *Voyager* tragedy and cannot be left unchallenged or uncorrected.

Dr Tom Frame is the Anglican Bishop to the Australian Defence Force.



DOCUMENTATION BLACK INC'S UNPROFESSIONALISM

Following the publication of Robert Manne's edited collection *Do Not Disturb: Is the Media Failing Australia?* (Black Inc 2005), Gerard Henderson wrote to Black Inc's publisher Morry Schwartz concerning the errors about him in the chapters written by Dennis Glover and Guy Rundle. Neither Mr Schwartz, Robert Manne, Dennis Glover or Guy Rundle responded to the letter printed below. The letter is reprinted here in order to correct the record.

14 September 2005

Mr Morry Schwartz
Publishing Director
Black Inc.
Schwartz Publishing Pty Ltd
Level 5, 289 Flinders Lane
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Mr Schwartz

I refer to your email of 29 August 2005 which you describe as your "reply to the points" which I "have raised" in my various emails concerning Robert Manne's edited collection *Do Not Disturb: Is the Media Failing Australia?* – which was published by Black Inc. in August 2005. I delayed responding because I needed to check some material which was in storage – and because I expected that you might add to your (grossly inadequate) reply. However, after over two weeks, there has been no additional reply – so I can only assume you have said all you intend to say concerning the factual errors contained in the chapters by Dennis Glover and Guy Rundle in *Do Not Disturb*. I understand that you have consulted Robert Manne (Professor of Politics, La Trobe University) and Guy Rundle (Executive Producer, ABC Arts) concerning your response to me. I am not aware as to whether you have contacted Dennis Glover.

BLACK INC'S UNPROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

As you will be aware, this is not the first occasion in which I have expressed concern about Black Inc's unprofessional editorial standards, its unwillingness to engage fact-checkers prior to publication and its refusal to even acknowledge – let alone apologise for – errors made as a consequence of Black Inc's inadequate editing procedures. When errors are made in publications of The Sydney Institute, I

correct them. When errors are made in Black Inc. publications – you go into denial and engage in counter-accusations.

I am sympathetic to small publishing houses. Indeed, David Corlett – the author of Black Inc's *Following Them Home: The Fate of Returned Asylum Seekers* – addressed The Sydney Institute last night. By the way, the Institute – not Black Inc. – covered Mr Corlett's travel to Sydney. My point in our correspondence has been that, unlike some small publishers, Black Inc. has the financial capacity to employ fact-checkers before books are printed and to engage editors who will ensure that proper editorial standards are met.

There are references to me in the chapters written by David Marr, Dennis Glover and Guy Rundle in *Do Not Disturb*.

I do not agree with David Marr's description of me as belonging to the "thinking right" in his chapter titled "Is the Media Asleep?". However, I have not complained about this label since, ultimately, it is Mr Marr's opinion. The fact is that David Marr correctly recorded my views on the High Court's decision in the *Al-Kateb Case* – which were contained in my *Sydney Morning Herald* column of 17 August 2004. He sourced the column and accurately reported that I had supported the minority judgment of Chief Justice Murray Gleeson – who expressed grave concern that, under the existing legislation, asylum seekers could be kept in detention forever.

In other words, David Marr did what writers should do. He expressed an opinion – after accurately reporting and sourcing a comment. Unfortunately, neither Dennis Glover nor Guy Rundle could reach such a standard in their contributions to *Do Not Disturb* – and neither you (as publisher) nor Robert Manne (as editor) insisted that they should reach such a standard.

DENNIS GLOVER'S FACTUAL ERRORS

As you are aware, I have corresponded with Dennis Glover concerning his factual errors concerning me which appeared in his chapter in *Do Not Disturb* and have forwarded a copy of this correspondence to you.

- At Page 201, Dennis Glover made the following reference to me concerning my critique of the reporting of many journalists/commentators during Mark Latham's time as Labor leader:

Unfortunately it didn't take long for this exercise in intimidation to degenerate into a nasty game of list-making. Gerard Henderson was certain who the culprits were. In an article in the Age and the Sydney Morning Herald two months after the election, he listed the following journalists and commentators who were

unable to see from the start that Mark Latham was doomed to defeat: Alan Ramsey, Michelle Grattan, Craig McGregor, Barry Donovan, Michael Duffy, Margaret Simons, Kerry O'Brien, Laura Tingle, Matt Price, Maxine McKew and Mark Baker [sic]. Some, like McKew, were attacked not only for their opinions but for not asking the right questions or pointing out inconsistencies in their guests' arguments. (The logic, of course, comes from the justice system of the Soviet Union – during the Stalin era.)

Dennis Glover continued his chapter by asserting – without evidence – that I had labelled the above mentioned individuals as “unreliables”, who hold “sinister and unpatriotic” views and are into “treachery”. In a letter to me dated 14 August 2005, Dr Glover conceded that he had “mistakenly typed ‘Mark Baker’ instead of ‘Geoffrey Barker’”. He could not provide any evidence to support his claim that I had used such words as “unreliables”, “sinister and unpatriotic” and “treachery” in my newspaper column. In other words, his allegation was an invention.

Had Robert Manne acted professionally as an editor, such (unsourced) allegations could have been removed from *Do Not Disturb* prior to publication. Also, Mr Manne understands a lot about communist totalitarianism in the Soviet Union during Josef Stalin's time. More than most, Robert Manne was in a position to know that my irreverent put-down of how some journalists and commentators covered Mark Latham in the lead-up the ALP's disastrous loss at the 2004 Federal election cannot be compared with the “logic” of the so-called “justice system of the Soviet Union – during the Stalin era”. Such hyperbole does enormous disservice to the victims of Stalinism.

- At Page 205, Dennis Glover made the following reference to my (occasional) appearances on the ABC TV *Insiders* program:

Those to whom politics is close to a religious calling can get up early on Sunday mornings and watch Piers Akerman, Andrew Bolt and Gerard Henderson “prove” the ABC is biased towards Labor while simultaneously sinking the boot into it – on Barrie Cassidy's ABC-funded couch.

The fact is that I have never said the “the ABC is biased towards Labor”. Rather, I have consistently argued that many ABC presenters criticise both the Coalition and Labor from the left – which is quite a different point. As the record indicates, I supported the criticisms made by Labor leaders Bob Hawke and Paul Keating of the ABC during their prime ministerships. My criticism of the ABC has been that it favours left-wing causes not that it is biased towards

Labor (which is not “left wing” in any meaningful sense of the term).

In our correspondence, Dr Glover was not able to support his claim that I had ever said that “the ABC is biased towards Labor”. In an email dated 14 August 2005, Dennis Glover tried to deflect his error by maintaining that he had never claimed that I had “literally” said this. Another instance of denial – because this is precisely what Dr Glover did write on Page 205 of *Do Not Disturb*.

I have made my criticisms of ABC management deficiencies – which have led to a situation where the public broadcaster is imbued with a fashionable leftism and invariably criticises both the Coalition and Labor from the left – in my syndicated column and in such places as *The Sydney Institute Quarterly* and *The Sydney Papers*. However, I have not used my occasional appearances on *Insiders* – or my regular slot on ABC *Radio National Breakfast* – to criticise the ABC as an institution or ABC management. It would be unprofessional to do so. In our correspondence, Dr Glover was not able to support his claim about me with any evidence. Rather, once again, he sought to change the allegation. He even went to the absurd length as to claim that a general reference which I had made on *Insiders* to “some sections of the media” was, in fact, a specific reference to the ABC. It was as ridiculous as that. Dr Glover should be able to do better than this.

I note that in your reply dated 29 August 2005, you simply ignore my complaints concerning Dennis Glover's factual errors in *Do Not Disturb*.

GUY RUNDLE'S FACTUAL ERRORS

- At Pages 39-40, Guy Rundle listed me as one of the group columnists who have denounced the “elites” without acknowledging that they themselves were “part of such a group”. Mr Rundle produced no evidence to support his claim with respect to me. No surprise, really – since, in fact, I have consistently argued against the use of the term “elites” in this context. See, for example, my *Sydney Morning Herald* column dated 22 July 2003.

This error would have been picked up if Black Inc. had employed a fact-checker or if either Mr Manne or Mr Rundle had contacted me to check my views before *Do Not Disturb* went to print. The fact is that no one associated with *Do Not Disturb* attempted to check any matters with me prior to the book's publication.

- On Page 47, after claiming that some commentators “of the right...had begun their political careers on the left”, Guy Rundle wrote:

Other, more consistent commentators were less than fully upfront about their past: Gerard Henderson was so busy denouncing the accommodation of now

social-democratic figures with Soviet tyranny that he forgot to mention his own early years as National Civic Council wunderkind, at a time when the NCC was supporting every grisly Latin American dictatorship on offer.

Mr Rundle's assertions were not supported by any evidence of any kind. His statement is manifestly false – for the reasons set out below.

First, it is widely known that I worked part-time for B.A. Santamaria's National Civic Council in 1970 and 1971 and that I had an association with the NCC for a few years before and after the date. This has been mentioned in profiles of me on the electronic media and in print and this is referred by me in the only autobiographical essays I have written. Unlike Robert Manne, I believe it self-indulgent to discuss myself in my syndicated column – in my view, newspaper readers are just not that interested in the persona of columnists. Robert Manne, on the other hand, has written many a treatise on himself.

In your final "reply", dated 29 August 2005, the following concession is made viz: "You have noted your membership of the NCC in the past". It is just that Guy Rundle says precisely the opposite in *Do Not Disturb* which is published by you. Yet you make no apology whatsoever for Mr Rundle's error concerning me which, belatedly, you have acknowledged.

Second, I was never "a National Civic Council wunderkind" – which, as I understand it, means child prodigy. It is documented that – from the mid 1960s until the mid 1970s – I generally supported Mr Santamaria on foreign policy. I was an anti-communist when such views were unfashionable on university campuses. But I disagreed with Mr Santamaria on some social and economic issues and told him and other NCC members so.

In your (poorly written) "reply" of 29 August 2005, this is what you came up with in support of Guy Rundle's "wunderkind" allegations – following your discussions with both Guy Rundle and Robert Manne viz:

You object to the term NCC "wunderkind". You were a high profile and effective NCC/Democratic [sic] Club activist at Melbourne University and then worked for the NCC during the period. As noted in one of your articles regarding your eventual departure from the NCC, you were – after protest – accorded a chance to give a paper at an NCC conference, at which all 6 other papers (and originally, all 7) were to be given by B.A. Santamaria. To most people this would indicate that the term "wunderkind" was appropriate.

This comment is littered with errors:

I was not an NCC activist on campus – in fact, I disagreed with the tactics of the only NCC club on the Melbourne University campus in the late 1960s and early 1970s – i.e. the (quaintly named) Radical Club. There was no Democratic Club at Melbourne University at the time – although such an entity did exist on some other campuses. I ran the Democratic Labor Party Club at Melbourne University – it had no connections with either the DLP or the NCC. Just as the ALP Club at the time had no connections with the ALP. The sole activity of the DLP Club at the time was to publish a newsletter and host lunch-time talks along with the occasional dinner.

I set out my relationship with B.A. Santamaria and the National Civic Council in my essay entitled "B.A. Santamaria, Santamarianism and the Cult of Personality" which was published in *50 Years of the Santamaria Movement* (Eureka Street Papers, No 1, 1992). With his access to taxpayer subsidised libraries, Professor Manne should have been able to locate this document before the text of *Do Not Disturb* went to the printer. If he, or you, or, indeed, Mr Rundle had asked for a copy – I would have provided same prior to the publication of *Do Not Disturb*.

In your "reply" of 29 August 2005, you neglect to point out that – as described in the above cited essay – my paper at the NCC conference in 1974 was titled "A Critique of The Movement" (the NCC was also termed "The Movement"). What's more, Mr Santamaria attempted to prevent me from speaking at the conference. Soon after the address, I was effectively expelled from the NCC. These are hardly the actions of a "wunderkind". Child prodigies do not publicly criticise their mentors. What's more, I was not a child in 1974.

Third, it is wilfully false for Guy Rundle to declare – without any evidence, of course – that I worked for Mr Santamaria "at a time when the NCC was supporting every grisly Latin American dictatorship on offer".

As previously indicated, I had an association with the NCC from 1965-1966 until 1974-1975 and I worked part-time for the NCC in 1970 and 1971 while I completed my second degree (i.e. Law). My prime duties at the NCC involved research and writing. During this period, B.A. Santamaria was not at all interested in Latin America. He was primarily focused on the Cold War in Europe and Asia along with its impact on the Middle East. The fact is that Mr Santamaria was not even particularly interested at the time in Latin America's only communist dictatorship – i.e. Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba. Latin America was just not on the NCC's radar, so to speak. If Guy Rundle had done any research he would have known this.

In 1964 B. A. Santamaria published his book of essays *The Price of Freedom* – it contained no mention of

Latin America. In 1969 he published *Point of View*, a collection of scripts from his Channel 9 “Point of View” program. The only references to Latin America focused on Cuba’s place in the Cold War. B.A. Santamaria wrote two editions of his memoirs - *Against the Tide* (published in 1981) and *Santamaria: A Memoir* (published in 1997). Once again, the only references to Latin America turned on Cuba. Since B.A. Santamaria’s death – three extremely critical books have been written about him. Namely, Paul Ormonde’s edited collection *Santamaria: The Politics of Fear* (2000), Bruce Duncan’s *Crusade or Conspiracy?* (2001) and Ross Fitzgerald *The Pope’s Battalions* (2004). Despite the scathing criticisms of Mr Santamaria in all three volumes, there is no allegation in any of these critiques that B.A. Santamaria ever supported Latin American dictatorships.

Robert Manne was in a position to know this – since he was particularly close to B.A. Santamaria in the 1980s and early 1990s. So much so that he was one of only four speakers invited to address the NCC’s 50th Anniversary Function on 7 October 1991 – along with (then) Bishop George Pell, Archbishop Eric D’Arcy and B.A. Santamaria himself.

Like all of us, B.A. Santamaria had his faults and made misjudgements. However, his critics are wrong in alleging that he supported fascism in Europe in the 1930s and/or grisly dictatorships in Latin America before or after the Second World War. He didn’t. It is quite contemptible for Robert Manne to be associated with the latter claim (made by Guy Rundle) since Mr Manne never made such a criticism during Mr Santamaria’s life – or at the time of his death in 1998.

Robert Manne’s book *Left Right Left: Political Essays 1977-2005* (which was published by Black Inc.) includes his obituary which was written following Mr Santamaria’s passing. *Left Right Left* contains no reference to B.A. Santamaria’s (alleged) support for “grisly Latin American dictatorships”. Indeed, there is no reference to Latin America in *Left Right Left*. Nor does Mr Manne refer to Latin America in his recent books *The Shadow of 1917* (1994), *The Way We Live Now* (1998) and *The Barren Years* (2001). It seems that, like B.A. Santamaria, Robert Manne himself has exhibited little interest in Latin America over the years.

I note, for the record, that Black Inc.’s editor obviously did not check any of B.A. Santamaria’s published articles, books or Channel 9 *Point of View* television scripts before *Do Not Disturb* was published. This is a grievous oversight – and, once again, demonstrates Black Inc’s evident lack of professionalism.

In your email of 29 August 2005, you maintained that “the coverage of Latin American affairs in the

National Civic Council’s *News Weekly*” from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s “was comprehensive and frequent” and claim that “a number of articles” were “clearly in favour of repressive measures and regimes” in Latin America. This follows your belated decision to engage some “fact checkers”, which was referred to in your email to me dated 23 August 2005 – in response to my various emails documenting the factual errors in *Do Not Disturb*.

As Robert Manne knows, the National Civic Council was a hierarchical organisation dominated by its national president B.A. Santamaria. Its views were stated by Mr Santamaria and no one else. The back page was the key *News Weekly* feature – it contained a written version of B.A. Santamaria’s *Point of View* script. Except for occasional special articles, the remainder of *News Weekly* was essentially filled by its editor Ted Madden. The NCC did not have much money and *News Weekly* was produced on the cheap. Mr Madden was not a member of the NCC. He, in turn, engaged Denys Jackson, a retired journalist, to fill the international pages. Mr Jackson developed the (unfortunate) habit of lifting material from overseas magazines and placing it in the second half of *News Weekly* – where it was rarely read. I cannot recall even one of Mr Jackson’s contributions to *News Weekly* ever being discussed at any NCC function – until *The Economist* complained in early 1970s that he was plagiarising its material.

All you and your fact-checkers have been able to come up with to support Guy Rundle’s assertion that the NCC supported “every grisly Latin American dictatorship” are a number of unsigned articles published in *News Weekly* on 5 January 1966, 1 June 1966 and 12 April 1967. That’s it. I have read all three articles. They are brief, essentially descriptive and do not contain any barracking for any Latin American dictatorships – which was the gist of Mr Rundle’s (undocumented) allegation in *Do Not Disturb*.

In fact, in the 5 January 1966 article, Chile is described as “the brightest hope of Latin America” and its democratically elected Christian Democratic leader – Eduardo Frei – was praised. Chile in 1966 was not a dictatorship, grisly or otherwise. Rather it was a representative democracy – see, for example, Paul W. Drake’s entry on Chile in *The Oxford Companion To Politics Of The World*. The 1 June 1966 article, to which you take exception, was a descriptive piece on the newly independent Guyana. The 12 April 1967 article was very brief – it essentially supported the approach of President Juan Carlos Onganía’s authoritarian regime in Brazil against the supporters of the former Peronist authoritarian regime.

For the record, I seldom agreed with Denys Jackson. As I recall, B.A. Santamaria regarded him as quaint and ineffective. In any event, the three pieces you have quoted, after engaging fact-checkers, do not

support Guy Rundle's allegation. Rather than barrack for dictatorships in Latin America, *News Weekly* actually reported that Latin America's "brightest hope" circa 1966 was a representative democracy – i.e. Chile.

It is true – as I wrote in my email to you dated 5 August 2005 – that B.A. Santamaria did not oppose the overthrow of Salvador Allende's government in Chile in 1973. But he did not barrack for the Chilean military dictatorship which followed the coup – certainly not when I knew him. Nor, as far as I am aware, did he ever barrack for any Latin American dictatorships.

The fact is that you have not been able to provide evidence to support your assertion. Nor has Guy Rundle – despite the fact that, as the executive producer of ABC Arts, he would have access to the ABC's taxpayer financed library and archives. In any event, Latin America became an issue in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s – by which time I had no connection with the NCC. I supported the emergence of democracies which commenced in most of Latin America (but not Cuba) during Ronald Reagan's presidency.

In your emails to me – including your final "reply" of 29 August 2005 – you make other allegations beyond those made in Guy Rundle's article in *Do Not Disturb*. This is the familiar debating trick of moving-the-goalposts. All I would say is that your allegation that *News Weekly's* coverage of Latin America and Africa and Asia was "roughly equivalent to the *New Statesman's* coverage of USSR in the 1930s" is undocumented hyperbole. The *New Statesman* barracked for Josef Stalin and Soviet communism in the 1930s. The fact is that Santamaria was not interested in Latin America or Africa and never travelled to either region. Certainly he supported anti-communist regimes in South Vietnam and South Korea – but only on the basis that they were preferable to their communist totalitarian alternatives. There is no evidence that Mr Santamaria ever supported a totalitarian regime of the right or the left. I write this as one of his public critics who has read most of his work and many of his files.

In *Do Not Disturb*, Guy Rundle could have criticised both B.A. Santamaria (and, indeed, Robert Manne) for not being interested in Latin America. But that is not what he wrote. It is false for you to now imply otherwise.

CONCLUSION

As you are aware, this is not the first occasion on which I have had occasion to express concern at Black Inc.'s lack of professionalism. As I noted in our earlier correspondence, you have still failed to

produce a "sent header" record of the date and the time for the email which you claim was forwarded to me by Black Inc. in late 2003. As you are aware, I wrote to Black Inc. in response to the errors contained in Mungo MacCallum's allegations about me, which were published in Black Inc.'s *Quarterly Essay*, Issue 6, 2002. In the absence of any evidence that a reply was forwarded to me by Peter Craven on behalf of Black Inc., I can only assume that no reply was sent. Certainly nothing was received. If the email was actually sent by Black Inc. to me, then you could document this by providing the "sent" record. So far you have not done so. The invitation is still open.

As I have indicated previously, as a publisher you should match the same high standards that you set in your other career as property developer. So far at least, this is not the case – as is evident in the denial which you have engaged in with respect to the errors which I have identified in *Do Not Disturb*.

Over and out.

Yours sincerely

Gerard Henderson

cc: Robert Manne

Professor of Politics
La Trobe University

Guy Rundle
Executive Producer - ABC Arts
ABC Melbourne

Dennis Glover
Parliament House, Canberra

Set out below is the letter which Gerard Henderson forwarded to Peter Craven, the then editor of Black Inc's *Quarterly Essay* series, concerning the factual errors in Mungo MacCallum's piece in *Quarterly Essay*, Issue 6, 2002. Black Inc. did not respond to this letter. As mentioned above, Morry Schwartz subsequently claimed that a reply was sent by Peter Craven by email – but he was not able to provide a date or a time when the email was sent. Gerard Henderson's letter is published below to correct the record – in view of Black Inc's unwillingness to even privately acknowledge Mr MacCallum's errors.

Peter Craven

5 September 2002

Editor

Quarterly Essay

Level 5, 289 Flinders Lane
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Peter

Alison Broinowski recently drew my attention to Mungo MacCallum's comments concerning The Sydney Institute and myself which appeared in the "Correspondence" section of *Quarterly Essay*, Issue

6, 2002. I had read John Button "Beyond Belief" essay – but had not got around to reading Mr MacCallum's reply to those who commented on his "Girt by Sea" piece. Alison Broinowski thought that Mungo MacCallum's reply was over the top. Having now read it, I agree. Hence this letter.

As you will be aware, I was asked by Chris Feik to contribute to the "Girt by Sea" debate in the correspondence section of *Quarterly Essay*. He was interested in – and requested that I elaborate on – my article which was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* on 26 March 2002. Chris Feik will recall that I had some reservations about contributing the piece but, in the end, decided to accept the invitation. I should record that the comment was written without consideration. I did not request – and I did not receive – payment. My principal reservation turned on leaving myself open to an attack-in-reply by Mungo MacCallum – to which I would have no right of reply. This is precisely what has happened. In my view, it calls into question the very professionalism of how *Quarterly Essay* handles correspondence.

As you will be aware, my response to "Girt by Sea" was critical. But I also made some positive points about the essay. Mr MacCallum did not see fit to match my restraint – as the following examples demonstrate.

- At Page 110 Mungo MacCallum commenced his comments on me with the following erroneous assertion - viz:

It is always reassuring to find oneself on the other side to Gerard Henderson, a commentator whose employers at The Sydney Institute are too ashamed even to identify themselves. There, that's out of the way. Since Henderson likes to open with a personal insult it seems only proper to reply in kind.

The Sydney Institute is a company limited by guarantee. As such, it has a board of directors - headed by a chairman. The members of the Institute's board are my employers. Meredith Hellicar is chairman of the board. The membership of The Sydney Institute's board has always been a matter of public record – in accordance with the requirements of company law. If Mr MacCallum had any knowledge of company law, he would have known this. Moreover, the membership of the Institute's board has been on the Institute's website for many years. Mr MacCallum would have become aware of this had he done any research of any kind before launching into what he himself has described as his "insult".

It is wilfully false (and defamatory) for Mungo MacCallum to assert that my "employers at The Sydney Institute are too ashamed to even identify themselves". I note, for the record, that no one at *Quarterly Essay* bothered to check the veracity of this claim before it was published.

- At Page 111 Mungo MacCallum set out what he himself described as his "ritual final insult" directed at me – viz:

...if the word "hyperbole" ever disappears from the language, the faceless men of The Sydney Institute will have to buy their mouthpiece a new set of alphabet blocks.

Leaving aside the attempted abuse of the schoolyard genre, the reference to "the faceless men of The Sydney Institute" is just plain wrong. In fact, the Institute's board members are neither anonymous nor universally male. Moreover, it is wilfully false – and professionally damaging – for Mr MacCallum to assert that I am their "mouthpiece". The fact is that not one member of the Board knew that I was intending to write about "Girt by Sea" for the *Sydney Morning Herald/Age* – or for *Quarterly Essay*. I note, for the record, that no one at *Quarterly Essay* made any attempt to check Mr MacCallum's assertion prior to publication – despite the fact that the claim is defamatory.

It is unclear as to what form of editorial quality control *Quarterly Essay* chooses to exercise with respect to the "Response to correspondence" section. However, it does not seem to be all that exact. For example, at Page 112 Mungo MacCallum states that he finds "the use of first names in this kind of debate both presumptuous and patronising". Then, on Page 113, he refers to Robyn Spencer as "Robyn". How presumptuous, how patronising – how contradictory.

If *Quarterly Essay* wants to treat its correspondents with due professionalism, it should give them a chance to comment on the "Response to correspondence" section prior to publication – with a view to correcting errors of fact. The present practice is both unfair and unprofessional. The question is what will *Quarterly Essay* do about Mungo MacCallum's false – and defamatory – comments which were published (without editorial checking) in *Quarterly Essay*?

Yours sincerely

Gerard Henderson
Executive Director

cc: Chris Feik
Assistant Editor - *Quarterly Essay*
quarterlyessay@blackinbooks.com



MUMMY, MUMMY – LOOK WHAT THE GOVERNMENT'S DONE

Anne Henderson

Who would take on motherhood these days? Apart from the statistics that demonstrate a woman loses tens of thousands in salary over her career lifetime, chances for promotion and superannuation contributions, there is the cost of raising a child which is conservatively estimated to be between \$200,000 and \$400,000.

Then there is the continuous spate of unsolicited advice by way of academic books, one side purporting to have the answers as to why everything from bottle feeding to child care is bad and why mothers of very young children should not work, balanced on the other side by equally convinced theses that the working woman has a right to work and that quality child care is good for children.

For all that, recent birth statistics suggest that Australia is witnessing a mini baby boom in 2005. This may be the result of thirty something women recognising there is a risk in delaying pregnancy too long. It may also reflect a decade and more of continuous prosperity in Australia, as well as increased family benefits handed to stay-at-home mothers by the Howard Government. There is also the freed up labour market and job flexibility that allows parents to share the caring of very young children.

None of this, though, fully explains a sudden increase in the birth rate – still well below replacement levels but up on those of 2003. The other factor, it seems, is that young women (and men) are returning to the family values so ignored in modern lifestyles for decades. However, as with renewed interest in Christianity and church attendance where old constraints no longer apply, the new “family” has also cast off the mould of the 1950s.

Mothers and fathers today embrace parental freedom alongside nurturing obligations. And this poses new problems - not only in the management of family life

but also in the popular discourse and debate around “what’s best for baby”.

After ten years of reading and writing on the subject of what’s best for baby, former academic Anne Manne has just produced *Motherhood – How we should care for our children* (Allen & Unwin) Around the same time, three leading female academics (all professors), Fiona Stanley AC, Sue Richardson and Margot Prior AO published the result of their work in *Children of the Lucky Country – How Australian Society has turned its back on children and why children matter* (Macmillan).

For Manne, the emphasis is on mother as the dominant good for baby; for the collective professors it is a question of what is happening to Australian children generally across many socio-economic and cultural groups. For the professors, especially, the issues are societal and government policies need to change.

AT HOME WITH ANNE MANNE

Anne Manne approaches her polemical work using personal experience, alongside an examination of a great number of texts, studies and one-off examples she agrees with or which support her case. The reader is left in no doubt that here is a born again nurturer who is in favour of mothering from the cradle – even her daughters’ school years are referred to as being “caught up in McDonaldisation”, the term used to reduce institutional care for Australia’s children, at any level, to a sort of efficient assembly line production of a variety of person:

It promotes speed, convenience and quantity over quality, resulting in flattened, featureless and mediocre products. It succeeds ultimately because it is cheap.

Such is the strength of her distaste for the educational system, it’s a surprise her daughters were not home schooled.

The Manne approach to motherhood stems very much from her own experiences. As a university academic of the 1970s, Manne’s feminist beliefs were immediately challenged by becoming a mother. It was no longer a case of “my needs” but “hers” as she looked down on her sleeping daughter. The conversion was total; Manne went on to discover that local child care facilities were below her expectations and to accept a period of full time mothering until both her daughters went to school.

On Manne’s younger daughter’s full day at school, she went home, made a coffee and “cracked my knuckles a few times and sat down to write. The first school term I wrote the first essay of this book. I have been writing ever since.”

This confidence in Manne is to be admired. She shrugged off the worries of friends who warned her how the phase after children start school is one of big transitions and made a career for herself at home. Manne could write; an ideal career for a mother who wanted to be there for her daughters in the mornings and afternoons.

Yet this is not a lifestyle that is remotely possible for more than a handful of women. What's more, Manne's lifestyle was adequately sustained by a husband in a full time senior academic position who was the primary breadwinner. They adopted a lifestyle in Melbourne's rural fringes, happily not too distant from the husband's workplace where his job allowed easy hours for travel. They never divorced and family life was harmonious. Manne even kept horses and rode frequently. All nicely middle class but a minority scenario. It hardly passes as a prescription for most others. And this is Manne's problem in setting out her thesis for bringing up baby – what she has done is basically her answer to what others should do. If only.

In the Manne, earth centred frame of mothering, quite a few romantic notions of the past creep in as she goes along. There is little doubt that Manne is fiercely centred on home and hearth – nothing wrong there – but there are notions in her evaluation of family life in the past that are simply fanciful.

For Manne, paid work as dominant is a baddie. She pictures modern young professionals disciplining their babies to sleep after periods of controlled crying because of the demands of work on their time. For Manne, this is the fault of the modern workplace and baby is suffering.

But Manne's idea that a majority of mothers over centuries regularly "put their babies to sleep in their arms while singing lullabies" is a fairy tale. A nanny or nurse looked after baby in better off homes in the past, while in overcrowded agrarian homes it was usually an older sibling still not old enough to work the land or a grandmother and, likewise, in industrial times older children in working class families would look after younger siblings, some of the sibling carers as young as five. The worn out mother of a tribe of children hardly had time to sit singing lullabies to her baby.

GETTING CHILDCARE RIGHT

Institutionalised care has worried a number of commentators over the past two decades and more. As women gained the right to work and, more importantly, took up careers after career oriented study, childcare has become an essential if a woman returns to work while her children are young. In spite of increases in federal government funding for commercial childcare

places, it is the cry of many young working parents that there are still not enough childcare places. And costs are rising fast among those already available. Privately run childcare centres have mushroomed and some individuals have made considerable fortunes out of the childcare industry.

For years, feminists avoided or rationalised any notion that institutionalised care might not always be good for a child's development, even if it made possible more equality for women in the workplace. Then the critics, like Manne, began to be heard. Women professionals, such as broadcaster and author of *Guilt, hope and the childcare debate* Sally Loane, challenged aspects of institutionalised childcare and the attitude generally of the workplace to working mothers. The debate was not only inevitable but also valuable.

Even so, no one has all the answers. Most likely, there is no perfect solution. Like all evolution in history, Western family life will bend and change with the times, lessons being learnt along the way, mistakes made. Anne Manne's view of mothering, however, is very strongly one way – do it all yourself. This is not an approach that will wash with very many mobile, choice happy parents in a globalised economy, not even in their dreams.

Manne throws every criticism to be found of institutionalised childcare into *Motherhood* - from the dangers for very young children of more than 35 hours a week in care to the crass profits made by a few in commercial childcare centres. She goes to some lengths arguing that feminism has played into the hands of new capitalism by encouraging women to fit into the workplace, thereby encouraging a childcare industry and a child "invented" by capitalism – "feminism saved capitalism" she asserts.

There is a deal of exaggeration in this. True, it is not all rosy for two working parents managing family life. But, equally, there is sufficient evidence – both past and present – that a lot of women are not suited to spending long hours, as Manne terms it, "down among the children".

Yes, many women are forced to work because of high mortgages in Australian capital cities where the costs of housing are high. And rearing children is not cheap. But many women also, as Manne herself is forced to recognise, want time in the adult world for their own well being. And there is nothing more damaging for a child than a depressed or psychotic mother.

That grim new capitalism/feminist inspired world Manne sees us inhabiting is also a touch manufactured by Manne's own prejudice. Most of today's young parents don't seem so convinced. If they were, there would be a much greater exodus of

young families to more relaxed settings in regional towns and smaller states than there is at present.

It is true that working parents, more often than not, have little choice but to use childcare centres. But there is plenty of evidence that these parents also are pleased with the advantages this sort of care offers their children. Not only for the chances their children gain to spend time with other children, but also because the quality of childcare is generally very good. In spite of their very low wages, Australian childcare workers, for the most part, are highly professional and well trained.

And then there are the children in disadvantageous family situations, not something Manne considers. Children growing up in non English speaking households can only benefit from being exposed to English speaking others. Children in abusive situations are also better off away from the home at crucial times.

But such is Manne's antipathy to institutionalised care, she sees only what's she wants to see at times. This is particularly evident in her use of the case of Kathleen Folbigg, convicted of killing her four young children. Manne uses the case in support of her theories that institutionalised care harms children, ignoring important evidence that Kathleen's life was fundamentally ruined by her own parents.

Kathleen Folbigg was sexually abused by her father as an infant and her mother abandoned her before she was 18 months old. In a rage, her father tracked down his wife and stabbed her to death. After this, Kathleen Folbigg spent a brief time as a ward of the state. However, her principal carers from birth were her parents till she was eighteen months, her mother's sister briefly after that and then loving foster parents from the age of three. What happened in her own married life to Craig Folbigg has never been properly diagnosed. As a mother, she could be both caring and abusive to her children. The court did not find she was in any way deranged.

It goes without saying, however, that had Kathleen Folbigg had home help while caring for her children or had they gone to childcare, particularly Laura, the last child, killed at home during the day at 19 months, the story for the Folbigg children might well have been different. Anne Manne, however, draws a very long bow and argues that the tragedy of the Folbigg story can all be explained by the fact that Kathleen Folbigg spent a few months in state care as a toddler.

THE DEBATE HAS MOVED ON

In writing *Motherhood*, one suspects Manne thought she would attract a host of attacks from those on the other side of the debate when it was published. She records in the book how her husband warned her

when she planned to write her "unfashionable" views of mothering in the mid 1990s, saying "Don't do it. Listen, I've been involved in some of the nastiest controversies in public life for the last twenty years, and I wouldn't dream of touching that issue."

There is no evidence that over the past decade Anne Manne has been, as her friends cautioned her, "defamed" or her children attacked. But the debate has been feisty. However, the release of *Motherhood* in 2005 has not seen the sort of hyperbolic resistance Manne envisaged. On the contrary, it has attracted mostly favourable reviews of a very sober kind. As blogger William Burroughs Baboon puts it " ... perhaps this debate has already been had over the last ten years. The decision may be that concerning the arrangements we make for our children, no correspondence will be entered into."

Manne waited too long to produce her work if she expected to create a controversy. The tide has turned. People, on the whole, now approach such matters as care for their children with a lot more readiness to consider all options, and even to enjoy what time they can have with their newborns at the expense of the workplace. Women especially. Figures show that mothers of very young infants, who are working, represent a fraction (less than 10 per cent) of working mothers and that around only a quarter of this small minority work full time.

While figures show that the levels of the stress hormone cortisol temporarily rise in very young children in long day care, one should not overstate the seriousness of the figures. Even Manne cannot demonstrate that for this very small percentage of children the rise of the stress hormone cortisol creates any serious long term damage. What Manne does not do in her study, is balance out the statistics on serious damage that can occur in childhood with stay-at-home parenting, especially from overstressed or depressed mothers and, increasingly, mothers who are drug users.

LOOKING AT THE BIGGER PICTURE

In *Children of the Lucky Country*, Stanley, Richardson and Prior operate out of a very different perspective from the Manne approach. Their concern for Australia's children is a concern for those that are falling through the cracks, such as those affected by obesity, chronic diseases, suicide in teenagers, child abuse in the home just for starters. They are not fixed on any one particular style of child rearing and are ready to consider different tracks for different personalities and situations.

Their aim is to alert government to the fact that, for all the material well being in Australia, many serious problems remain in the lives of children here and

these difficulties are growing for a significant number of children in our care. These problems relate to socio-economic factors like the growing gap between those well off and those at the bottom; a continuing lack of progress in the health of many Aboriginal communities; the effects of family breakdown.

In other words, the authors are posing questions about how government and society generally should make a better effort to collectively come up with solutions to the problems modern lifestyles have created. One cannot, and doesn't want to, turn back the clock and embrace the values lost from an earlier time. That earlier world also contained problems now solved. But how do we tailor government policies, funding and input in a way that both solves and prevents the negatives in the lives of many Australian children in this fast moving and changing globalised environment?

Stanley, Richardson and Prior are with Manne in recommending there is a long way to go to make a child centred society. And all believe that Australian workplaces can and need to do more to make work hours and conditions more acceptable to parents spending time with their children. For the professors, achieving a community focused on the child will take a lot more than workplace change.

The professors argue instead for an all out revolution in community attitudes – from individuals to neighbourhoods to suburban planners to the availability of quality child care in all areas, with the focus on a rapid increase being funded immediately in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. They stress the current lack of adequate funding for public education means the most disadvantaged children “miss out on quality education”.

They also argue, as does Manne, that valuing the service parents do for the community is long overdue. Parenting, say the professors, should be honoured and supported by awards, days of celebration and government policies that make parenting easier both financially and socially.

THE ECONOMICS OF CHILD CENTRED POLICY

In the debate over how best to bring up baby, however, it is all very well to call for greater government funding to make childcare a better paid profession or increase the number of quality places, or to look to countries like France, as Anne Manne does in her support of the French 35 hour week, to argue that a more regulated workplace, with benefits and time out for parents of small children, will solve the problem.

Many countries like France, with highly regulated workforces, also have high levels of unemployment.

The unemployment rate in France is currently over 10 per cent. Costs associated with employing a single person are so great in France that businesses, especially small businesses, avoid taking workers on. All this sounds very familiar to Australians who have watched both Labor and Coalition governments argue for freeing up the Australian labour market since the early 1990s.

There is also economic evidence that generous leave entitlements to mothers who want to stay in the workforce are not good for either the economy or the careers of mothers. The 2005 OEDC Report on Sweden argued that its “parental leave” scheme:

... may have become too generous in the sense of harming women's labour market prospects. The social goals of the scheme need to be traded off against these costs. In general, measures that increase the duration of mother's leave further should be avoided so as not to aggravate gender segregation and human capital loss, which are detrimental to longer-term career prospects.

It is all too easy to lay the blame for our much more individualistic society at the feet of a few – whether government or individual, employers or big business. Or to regret that business is concerned about shareholders over the family interests of its workers. There is far more affecting family life than the world of work and profit taking.

It is not only the rigidities of the labour market that have been freed up, leaving workers in more flexible work arrangements which sometimes can become financially precarious. Constraints governing social behaviour and the family unit are also far more elastic than in the past. For more than four decades now, the Western world has seen unprecedented changes affecting family life. Even the notion of what constitutes a “family” is not easy to define any more.

There is no going back to the world of the American television series *Leave it to Beaver* where Dad went off every weekday morning to his office while Mum and their young children got on with their days in nicely manicured suburbia. Anne Manne's way of mothering may appeal to some, but it won't be a majority who will find it an answer.

Mum, by and large, now wants something of Dad's world of work experience. She expects a measure of independence, indeed will need it in the event of a divorce. Dad, more often than not, can't earn enough to provide the family with everything it needs – and many dads are keeping more than one family. What's more, work, for an increasing number, is challenging and attractive.

DOWN AMONG THE CHILDREN

The problem with both Anne Manne's thesis and that of Professors Stanley, Richardson and Prior is that they too easily ignore the great increase in Australian government assistance to families over recent decades. As Michael Keating points out in his *Who Rules? How Government Retains Control* (Federation Press 2004), in January 1983 just four per cent of the disposable income of a low single income family with two children came from government family assistance; when Prime Minister Paul Keating lost office in March 1996 this assistance had gone up to 41 per cent of such a family's income; by 2004 it had gone up to more than half of the family's disposable income.

In 1996-7, assistance to families represented 10.2 per cent of total outlays, while in 2005-06 it is expected that assistance to families will be 12.9 per cent of total expenses. Many Australian families on lower incomes are not net income taxpayers. For example, a double income family with two children aged three and eight has to earn more than \$46,000 per annum before they pay net tax.

In fact, the targeting of families with young children by the Treasurer has been so pronounced, childless singles are often heard to moan that they are being left out of the government's Budget. Such have been the handouts to mothers who stay at home, John Howard has often been accused by feminists of trying to get women out of the workforce.

For all that, it is disturbing to read the statistics on the failures of parenting across Australia – whether figures on youth suicide, children's obesity, abuse, childhood disadvantage and so on. But as Professors Stanley, Richardson and Prior make clear, governments alone cannot impact the problem. As a nation, everyone has to act.

It's a tall order. Workplaces are increasingly "family friendly"; unemployment levels are low; the population has never been more highly educated – and still significant numbers of children are neglected and remain at a disadvantage among their peers. Many adults, also, are simply avoiding parenthood.

There are no complete answers to how we can raise all our children well. But Manne, Stanley, Richardson and Prior, collectively, do throw a lot more light on a child's world Down Under. Parents and non-parents, government assistance aside, need to do better.

- Anne Henderson is editor of *The Sydney Papers*



SIR DAVID SMITH, DALE BUDD AND THE DISMISSAL

At The Sydney Institute on Tuesday 8 November 2005, Sir David Smith responded to the claims by Dale Budd in his essay in the recently published Sybil Nolan (ed) *The Dismissal: Where were you on November 11, 1975?* (MUP). In November 1975, David Smith was official secretary to the Governor-General Sir John Kerr and Dale Budd was Malcolm Fraser's principal private secretary. Mr Budd claims in his essay that Sir John phoned Mr Fraser at 9.30 am on 11 November 1975 and asked him, in advance of Gough Whitlam's dismissal, whether he would be prepared to accept certain conditions pertaining to a caretaker government. The claim, in effect, is that John Kerr gave Malcolm Fraser advance notice of his intention to dismiss Gough Whitlam. Dale Budd also wrote in his essay that David Smith phoned him from Government House at 1.30 pm and said: "You are now working for the Prime Minister. He is on his way back."

At The Sydney Institute, Sir David doubted Dale Budd's account of the first phone call and described Mr Budd's account of a 1.30 pm phone call as a "total fiction". His comments are published in full below:

I've spent 30 years chasing myths and legends and now I've got a new batch.

I have no personal knowledge of the phone call between the Governor-General and Mr Fraser in the morning. I know it took place – I was not in the study at the time. My understanding of it, from the Governor-General immediately afterwards, was that he sought to confirm what had taken place at the meeting that had been held at Parliament House that morning between the leaders of the Government and the leaders of the Opposition. They failed to reach a resolution and, as a result, Mr Whitlam was to come out with certain advice later in the day.

Sir John Kerr, as I recall, Sir John Kerr has denied that he gave Mr Fraser any warning of the caretaker conditions. I'd been instructed by the Governor-General to draft the letter which Mr Fraser signed in the study, and before he was sworn in as prime minister, accepting the caretaker conditions that the Governor-General had imposed on him. The Governor-General read the letter to Mr Fraser in my presence and asked him if he would be

willing to sign that. I can simply say that I formed the impression that the conditions were coming to Mr Fraser as new. If he'd had any warning of them earlier that morning he was a good actor and I have no knowledge of what is now claimed by Dale Budd.

The phone call that Dale Budd claims that I booked him at 1.30 is a total fiction. At 1.30 I was in the process of making the phone calls which I had been asked to make after Mr Fraser had been sworn in. The three of us in the study - the Governor-General, Mr Fraser and myself. Mr Fraser was asked to sign the caretaker letter, to which I've just referred. He took the oath and signed the oath form and then the Governor-General asked me to make a phone call to Buckingham Palace so that the Queen could be alerted to what had happened.

Mr Fraser asked me to make two phone calls for him. The one to John Menadue, which Menadue confirms in his autobiography, which was to tell him that his former prime minister had been dismissed and he had a new prime minister and the new prime minister wanted to see him at Parliament House smartly. But Mr Menadue took no notice of that and went to the Lodge. My second call was to Ewart Smith, the officer in the Attorney General's Department responsible for preparing the proclamation which I had to read later that afternoon. I made those two calls - the one to Menadue and one to Smith in the Attorney General's Department - first. They were the more important, obviously. And then I tried to phone Buckingham Palace.

In the daylight saving, it was then getting on to 3 am their time - 2 pm our time. So I couldn't have called Budd or anybody else at 1.30. The switch operator to whom I said I wish to speak to Sir Michael Charteris, the Queen's private secretary, said: "Excuse me Sir, do you realise what time it is?". I said: "Yes, I'm fully aware of what time it is, I need to speak with the Queen's private secretary". I knew that all the private secretaries' homes were connected to the Buckingham Palace switchboard. And so I waited and waited. He came back and said: "I'm sorry Sir, I can't raise Sir Martin Charteris." I said: "Well, can you get me Sir Philip Moore?" He was the deputy private secretary. "Very good Sir; sorry Sir, I can't raise Sir Philip Moore." I said: "Well, can I speak with Mr William Heseltine?". He was the assistant private secretary, the third man on the totem pole and an Australian. I can see the switchboard operator saying: "If I've got to wake one of my bosses at 3 o'clock in the morning with a phone call from Australia, it's going to be the Australian and not the two Poms."

And so, I was making these phone calls for Mr Fraser and for the Governor-General. I was not asked to call Dale Budd. I had no reason to call Dale Budd. I think Dale Budd, in the book that you've talked about, says that I told him that Mr Fraser wanted to see David Kemp and Senator Withers. Why I would have been

asked to carry that sort of message, I can't imagine. The only message I was asked to carry was to the one to Menadue and one to Ewart Smith.

I made no phone call to Dale Budd that afternoon. I had called him in the morning to arrange for Mr Fraser to come out. And, of course, poor old Dale got that wrong too. The message was: "Mr Whitlam is coming out to see the Governor-General as soon as the no confidence motion in the Parliament is disposed off, just before lunch. Would you - can't give you a time - would you watch out for Mr Whitlam's car and when it departs for Government House would you send Mr Fraser on a few minutes later." Somebody was deputed to keep an eye on Whitlam's car and make sure it drove off. So they sent Mr Fraser off in his car. A few minutes later, amid consternation, Mr Whitlam's car came back. The driver had gone off on a very short errand. They had observed the car leaving but and they didn't see that Mr Whitlam wasn't in the car.

So, that's my opinion of the conversation with Dale Budd. There was no conversation with him at 1.30 whatsoever.

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

Dear Editors

I suppose one shouldn't be surprised that a reviewer who mis-spells the names of authors he is reviewing should also be careless about other things, like the text. Stephen Matchett (*The Sydney Institute Quarterly* August 2005) mis-spells my name five times and the name of the co-editor of *Us and Them*, Barry Hindess, three times in his "Review of the Reviewers". He doesn't do much better with the text, failing to explain what the subject of the book is - a hint, it is about how anyone concerned over human rights or social justice issues in Australia became framed as a member of an "elite" while powerful others escaped scot-free.

Marian Sawyer

Apologies to Dr Sawyer. I did the fact-checking for this article and should have picked up the typos re Sawyer and Hindess. However, a photo of the cover of *Us and Them* was reproduced in *The Sydney Institute Quarterly* which, obviously, got both names correct. The *SIQ* would have been prepared to run a lengthy response to Dr Matchett's critique of *Us and Them* had Marian Sawyer submitted same.

Gerard Henderson



BOOK REVIEWS

John McConnell

MUSLIMS IN AUSTRALIA – IMMIGRATION, RACE RELATIONS AND CULTURAL HISTORY

Nahid Afrose Kabir
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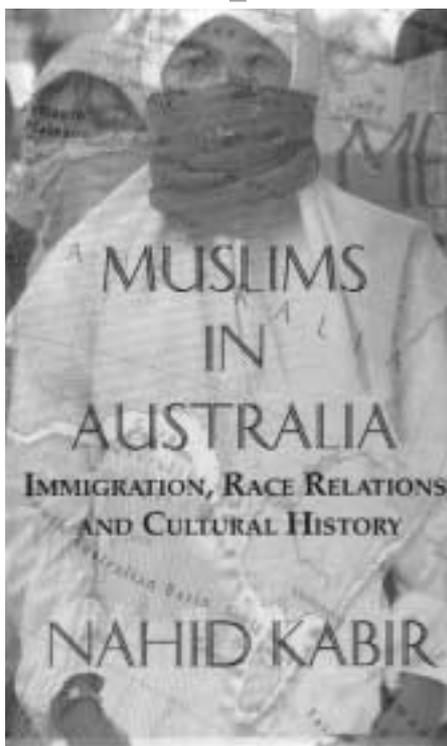
It is a tragic time. Islamic Jihadists aspire to murder and maim randomly. In London – and now in Bali again – young men have chosen to commit suicide hoping to kill as many fellow human beings nearby as possible. It is indeed a tragic time. In the midst of such evil, we do well to remember that Islamic Jihadists represent a tiny proportion of the followers of Islam. We do well to remember also that Muslims are amongst the victims of the Islamic Jihadists. In committing their appalling atrocities, Militant Islam murders and maims Muslims too. Probably, Muslims rank second only to Israelis in the toll of human carnage and suffering wrought by Islamic Jihadists these past few years.

Australian Muslims wish to raise their families in a tolerant and peaceful society. Overwhelmingly, they make a positive contribution to Australia. And they suffer the added penalty that, with every terrorist outrage, suspicion falls upon them. Many Muslim Australians fear an uncertain future for their children. As do the rest of us. There is unity in our concerns. Anything that adds to a more realistic and wider understanding of this new age of terrorism is to be welcomed. May the voices of moderate Islam be heard loud and clear.

One such voice belongs to Nahid Afrose Kabir. In *Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History*, Nahid Kabir examines whether Muslims have encountered discrimination in Australia on the basis of colour, ethnicity or religion, particularly whether religion has become the

primary category of discrimination. She also documents the contribution that Muslim Australians are making to the Australian nation and advocates that they move in the direction of reasonable integration with Australian society.

Nahid Kabir is Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Social and Cultural Studies at the University of Western Australia. She has a PhD in History and an MA in Historical Studies from the University of Queensland, in addition to an MA in History from the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh. Nahid Kabir explored Australian attitudes towards Muslims over the last century and a half – from 1860 to 2002. The author sifted through texts, conducted interviews and undertook archival research for her PhD thesis. The book consists of seven chapters. Basic, but useful information about Islam, the Qur'an (Koran) and Islamic devotional practices are provided in the introductory chapter. Chapters 2 to 6 are organised chronologically. The author sets out her conclusions in the final chapter. These include the following :



- **Muslims have been excluded or isolated in Australian history.**

- **Discrimination against Muslims during the “colonial” and “White Australia” periods, when there were threats to national identity and security, reflected majority discrimination against all minority groupings – including Irish Catholics.**

- **Discrimination against some Muslims during both World Wars reflected not their Islamic faith or colour but rather fears that they represented a security threat.**

- **More recently, during the “multicultural” period, some**

Muslims remained under-privileged because of their race while others were identified with extremism or as enemies. Some Muslims, especially working class Muslims in Sydney and Melbourne, believed that they were being discriminated against

- **Although some media stereotyping occurred, media coverage in Australia on this issue has been “reasonably objective”.**

- **The rise of Islamic militancy is contributing to discrimination against Muslims in Australia. Concerns about**

national security link international events and discrimination against Muslims in Australia. National security concerns override considerations of race and religion.

Nahid Kabir records that moderate Australian Muslims “fear that as a religious category they will remain marked as the ‘enemy’ group.” Just as the Australian Government has sought to “protect its citizens of Islamic faith”, she argues, so should Muslims “make an earnest effort to be a part of the wider society”. Sections of the Muslim community have begun to contribute to wider Australian institutions.

Dr Kabir hopes for an extension of this involvement by Muslims in the wider society. Muslims, she writes “have to open themselves more to the wider community, socially, politically, monetarily and to some extent culturally...integration or acceptance is a two-way process, and the Islamic community would be better off if it adapted itself to its host country – Australia...Australian Muslims are mostly moderate people and by a degree of reasonable integration, they can wipe out the wider society’s misconceptions about Islam”.

May Muslims in Australia gain a wide readership.

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF HAROLD HOLT

Tom Frame

Allen & Unwin in association with the National Archives of Australia

Pb, 2005

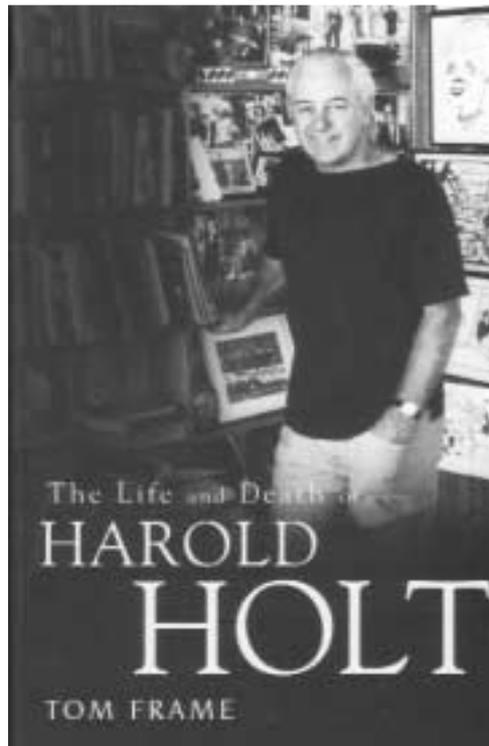
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The Victorian State Coroner found recently (September 2005) that Harold Holt – Australia’s seventeenth Prime Minister – drowned while swimming in December 1967. Harold Holt vanished at Cheviot beach near Portsea on Victoria’s Mornington Peninsula. Almost 38 years after the Prime Minister’s disappearance, the Coroner has found that it was accidental. Holt was not a strong swimmer. The delayed Coroner’s finding may be explained by the fact that Harold Holt’s body was never recovered. A change to the Coroner’s Act now enables an inquest to be held even if a body has not been found. Death by misadventure is unlikely to

befall another Prime Minister in this age of heightened security.

The unusual manner of Harold Holt’s death has come to overshadow his life. Holt inherited the leadership mantle of the Liberal Party and prime ministerial office following the retirement of Robert Menzies on Australia Day 1966. Menzies had been prime minister for 17 years.



Harold Holt then served as Prime Minister during 1966 and 1967 until that fateful entry into the dangerous currents off Cheviot Beach. Tom Frame, Anglican Bishop to the Australian Defence Force and a historian has written *The Life and Death of Harold Holt*. Peter Costello, Australia’s federal treasurer and Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party has contributed the foreword to the book. Peter Costello remarks in the foreword that the day that Harold Holt disappeared represents his “first clear memory of an Australian political event”. In producing his biography of Harold Holt, Tom Frame experienced two major limitations. First, no Holt narrative is available. Holt did not maintain a personal diary.

Politicians’ diaries do not always illuminate in ways that are intended. But such a narrative could have provided insights into how Harold Holt saw personalities and politics. Nor did he engage normally in personal correspondence of a reflective nature.

Second, there is an absence of detailed information about Holt’s life prior to 1949. Little is known about his childhood and adolescence. Information about Harold Holt’s life outside parliament is limited.

Despite these deficiencies, Tom Frame is “confident that no significant body of papers was overlooked” in writing the biography. This means that Tom Frame’s book is primarily about Holt the politician. This is unfortunate, even if unavoidable. It restricts the reader’s ability to engage with the character and personality of Harold Holt.

Tom Frame believes that Harold Holt “was strengthened, toughened and chastened by politics and government.” Frame is not attracted to the view that Holt was “a victim of circumstances”. He believes that Holt had “a long and abiding impact on parliamentary processes and everyday life.”

Harold Holt entered federal parliament in 1935. He was to spend 32 years in parliament. Three-quarters of his time in parliament was in government. In 1939, following the outbreak of World War Two, Holt became Australia's youngest minister. For several years, following the election of the Menzies Coalition Government in December 1949, Holt served as Minister for Labour and National Service as well as Immigration Minister. He became Treasurer at the end of 1958, a position he was to hold until January 1966.

From 1956 to 1966, Harold Holt was Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Government in the House of Representatives. He became Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Prime Minister of Australia from 29 January 1966. The leadership transition was smooth. The cabinet remained essentially the same. But Holt lacked a grand design to guide and inspire his government. However, Harold Holt did initiate a number of steps that differed from those that applied while Menzies was Prime Minister. Some were matters that the Whitlam Government later developed.

Harold Holt began to unwind the White Australia policy. He began moves to eliminate appeals from the High Court of Australia to the Privy Council in the UK. While retaining traditional ties with the US and UK, Holt shifted Australia's foreign policy orientation more towards Asia. He successfully submitted the referendum on Aborigines to the Australian electorate. This particular referendum gave legislative rights on Aborigines to the Commonwealth and ended discrimination against Aboriginal people in undertaking a census of the Australian population.

Despite the size of Harold Holt's victory at the December 1966 federal election, problems were looming during 1967. The Voyager disaster, Senate difficulties, a by-election loss, rising Australian casualties in the Vietnam conflict and the VIP flights controversy combined with challenges posed by a Gough Whitlam-led opposition to undermine confidence in the government and the leadership of Harold Holt. It was also a time of transition. Australia's international relationships were beginning to change, particularly with Britain. Moreover, significant social and political changes were underway.

Holt recognised that changes were occurring but struggled to interpret them in a meaningful pattern. Rather than being able to understand and to articulate the national and international contexts, Holt uttered the foolish quip of "All the way with LBJ", appearing to offer a blank cheque to the United States President personally. Gerard Henderson recalled in an article published in December 1997: "I

was present at the University of Melbourne on July 31, 1967 when Holt delivered the inaugural Alfred Deakin Lecture. Even allowing for some leftist-inspired disruptions, it was a woeful performance. By mid-1967, it had become evident that the prime minister could not explain government foreign policy – and, in particular, Australia's military commitment in Vietnam".

It is surprising how much space Tom Frame allocates in the biography to the fanciful claim that Holt was a Chinese spy and that rather than drown on 17 December 1967, he had a rendezvous in the water off Cheviot beach with a Chinese submarine. The source for this bizarre story publicised by British novelist Anthony Grey turns out to have been a Lieutenant Commander Ronald Titcombe. Eventually, the author concludes that the story is a "complete fabrication".

Tom Frame portrays Harold Holt as a "thoughtful and compassionate man" in search of affirmation from others. Holt, he says, was a humane person but needed to be acclaimed by others. He sought approval through personal challenges and professional achievements. Tom Frame links this craving for acclamation to the parental affection that Harold Holt was denied in childhood. He interprets Holt's extramarital affairs as a search for affection, commenting curiously that these relationships were "largely therapeutic".

When Holt married Zara, she had three boys from a former marriage. He became the boys' stepfather. Tom Frame believes that Harold Holt was actually the father of the twins, Andrew and Sam.

Tom Frame's account of Harold Holt is largely a sympathetic one. He argues that Holt was a seeker after consensus. That he had an inability to manage power and to deal with opposition. That he lacked an inspiring or sustaining vision. That he wanted everyone to love him. This latter point particularly hampered Holt's career. Tom Frame concludes that Holt found politics unfulfilling: "The real tragedy is that Holt spent almost all of his adult life pursuing a job that did not bring him satisfaction".

Harold Holt's story leaves Tom Frame wondering whether it is possible for someone who is decent, honest and kind to lead a nation. Perhaps a good dose of megalomania doesn't go astray.

- *John McConnell is the author of several senior textbooks*



REVIEW OF THE REVIEWERS

Stephen Matchett

Mark Latham is the once and future Labor leader. It seems certain his career finished forever last summer. But with some of the ideas he offered, and the way he combined the economics of social reform with the rhetoric of an old-fashioned Labor leader, he pointed a path for others to follow. The better of the books on Latham: Michael Duffy, *Latham and Abbott: The lives and rivalry of the two finest politicians of their generation* (Random House, 2004), Bernard Lagan, *Loner: Inside a Labor Tragedy* (Allen and Unwin, 2005), Mark Latham, *The Latham Diaries*, (Melbourne University Press, 2005) and Craig McGregor, *Australian Son: Inside Mark Latham* (Pluto Press, 2004), demonstrate why.

The irony is, in the end, Latham turned his rhetoric of community engagement against the only institution that can give it meaning, a major political party.

As Mark Latham told us for years, to change society takes the application of ideas, and the only venue where policy ideas are applied is politics. And the only political forum where real power, the kind that makes real change possible, exists in the parliamentary process, properly dominated by the major parties. The community action alternative is the politics of the cake stall.

Latham's self immolation and the cringe-making way he worked so hard to extract every iota of publicity out of his diaries makes it easy to ignore how, and why, a great many commentators, and millions of electors, took him seriously for 12 months.

It is easy to forget how Labor looked to Latham, how much talk there was of a new politics focused on community needs, instead of economics. Reading last year's instant biographies shows how people were anxious to believe in Latham as a national change-agent.

But the commentators were having themselves on. Certainly Latham's talk of male role models for boys and the importance of reading to kids appealed to electors. But not to win an election.

And while it was always obvious that the disparate directions in his thinking were not necessarily

congruent, nobody much anticipated how this could divide Labor's base. Latham could have held the ladder of opportunity for Tasmanian timber workers. However, he preferred to appeal to inner city environmentalists

Combining economic maturity with the grab bag of causes its rainbow coalition of supporters requires is not easy for Labor. For a start, there is the inevitable tension between the way the public sector unions cloak self-interest as the pursuit of equality and demand Labor put their economic aspirations above those of the community as a whole. Latham fell for this himself, with a schools policy that sought to punish the non-government sector for the failings of state education.

Latham had all the policy components Labor needs; he just could not assemble all the ideas into a saleable package. And he was politically ill disciplined. This showed in the way he made rash decisions, like denying rumours that no one even knew about. Like the way he would follow his own instinct rather than stick to the script. And in the way he took sets against his staff; just as a backbencher he used to denounce anyone who annoyed him in the adjournment debate.

Latham failed as leader not because of his ideas but because in his psyche and style he was in the wrong business. The tragedy that emerges from Bernard Lagan's biography is that he was a man with a passion for a craft for which he had no natural ability. Certainly, Latham could work a room when he wanted to, but he never seemed to have the politician's ability to get on with people.

While he was an innovative thinker, with a gift for a media stunt, he had a tin ear for policy presentation and explanation. Some of his worst blunders, the announcement he would bring Australian troops home from Iraq and the Tasmanian forest policy, were unforced errors.

Nor did Latham ever build a support base of his own. He was supposedly part of the NSW right, but he had no factional support. He had no capital in the favour bank, no union protectors, and no patronage to dispense. All he had was an interest in policy, self-belief and enormous energy. And while he had three in spades they were not enough to save him from his own errors - and from John Howard, perhaps the wildest politician of his generation.

But while Latham was the architect of his own failure, his attempt to match policy and politics is the best way forward for Labor, which needs leaders who are ideas merchants, just less abrasive ones.

In August 2005, Labor effectively endorsed Latham's approach, when Craig Emerson produced a sensible tax reform strategy and Kim Beazley demonstrated

he would not be held to ransom by sectional interest groups by cutting student unions loose over the Voluntary Student Unionism issue. They moved the party to the vital centre, where the issues that win elections are decided.

But it will take an extraordinary politician to deliver on this relocation – an individual with policy skills plus the political ability to stare down the party factions and public sector unions. Most of all it will take a great communicator. Which Mark Latham was, on a good day. There just were not enough good days.

In hindsight, it is easy to observe the better of the biographers talking themselves into the Latham legend. Even ignoring the also-rans, who could not distinguish what they liked the look of from what was going to happen, a lot of people conned themselves over Mark Latham.

Most of the Latham books were either puff pieces or extended magazine articles. Nor is Bernard Lagan's considered study of the Latham leadership from beginning to its awful end likely to attract enduring attention. In politics there is nothing as ex as an ex – especially a failed opposition leader who has disappeared into self-imposed exile.

Perhaps this will relieve the authors, who might not wish to be remembered for so spectacularly spruiking a bloke who turned out to lack the toughness to lead a political party. But while examination of the extraordinary events of 2004 may embarrass politicians and pundits, they are worth remembering. If only to show how gullible people who spend their lives in politics can be.

The amazing thing is that so many political players and people in the media believed Latham could do it. While Latham always thought the press was persecuting him, in fact he got as good, and bad, a go, as anybody else does from news reporting, and a superior run from some of the commentators. As Michael Duffy explained Latham's reputation:

His rise had been helped much more by his reputation as a thinker than by any of his thoughts. Journalists liked the fact he

had ideas and were not worried – surprisingly unworried as time went on – by his lack of success in arguing them inside the party. As a head-kicking thinker – or, if you like, a poet-warrior – he made great copy. (288)

Some favourable coverage occurred because Latham livened things up a bit. The coverage of federal politics in Australia is remarkably serious. People who read broadsheets know an awful lot about tax and interest rates, so a bloke who argued that the need for more people to read *The Cat in the Hat* to kids was a political issue made for a change.

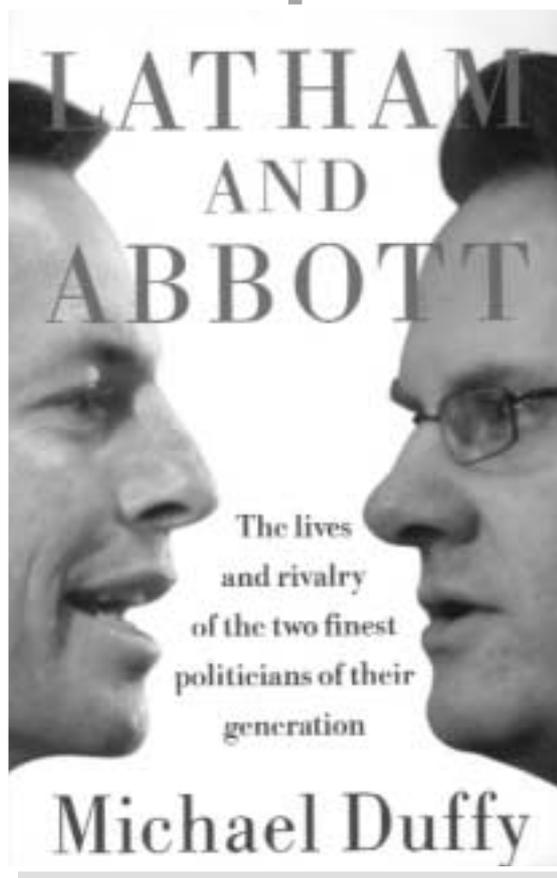
But on the partisan fringe there were ideologues, who would have embraced Mr Ed the Talking Horse if they thought he could beat the hated Howard. Latham called Liberals names, which reminded the moral middle class of Labor leaders past. And he talked about class. The MMM would have preferred him to talk about gender, sexuality and ethnicity, but class would do. So, they decided that Latham was Gough Whitlam, or Paul Keating in the raw and that

he offered Labor's left a chance to a return from a decade of political exile.

CRAIG MCGREGOR'S NAÏVETY

Like Craig McGregor, who saw in Latham a hope for the left to seize control of the political agenda. His brief book was less a biography that scrutinised Latham's life than a polemic about the way Australia should be, and how Latham would set things right, if he only listened to the right sort of people, the one's with progressive ideas, much like McGregor's.

From the start, McGregor wrote to an ideological agenda that shaped his interpretation of Latham. Sure his wife and kids made him an emblematic Aussie of sorts. But because there are millions of different races, classes, sexes and so forth and so on, McGregor says he did not conform to any universal ideal. He was, the author asserted, "typical, but no longer average" (4), whatever that may mean or matter.



It was a nonsense distinction that demonstrated the author's desperate desire to make Latham into a working class hero. McGregor wrote as an old-fashioned lefty, more interested in class than the evils imposed by ethnicity, gender and sexual oppression. Thus Latham's poor childhood was mentioned, although his father's drinking and gambling, which largely caused it, were excused as what people do when they are "in need of escape from the drudgery of long hours of low paid work" (29)

But McGregor wanted to have a bob each way and also urged Latham to understand his market had moved and that what was once the working class was no longer solid for Labor. So, he also made it plain that Labor under Latham needed to maintain the old Whitlamite alliance of workers and white-collar reformers, who make up the "Moral Minority". (101)

McGregor's "Moral Minority" was remarkably similar to the characteristics of the academics and public servants identified by Robert Manne and Judith Brett, as the MMM, Howard-hating keepers of the national conscience. McGregor also found right thinkers in the media, and among the teachers, nurses and welfare workers who are outraged by Iraq and indigenous issues. They helped to give Labor a moral base and Latham needed to respect them, McGregor warned. (104-105)

But McGregor was also anxious for Latham not to forget people who could not climb the ladder of economic opportunity:

There are many people in Australia who are simply incapable of climbing such a ladder: they include those who are not gifted enough or didn't know how to use "the system" to their advantage ... including the utterly poverty-stricken and too many Aborigines, and many newly-arrived refugees who are up against racism and a completely foreign society. What are we to do about the American-style underclass which has developed in our midst? Latham's mantra ignores the

grossly underprivileged and marginalised groups which the Labor Party was founded to protect. (129-130)

It all spelt out the battle for Latham's soul McGregor desperately wanted to win. It was all very well for Latham to bang on about helping Australians grow rich through their own effort. What really mattered was a leader to protect the real working class, the utterly indigent who would never challenge their ideological and economic betters.

And of course, to protect the deserving poor, McGregor did not want Latham Labor to cut taxes.

He appealed to ANU research that demonstrated people were interested in superior services rather than more quids in their kick. (153) Through a great deal of the book McGregor was less describing the leader's life and ideas than arguing against his plans for Labor, because Mark Latham was about helping ambitious people like himself rather than the indigent and hopeless.

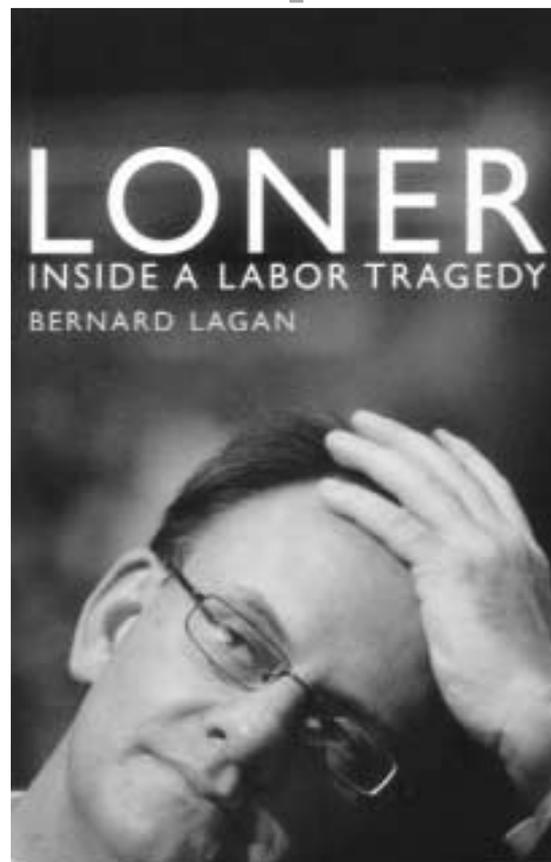
But in 2004 Latham was all that was going. McGregor endorsed him, perhaps because he liked enough of Latham's ideas, or perhaps because he saw the young Labor leader as ideologically malleable:

He represents a new generation of politician: someone who has the ability to combine a reformist zeal, which

was the best of the "old" politics, with a set of ideal values that he is wanting to translate to the society at large, which may be the defining characteristics of the new politics. ... I'm convinced that Latham will become prime minister of Australia; the people will decide. But at least he has reintroduced to a nation that badly needs it the politics of hope. (193)

A conclusion that made as much sense as McGregor's ideas of an Australia divided into conflicted classes playing a zero sum game.

This was an extraordinarily naive book, absolutely ill-informed on the aspirations of ordinary Australians, by an author with a tin ear for the rhythms of politics



in the real world. And it was completely clueless as to Mark Latham's political skills, or lack of them, demonstrated by McGregor's post election argument that the leader would be prime minister yet (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 October 2004).

MICHAEL DUFFY'S TIMING

Michael Duffy produced a much more balanced look at Latham in his comparative biography of the Labor leader and Health Minister Tony Abbott. It was a brave approach, for two reasons.

Firstly, predictions in politics always have a limited life expectancy. In the middle of 2004 both men were stars, but what a difference a year makes. Latham is gone and Abbott has had a run of bad political luck which has reduced his standing as a possible future Liberal leader.

The second problem for Duffy was that neither of his subjects is especially interesting. If this pair are the finest politicians of their generation a book about worse ones would have plumbed depths of dullness indeed. The lives of people whose experiences readers share are never as interesting as those of biographical subjects from different eras or cultures. Familiarity may not breed contempt but it makes it hard for readers to be intrigued, or impressed.

There was very little Duffy wrote that made the histories of two blokes growing up in peacetime suburban Sydney in any way interesting. Certainly Latham did it tougher than most, as a young man from a poor background. But while he traded on his relative lack of privilege as a badge of political honour his experience of school and university, at least as reported by Duffy, was little different from that of all sorts of working class kids of his generation. In contrast, Abbott appeared an excellent example of what economic security, enormous ambition and an abrasive charm can accomplish for a student.

But in Duffy's portrayal there was nothing unique about either of them, except in their own eyes, and those of the author, who appeared sympathetic to both men and provided ample evidence of how they struggled up their respective ladders of political opportunity.

For a comparative biography, Duffy did little comparing; perhaps this was a deliberate attempt to avoid giving any impression that he preferred one subject to the other. Yet, the evidence indicated the climb was harder for Latham, if only because he lacked the charm and capacity for friendship that Abbott, however arrogant in his ambitions, enjoys.

Perhaps the book's greatest weakness was the absence of an assessment of the ideas of one politician who presents as a conservative intellectual and another who always sold himself as a change agent. There was certainly not much discussion of Latham's political philosophy, although his many and varied writings are not hard to find.

Like McGregor, Duffy did point to Latham's taste for bossing people about, and expecting ordinary Australians to fix problems that were too tough for government (228). But what sort of prime minister this would have made him is an essential theme that he largely ignores.

Duffy saw Abbott as the more intellectually flexible, open as a minister to new ways of doing things, (185) but there was never much of a sense of what he would do in the Lodge.

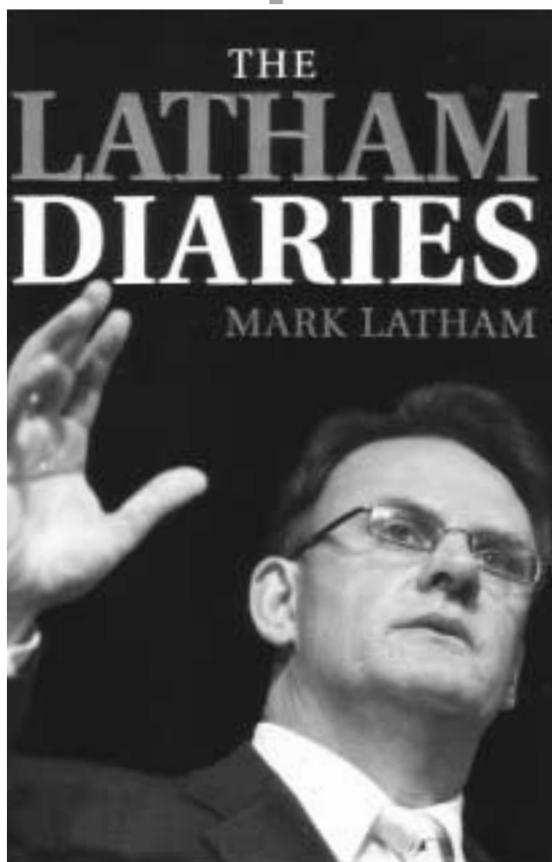
Even with the limitations of his subjects, and the way the passage of time reduced the relevance of his book, Duffy did a very good job to keep on top of his material. His approach, slicing Latham and Abbott's lives by eras

and personal experience looked easy. Yet, achieving a balance between the narrative and his analysis of each man was a significant achievement of intellectual organisation.

But the times were not kind to Duffy's book (it is already remaindered) and his basic argument that his subjects were the coming men of Australian politics was proved wrong within six months or so of publication.

BERNARD LAGAN'S JOURNALISTIC BOOK

Bernard Lagan was also a victim of timing. By the time his book appeared Latham was already history,



and with his *Diaries* due there was not a lot of interest in a journalistic interpretation of yesterday's man. Nor can writing this biography have been easy given Latham did not think much of Lagan's ability, describing him in the *Diaries* as "not the world's most accurate journalist but a good bloke" (297). Of course in Latham land, where prejudice prevails, one out of two is a better assessment than most got.

Lagan did not do a bad job for a quick book, presumably begun when Latham seemed a chance to win the 2004 poll. This was very much a journalist's book, with all that it implies. It is light on intellectual context and long on description, strong on colour and weak on analysis. And at times it was in desperate need of editorial attention. Consider, for example, the description of a Sydney club where "canyons" of gaming machines exist in a "cave" (3).

Nor was Lagan as always detached as a biographer, focused only on the facts, should be. There was certainly no disguising whom he admired. On the page Don Watson's book of his adventures in the Keating government is called "luminous" Alan Ramsey is "diamond hard", which is one, among many other possible descriptions of his egocentric style (16).

Yet even with these limitations, there is no doubting the way Lagan added to our understanding of Latham's leadership. Such as the revelation about what appeared a tactical masterstroke during the debate on the Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement, when Mark Latham announced he wanted protection for cheap medicines under the FTA. Rather than a brilliant move to outflank the government, as everyone assumed at the time, in fact Latham was only intending to shut up the Labor left. (105)

It was an anecdote that defined the book. Latham was playing politics with something in the national interest. Even worse, despite a life in politics, Latham lacked craft skills. He could not command loyalty and his ideas were piled upon each other rather than assembled in an orderly fashion. A politician with no support base within his own party is either a prophet who just happens to be without honour, or a maverick

whom people do not like or do not trust. Latham managed to be both, which Lagan illustrated, but was unable to completely explain.

It is a problem demonstrated by his treatment of the Tasmanian timber debacle during last year's campaign. Even with Lagan's close contact and obvious understanding of the way Latham thought, the book's explanation of how Labor was so badly outsmarted by the government was not clear.

Bernard Lagan's portrait of Latham was fair to the point of being generous, but it still left great gaps. In the end it was Shakespeare writ small, the story of a bloke with talent, not greatness, brought down by flaws that were large and numerous.

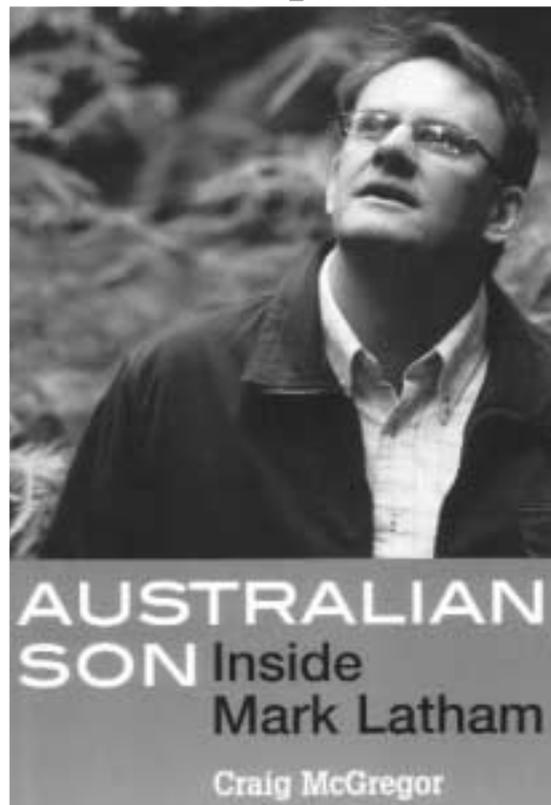
Yet the leader emerged as the architect of many of his own misfortunes. There was his relationship with the media. Certainly, the press went in hard, in some cases looking for dirt that did not exist. But in his clumsy self-righteousness, Mark Latham made his situation worse.

To famously call a press conference and deny rumours that nobody had heard of was egocentric. Certainly it gave Latham the opportunity to demonstrate how upset he was, and to demonstrate how much his family meant to him, but there was more than a touch of melodrama about it all, as if he needed to prove that nobody had ever loved a family or been

as willing to shield them from attack as he was.

At times Lagan generously sought to explain his subject's behaviour, but only damaged the credibility of his own book. His description of the way the leader responded to media intrusions as "Latham knew the gallery was tearing at his flesh. He had to stop it. He felt overwhelmed." (119) is nonsense. He could have done what political professionals do, which is to address the problem before it was out of hand. But by making himself a martyr, Latham only made the situation worse for himself.

But Lagan did not and could not, even if he had wanted to, disguise the most damning evidence of how ill suited Latham was for the job - his relations with his colleagues and staff. That there is no den of dissension like the federal parliamentary Labor Party



is the main message Mark Latham has communicated since his flight from politics. But it is another nonsense; the culture of all political parties is uniquely awful in much the same way.

Whatever is wrong with Labor, Mark Latham brought out the worst in his colleagues. Lagan's book demonstrated the way the leader's views on the US alliance and Iraq bothered his front bench and the way his supporters, like John Faulkner, doubted his media tactics. But the most extraordinary example of what happened because Latham could not trust people within the keep of the party was the way his tax plan was undermined.

In February 2004, somebody leaked modelling for Labor that assessed the outcome of cutting the top marginal personal tax rate to 30 per cent. The leak was designed to alert the Labor left to the plan, and it worked. Whatever the economic sense of the strategy it was doomed. And without a bold, credible economic plan, to take to the election so was Labor.

Perhaps the person, or persons, responsible for the leak hated the idea of a lower top rate, or perhaps they feared Latham would not be able deliver it. Whatever the reason, Latham was an ideas merchant who could not sell his wares, even to his own side. Nor did he inspire his staff. Just about the saddest thing in Lagan's book is the description of the way Latham lost the loyalty of some of the party's best and brightest.

Lagan recorded Latham's contempt for the work of his speechwriter Dennis Glover, scrawling "crap" on drafts. (133). This says a great deal more about Latham than it does about the work of this fine political writer. And Lagan showed how he alienated staff with his personal and professional style:

He saw his office as an extension of his own arms and legs. He directed, he ordered. ... Some of Crean's former staffers felt they had at least been working towards a higher purpose. With Latham, they detected that the purpose was Latham. (135)

Nor did he care who else he upset. Lagan also reported the way Latham was not worried if he had a bad, or no, relationship with business.

Lagan's book brought no revelations about Latham's leadership, but it clearly and concisely set out why he was never the right man to lead Labor. Lagan made it clear that Mark Latham cared little for anybody but himself and those he loved. There was an irredeemable flaw in this self-proclaimed man of the people – he may have liked all Australians in the abstract, but he did not care for us as individuals.

While Latham did not look good in Lagan's portrait, he looked much worse in his own.

AN ABSENCE OF SELF-AWARENESS

That Mark Latham chose to present himself to the public in the way he did, in his *Diaries*, demonstrated an absence of self-awareness. In the way he described his own actions, and those of the people around him, Latham came across as a man of staggering self-obsession, disinterested in everybody and everything that did not enhance his own image.

With the way he sneered at his colleagues, attributed ill intent to those around him and generally blamed the world for his woes Latham demonstrated how friendless he was. If this man had mates they would surely have tried to convince him not to make such a fool of himself as he did with his *Diaries*.

There are many intriguing aspects of *The Latham Diaries*. Like the way entries from the 1990s were so relevant to his leadership. And the way the cause of his despair in 1999 were so similar to those of 2004. Not only was he prescient, he was a saintly stoic to soldier on for so long when he knew Labor was being destroyed by the factions and the politicians they imposed on the party.

And all the generalities about the need for new ideas are there - but the ideas aren't. As shadow treasurer he knew what needed to be done, writing:

You can only liberalise an economy once, realising a big boost in productivity. After that, you need to keep reforming to keep the economy growing, otherwise the productivity gains start to expire. (228)

All true, but while he talked of the need for tax cuts he thought the main push had to be in private sector competition policy. Not workplace relations, not infrastructure reform, not change to the provision of public services. In targeting big business his notes read like musings by National Party Senator Ron Boswell.

Mark Latham obviously wanted to sell books and settle scores with these diaries, with allegations on almost every page. And in the process, he crippled his own argument's credibility. Anybody so eaten up by anger and shackled by suspicion that he suspects almost everybody, is an individual of little judgement that can be trusted.

REVIEWING THE BIOGRAPHIES

Mark Latham's *Diaries* become dull very quickly. Outrage is never entertaining for very long. Nor, was a great deal of the coverage of the titles in the Latham library. Many of the writers preferred to propose their own thinking in pieces that may have looked like reviews of the books, but weren't.

In some cases, this did the authors a favour. Craig McGregor certainly got off more lightly than his partisan pamphlet deserved. According to John Ferguson, (*Herald Sun*, 14 August 2004) McGregor “is unashamedly a Latham man” but even so, his book “is not without merit”. Whatever it was, Ross Fitzgerald did not find it, in a review that began by describing *Australian Son* as “flat, one-dimensional and sloppy” and concluded, “it reads like a hagiography and, inadvertently, does not do Latham proud”. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 August 2004)

Michael Duffy deserved a broader analysis than his book received, with too much being written about his subjects and too little about the author’s effort. And even some of the approving reviewers could not resist providing their own political opinions. Like Ross Fitzgerald (*SMH*, 14 August) who began by reviewing the book: “Duffy is right on the money in his fascinating juxtaposition of Latham and Abbott.” However, he could not resist including his own political opinion: “Duffy’s excellent book shows that Abbott is much further off the eight ball than the federal Opposition Leader.”

As a political commentator, Ross Fitzgerald makes an excellent reviewer. He was much tougher on Lagan, calling his biography a “curiously uneven and one-dimensional book” and criticising it for some omissions that may say more about Fitzgerald’s authorial interests than Lagan’s. Fitzgerald complained that there is “not a single entry” under alcohol in the index. (*The Australian*, 16 July 2005) Why? Mark Latham’s father was a drinker, but there is nothing on the record to indicate the grog played a part in the son’s political downfall.

Overall, Lagan received a generally positive response, at least if Dennis Atkins calling the book “a political pot boiler” can be called positive. Despite the sneer Atkins thought well of the book: “the thing for which we can be thankful to Lagan – and this is where he has bettered other authors who’ve tried to explain Latham – is that he does reveal the incredible ordinariness of the man”. (*Courier Mail*, 23 July 2005)

Michael Duffy (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 August 2005) was generous. He liked Lagan’s approach that saw Latham as a loner, and agreed with his argument that Labor’s failure to get traction on the economy was a key a reason for losing the election. But it was left to Michelle Grattan in her piece on Lagan (*The Age*, 9 July 2005), to provide the most astute analysis of any of the biographies:

What Lagan (not surprisingly) hasn’t fully succeeded in explaining is the Latham psyche: this strange, conflicted personality whose passions come across with a hard edge. What in his past, or the

make-up of his mind, has made for all the aggression that explodes from time to time.

She concluded that Lagan simply lacked the resources to properly explain his subject:

To get fully into the inner chamber of Latham’s head Lagan would have needed a political psychologist or two, or at least several post-election in-depth interviews. Instead, the wounded Latham communicated through email. The quotes that caused all the fuss were bullets against his old party sent through cyber space.

THE DIARIES AS ABUSE

And then the *Diaries* came. Mr Latham’s version of his time in politics generated an inordinate amount of news reporting and opinion writing. So much so there were precious few reviews of the book itself, as if editors and reviewers were Latham-ed out.

However, among all the amazement at Latham’s outlandish arguments there was cool commentary, even some early revisionism that found sense in some of what the former leader said.

John Button (*The Age*, 1 October 2005) wasted a great deal of space comparing Latham’s diaries with those of minor Tory grandee and major philanderer Alan Clark. It was an unconvincing effort. Clark was focused only on his own interests and as far as policy was concerned, did not appear to have a brain in his head. But Latham, for all his faults was actually interested in how we are governed. Still, Button was a true believer in some of Latham’s ideas:

Latham sought a way out of the malaise by means of ideas about political power, the nature of democracy and the development of social capital that might provide a balance between the needs and aspirations of local communities and the global economy. He was about a new politics. ... The *Diaries* should be seen as a testament of things to think about if Labor is to become an effective social democratic party.

Another veteran from Labor’s golden age, Neal Blewett, (*Australian Book Review*, November 2005) shared John Button’s view, describing the diaries as:

...the most important book published yet on Labor’s wilderness years ... it conveys a pungent characterisation of Labor’s post-1996 history; conveys a profound understanding of the challenges facing a social democratic party in contemporary Australia; and its damning account of Labor’s feuds, machinations and toxic

culture suggests why the party is incapable of meeting those challenges.

Surely, this is not the same aggressive and abusive Latham the rest of us read? Well, it is, as Blewett adds, “also the most rancorous and at times rancid memoir ever penned by an Australian politician. For someone so sensitive to invasions of his own privacy, Latham throws around personal slurs and innuendoes with much abandon”.

There is a great deal of sense in his piece about Labor and Latham’s leadership but if anything, Blewett had a bob each way in acknowledging, but not pursuing, aspects of the diaries that diminished their impact:

The diaries are not a set of regular daily entries but rather occasional jottings that appear to have undergone a degree of stylistic polishing ... Although the entries are supposedly uncut it is unclear whether any have been omitted. ... There are also hints throughout the diary of a greater degree of retrospectivity.

Blewett’s was a restrained review; capable of focusing on the important issues Latham raised and ignoring the rancour in his remembrances that most writers focused on.

As did David Burchell in a fine two part piece in October for *Australia Policy Online* (www.apo.org.au). According to Burchell, Mark Latham exaggerated his rough treatment by the media and the tough time he had leading Labor, but not by much. “For all his ungraciousness and cruelty, Latham is not altogether misguided in seeing himself as a messenger who’s been shot.”

And he embraced the message from Latham, and many other social commentators desperate to convince us how miserable we all are:

The central conundrum of the times, as Latham correctly intuited earlier than most, is the paradox of a society which has never been better-resourced, but seems incapable of generating peace of mind and rest in adequate quantities.

The next Labor politician who can convince us that we are in fact all stressed and that he, or she, has a sensible solution to the problem, could well be prime minister. But on his form to do date, as revealed in these books, Mark Latham will call that person names. It seems his legacy to Labor is abuse.

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a mate for head of state

Sunday 22 January will be the inaugural “A Mate for Head of State Day”. At The Sydney Institute the concept will be launched on Wednesday 18 January 2006. What’s a mate for Head of State? It’s an Australian of course. One of us. A Mate for Head of State Day will be dedicated to telling all Australians that it’s time an Australian became Australia’s Head of State – our primary symbol should be one of us.

SPEAKERS:

JOHN BELL AM
(Artistic Director, Bell Shakespeare)

KATHY BAIL
(Editor, The Bulletin)

GERARD HENDERSON
(Executive Director, The Sydney Institute)

TOPIC:
A Mate for Head of State? Why Australia Needs One

DATE:
Wednesday 18 January 2006

TIME:
5 for 5.30 pm (Note starting time)

VENUE:
Museum of Sydney Theatrette, cnr Phillip and Bridge Streets, Sydney

RSVP:
(02) 9252 3366 or email

ENQUIRIES:

PH: (02) 9252 3366

FAX: (02) 9252 3360 OR

EMAIL:

mail@thesydneyinstitute.com.au

WEBSITE:

www.thesydneyinstitute.com.au

WHAT THE LEADERS SAID – NGUYEN TUONG VAN

WHEN they got down to fundamentals the leader writers all agreed that Singapore was wrong to execute Nguyen Tuong Van. Certainly some thought our government could have done more.

But not the *Australian Financial Review*, which was adamant there was no case for connecting trade to the death penalty, anywhere. Nor was there any need for calling off the cricket match between a Prime Minister's 11 and the West Indies to be played on the day Nguyen was to die:

Trade sanctions would be futile and would harm Australian regional interests far more than Singaporean interests. We do not limit trade, shun the cricket or fall silent when they take lives. And neither should we. ... Realistically, Canberra must continue to separate the issues of trade and punishment. But it needs to send an explicit message to the world, and to the region, calling for the abolition of capital punishment – which in every situation is wrong and barbaric. (*Australian Financial Review*, 1 December 2005)

The *Australian* agreed in five leaders that all spoke out strongly against the death penalty in any and every country. As with the *AFR*, it saw no need to link Nguyen's death to our overall relationship with Singapore. And on 28 November 2005 the paper displayed its belief in the sovereign power of globalisation to civilise societies, however authoritarian and rejected calls for diplomatic or economic action:

...the road to reform is not via boycotts, sanctions or diplomatic standoffs, which are only likely to entrench existing positions. The road to reform is more globalisation: the deeper integration of economies that also nurture a constant dialogue and exchange of values. The Van case is an impossibly sad one, but we can make the pain even worse by using it as a pretext to undermine one of our defining regional relationships.

The paper also went of its way to make it clear that while it denounced Nguyen's death there was no case

for ignoring what he had done. Nor did it see any contradiction in the government's pleas for his life while ministers did not denounce the death sentences passed on some of the first Bali bombers:

Those bombers were not Australian citizens, but the cold-blooded murderers of Australian citizens. It is not the business of any Australian government to take up their cause. In fact, if we thought there were any exceptions to the barbarity of capital punishment as a sanction – and we don't – it would be in the case of those such as Amrozi, Mukhlas and Iman Samudra. The monstrosity of their crime puts Van's in perspective.

The *Daily Telegraph* wrote Nguyen off early. On 18 November the paper argued it was none of our business, "as abhorrent as the penalties may be to Australians, we cannot dictate the terms of punishment for our citizens when they commit crimes on foreign soil". In an unconvincing attempt to find something positive from what the paper assumed was an imminent and unavoidable execution the paper concluded, "our best, and only option, is to avoid similar cases in the future by educating young people before they face the same tragic fate as Nguyen".

The following week the *Tele* (24 November) talked tougher against his execution. Although the paper accepted that Singapore had every right to execute Nguyen, it pointed out he was caught in a transit lounge and as such the heroin he was carrying constituted no threat to the people of Singapore. It added that Singapore had connections with the military junta in Burma, where most of the heroin in Southeast Asia comes from. And, despite accepting that this was a matter for Singapore, the leader concluded with the utterly irrelevant comparison with what would have happened if he had been caught at home.

Had he been convicted in this country of trafficking in such a quantity of heroin, he would have been liable for a lengthy jail term. But he should not be executed.

By execution eve the paper (1 December) had given up on Nguyen who, "has only himself to blame". But it was still affronted by Singapore's refusal to let his mother embrace him before he died: "(Australians) will ask themselves what possible purpose it can serve the Singaporean Government to deny Ms Nguyen the miniscule solace of final embrace with her condemned son."

The *Sydney Morning Herald* (19 November) began with a leader that had a bob every which way. Smuggling drugs should not be too easily dismissed

“because of the damage they do to individuals and societies”. And we should not blame other countries that do not agree with the way “we tend to excuse illegal acts by young people as youthful risk-taking or inexperience or stupidity”.

All sensible stuff, but the *SMH* never likes to miss a chance to denounce official Australia. Certainly, the paper said, Australians will be shocked that Singapore informed Nguyen’s mother that her boy was to die by registered letter, but:

Australians will have been equally shocked at the revelation last month that the Australian Federal Police had full knowledge of the Bali nine and their plan to smuggle heroin to Australia. The AFP fed information to Indonesia police watching the group; well aware the offence carries the death penalty there. As the *Herald* has said before, the AFP’s actions are anomalous in a country which objects to the death penalty, and undercut Mr Howard’s protests about Nguyen’s sentence.

What was all that about understanding that other countries were less relaxed than we are about drugs?

And the day before he died the *SMH* (1 December) also wanted everyone to understand that Canberra had not undertaken enough of the right sort of actions: “Australia has lately undermined its position by its moral ambivalence – deploring capital punishment in one breath, yet quick to acquiesce in the death penalty, when, for example, it is for the Bali bombers.”

The government’s great failing was not to campaign globally against capital punishment around the world, demonstrating national sovereignty only extends as far as the *SMH* thinks it should.

In Melbourne the *Herald Sun* (26 November) went into coaching mode, urging the Prime Minister not to abandon Nguyen to his fate:

Isn’t John Howard the politician who never says die? [who] came back from the brink of political oblivion? Not once, not twice, but more times over more years than any politician serving in Australia’s Parliament? ... He has shown personal courage in the face of great adversity. Courage is what he should be giving to the family of Tuong Van Nguyen. Courage to keep trying to save a son and a brother.

The paper went on to demand that the Prime Minister lobby Commonwealth countries and ask the International Court of Justice to review Nguyen’s case, even though Singapore would not pay any attention. It was a piece stronger on rhetoric than it was on practical ideas.

Its Sunday stable mate saw no hope for Nguyen and confined itself to a well-written denunciation of the death penalty the following day.

On the day he died the *Herald Sun* (3 December) confined itself to calling Singapore names, saying hanging people was “a throw back to less civilised past that degrades all involved. This grotesque, anachronistic method is consistent in suiting the authoritarian mindset that Singapore’s modern rulers are yet to break free of”. And the day after (3 December) the paper lamented that the killing accomplished nothing, before announcing his execution should be used to catalyse a campaign against the death penalty. It was a case of finding purpose in the senseless.

The Age (3 December) denounced the execution in a long, considered leader that pulled no punches. It pointed out that abolition of capital punishment was tied to the advance of democracy and that its use, “says much about the character of a nation and the relationship between the state and the people”, before making the damning point that the United States stopped executing people, only to start again in 1976.

The leader made a cogent case that capital punishment was not only wrong but served no purpose.

But, like its Sydney stable mate, the paper could not resist giving the Howard government a whack for not explaining to foreigners why they should do what we think is right, regardless of their own laws.

If the Australian government were principled in its opposition, it would object to every instance of capital punishment. One would hope any state whose leaders call themselves Christian would recognise there is no ambiguity in the commandment, Thou shall not kill. ... Yet, has been widely observed, in Singapore too, Australia has been inconsistent. In cases such as those of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and the Bali bombers, the prospect of execution has even met with support. With the Bali nine on trial for drug trafficking, Australia may have further cause to regret its inconsistency.

It was an editorial that demonstrated the divide between those who condemned Nguyen’s death and those who were additionally interested in a reason to attack the Howard Government.

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THE AGE AND THE NATIONAL SECURITY (NON) DEBATE

The powers that be thought up this question to put to *Age* readers on 26 October 2005 concerning the Howard Government's national security legislation viz:

What part of the proposed terror laws do you most dislike? Shoot to kill authority; restrictions on social contracts and work for terror suspects; life imprisonment for giving funds to terror groups; detaining suspects for two weeks without charge; another part of the proposed laws – or do you think we need tougher laws?

Interesting to note that push polling is alive and well in the "Guardian on the Yarra". Yet you wonder why such a phenomenon would be necessary when you look at *The Age's* one-sided coverage of national security issues on its Opinion Page – in the month of October 2005 alone.

1 October: Social commentator Hugh Mackay kicks off the month with the reflection that "our reflexive cry for a more regulated environment is understandable but dangerous".

4 October: Denise Allen, a former Victorian Labor MP, writes that she has resigned from the ALP due to Labor's inability to criticise the Howard Government over its "draconian anti-terrorism laws".

7 October: After a weekly break, Hugh Mackay returns to his theme. He writes that "it is nonsense to say that suicide attacks are alien to our culture". His source? None other than "the Roman poet Horace".

13 October: Retired Family Court chief justice Alastair Nicholson weighs into the national security debate. He maintains that "our liberties and our democracy are under a more serious threat than that posed by terrorists".

16 October: *The Age's* Michelle Grattan uses her *Sunday Age* column to condemn the proposed national security legislation. The normally taciturn Ms Grattan uses such terms as "outrageous", "scant regard" and "extraordinary" to condemn both the Coalition government and the Labor opposition.

19 October: Lawyer Ben Saul criticises the national security legislation.

20 October: *The Age's* Canberra based economics commentator Ken Davidson – who opposed almost every economic reform ever made by Labor and

Coalition governments at both Federal and State levels – gets into the act. He leads off with the claim that "politicians, not terrorists or trade unions, are the biggest threat to Australian democracy today".

20 October: *The Age* runs an extract from former Liberal prime minister Malcolm Fraser's Stephen Murray-Smith Memorial Lecture. He criticises both the Howard Government and Labor over their stances on national security legislation.

22 October: Shaun Carney, an associate editor of *The Age*, writes a descriptive piece on why the State Labor premiers and Federal Labor leader Kim Beazley are likely to support the Howard Government on national security. But a sub-editor provides an emotive title: "Labor toes the terror line."

24 October: Chas Savage, who is described as "a Canberra writer and outlaw", urges sedition and implies that, under the national security legislation, such utterances will land him in the slammer. The so-called "outlaw" seems unaware that similar provisions have existed in the Crimes Act for four decades. Perhaps this self-confessed "outlaw" just needs attention.

25 October: *The Age* runs part of a speech delivered by its editor-in-chief Andrew Jaspán to the Law Institute of Victoria. He quickly moves into hyperbole mode by claiming that, under the national security legislation, "a newspaper columnist's call to scrap the monarchy might lead once again to his/her head being chopped off". Mr Jaspán provides no evidence for this assertion. Oh yes, *The Age's* editor-in-chief also compares Australia with both "repressive regimes" and South Africa during the apartheid era. Oh yes.

26 October: Michelle Grattan returns to the topic. This time her language includes the words "reprehensible" "ridiculous" and "drastic".

27 October: Lawyer George Williams compares Australia's "new terror laws" unfavourably with those in Britain.

28 October: Senior columnist Tony Parkinson joins the (*Age*) chorus on sedition. He cites the ABC TV *Media Watch* program to the effect that John Pilger's comments might be construed as "seditious". Really. Mr Parkinson fails to explain why, if this is the case, Mr Pilger has not been charged under the existing sedition laws in the Crimes Act.

31 October: Academic Hugh White criticises the national security legislation. Yawn.

So what's the total for the month of October? *The Age's* Opinion Page ran a total of 15 pieces on national security issues. And the total was: *Articles Criticising National Security Legislation – 15; Articles Supporting National Security Legislation – Zip*. However, *The Age* did run one article by Foreign Minister Alexander Downer (7 October 2005) on how the Australian Government is tackling "transnational terrorism". That's all.

GERARD HENDERSON'S MEDIA WATCH

MARK LATHAM BAGS EVEN ALAN RAMSEY

Mark Latham's *The Latham Diaries* (MUP 2005) have received massive media coverage since the former Labor leader's tome was launched last September. However, reviewers and commentators alike have overlooked the book's essential message. Turn to Page 377 – where the diarist asks himself: "Why is it that every time I come to Adelaide there's a problem". Good question. A really good question, in fact. It reflected the position previously taken by another Australian political failure – in this case, the late Liberal leader Billy Snedden. In the early 1970s, when leading the Liberal Party, Billy Snedden was heard to comment: "Wherever I go in Australia, people know that something is wrong". They sure did.

So how did Mr Latham write his diaries? Turn to Page 2 where the process is explained:

My style was to take down notes as things happened and write up the diary in full later, usually within a week. For the publication of this book, I transcribed these handwritten entries into the computer. Some entries have since been modified to protect the privacy and reputation of certain individuals. Otherwise, the original entries have been preserved.

Interesting. The reader is asked to accept that the original entries were "preserved" without modification – except in order "to protect the privacy of reputation of certain individuals" – and then were "transcribed" and forwarded to MUP.

But how, then, to explain ML's entry for 26 October 1995 when he refers to "State Labor governments" having become "an exercise in managerialism, lost without a cause". In October 1995 there were just two State Labor governments – Bob Carr's government in New South Wales (which was elected on 25 March 1995) and Wayne Goss's government in Queensland (which was elected on 2 December 1989).

ML's 26 October 1995 diary entry is essentially a critique of his own faction – i.e. the New South Wales Labor Right. He maintains that the "NSW Right is a subset of the Party's broader structural problems" and cites "State Labor governments" in the context. The only problem with this analysis is that there was only one long-term state Labor government at the time – in Queensland. Is this an example of ML's

prophetic gifts about future ALP governments in New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania? Or does it suggest that ML's well known revisionism extended to his diary writing practices? How fascinating that views which Mark Latham was known to hold about the NSW Right in 2005 appear in his diary entries of a decade earlier.

Yet there is more to *The Latham Diaries* than apparent revisionism. In fact, the diaries are instructive for what they reveal about the former Labor leader's inconsistency – as the following snapshots demonstrate.

28 December 1999: "I need the parliamentary pension for my financial security...I've contested three elections and need to try for a fourth to qualify for my super."

4 January 2004: "I'll need to test him [John Howard] in the first week of Parliament by attacking the Club – put forward the abolition of the rorted superannuation scheme. It's a time bomb in his lap."

13 February 2004: "If nothing else, I can tell my grandchildren I achieved one thing in this job: that I got legislation through to end that rotten rort of a [superannuation] scheme."

In January 2005 ML announced his retirement from Parliament – and proceeded to live on his most generous taxpayer-subsidised superannuation. Rorts, like beauty, seem to be in the eye of the beholder.

4 January 2004: "[Janette Howard] seems a nice lady."

13 November 2004: "[Janette Howard's] a nasty piece of work" who gives "snide fashion tips".

In The Latham Diaries, ML rejoiced that he did not have to go home with Janette each night. This assumes that Mrs Howard would have wanted to go home with ML – a big call, when you think about it.

20 December 2004: "People have so little love and trust in their own lives, they try to escape by prying into others' lives...There is something horribly unnatural about losing your privacy."

This from the very same diarist who, in *The Latham Diaries*, (i) names a married Labor parliamentarian as (allegedly) having had a "long-running relationship" with a named female lobbyist in Canberra, (ii) names a female journalist in Sydney with whom he "once had a fling" and (iii) names a former Labor staffer who had an affair with the "missus" of a senior ALP official in Melbourne, who is also named.

On 9 December 2004 Mark Latham recorded that he had “hosted Christmas drinks for the press gallery in our new press office”. He continued: “Gritted my teeth and tried to be pleasant. Naturally, all the grubs bagging me were there to drink my grog and see if I’m still alive. I have hardly any allies left.” ML cited only one such ally – Channel 10’s Paul Bongiorno.

ML could also have mentioned the *Sydney Morning Herald’s* Alan Ramsey – who had predicted that Labor would win the October 2004 election and who had condemned the electorate when it failed to elect ML, declaring: “This time the people’s will has got it dreadfully wrong” and referring to the “idiocy” of the electorate. Mr Ramsey had such faith in the diarist that he declared: “Still Latham’s time will come; believe it.” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 October 2004).

Alan Ramsey was perhaps the loudest barracker for Mark Latham in the Canberra Press Gallery. So how did the diarist treat him? Here’s how – on Page 332:

Went to the launch of Barry Donovan’s new book on me, *The Circuit Breaker*, at Sydney University. Hawke did the honours and spoke really well. Unfortunately, the book is not much chop – a long series of quotes and speech extracts. It’s like an Alan Ramsey article in book form.

So there you have it. In the end, Mark Latham not only dumped on the New South Wales Labor Right (which set him up for his political career and the resultant superannuation which sustains his retirement) and Gough Whitlam (his mentor) – but also Alan Ramsey of the VERY LONG QUOTATION School of Journalism.

JOHN HEWSON FORGETS

While on the topic of embittered former leaders with a tendency to inconsistency, consider the case of John (call me Doctor) Hewson. In his *Australian Financial Review* column on 14 October 2005, Dr Hewson wrote that industrial relations reform was his idea in the first place – and that John Howard was converted to the concept only after he had read one of The Doctor’s columns in *Business Review Weekly* in the mid 1980s. Fair dinkum. As The Doctor put it:

It’s time for honesty in this debate about industrial relations reform...Despite his carefully nurtured reputation, John Howard has been dragged screaming through to accepting the significance of IR reform. I recall that I wrote a *BRW* article in the early ‘80s saying that, now we had reformed the financial system, it was time we moved on to the IR system. Howard immersed himself in it and it has been his mantra ever since. Yet, in 1992, when I launched the Jobsback package, Howard totally opposed it – yet I made him travel all over Australia with me to launch it.

That’s according to The Doctor’s memory. So, what about the facts? Well, the fact is John Hewson did not support industrial relations reform in his *BRW* columns in the 1980s. Rather, the opposite is the case – The Doctor actually opposed John Howard’s attempts to reform industrial relations when Mr Howard was deputy leader and, later, leader of the Liberal Party in the 1980s.

In the mid 1980s, John Hewson was a strong supporter of the Accord between the Hawke Labor Government and the ACTU leadership – see *BRW*, 1 February 1985. In other words, The Doctor supported a centralised industrial relations system – not industrial relations deregulation – circa 1985. What’s more, he specifically opposed John Howard’s industrial relations policy. The Doctor wrote that the Coalition’s IR policy was “too confrontationalist” and predicted that it would be “counterproductive” – see *BRW*, 16 May 1986. In this article, John Hewson also advised the Coalition not to pin all its hopes on industrial relations reform.

Enough said. So what about John Hewson’s claim that John Howard opposed the Coalition’s industrial relations policy, which was titled *Jobsback*, in 1992? The Prime Minister wrote to the *AFR* (18 October 2005):

The claim that I opposed the Jobsback package in 1992 is totally wrong. As shadow minister for industrial relations, employment and training I wrote the *Jobsback* policy.

So what has The Doctor said about his evident memory failure in this instance? The answer – absolutely zip.

FRANK MOORHOUSE REMEMBERS – OR DOES HE?

There is something refreshing about commentators with bad memories who admit to being fallible in this area. The novelist Frank Moorhouse, for example. Writing in Sybil Nolan’s edited collection *The Dismissal: Where were you on November 11, 1975?* (MUP), Frank Moorhouse recalled lunching with Professor Donald Horne and Professor Douglas McCallum – both of whom were on the staff of the Political Science Department of the University of New South Wales – on the day when the Governor-General Sir John Kerr dismissed Gough Whitlam’s Labor Government. The luncheon took place at the UNSW Staff Club.

Early in his essay, Frank Moorhouse warns “never fully trust oral history”. Sound advice, to be sure. He recalls that Owen Harries was also at this lunch – but Owen Harries denies this. Frank Moorhouse also recalls meeting the writer Matt Condon later that day but concedes that Mr Condon was living in Brisbane at the time and was just 13 years of age.

In his essay, Frank Moorhouse told the story about how “at some time during the lunch, probably towards the end, the young woman waiting on our

table came to us and told us breathlessly and close to tears, that the Governor-General had sacked Gough Whitlam". The novelist believes that, at the time this news was delivered, "we would've been through our third bottle...give or take a bottle or two." It was that kind of lunch.

In any event, the waitress received a lecture in constitutional law and all that. Professor Horne (who supported Whitlam) insisted that she must have misheard the news. And Professor McCallum (who opposed Whitlam) lectured that, while Whitlam's dismissal would have been a good thing, such an eventuality was not constitutionally possible. Frank Moorhouse supported the position of the "two professors of political science" – and the waitress went back to the kitchen, so to speak. But she returned with the very same news and, in Moorhouse's words, "it was beginning to sink in that something extraordinary had happened; and perhaps the waitress had been right". Order another bottle, or three, perhaps.

Frank Moorhouse has "no recollection of how the lunch ended". No wonder. However, he does remember going to the London Hotel in Balmain where anarchist-inclined patrons were urged to form a "citizens militia" and there was talk about "raiding army reserve armouries" for weapons to take to the barricades. But, the morning after, Balmain's anarchists decided that they had other things to do – "writing of sonnets, finishing chapters of novels, beginning or breaking up relationships, and so on". And so the counter-revolution to the (alleged) coup d'état never took place. Yet another manifestation of the hangover as a capitalist invention to protect the capitalist state.

Frank Moorhouse's recollections continued:

In the following weeks, although I supported no political party, I was invited to speak at a great rally of support for Whitlam at the Sydney Opera House as a writer who was also a Senior Literary Fellow of the Australia Council. About 11,000 people heard the speeches – 3000 inside and 8000 over the PA system outside. The speakers included Patrick White, Olympic gold medalists, actors, pop singers, writers, the painter Lloyd Rees and so on... I was very cool while delivering the speech to the largest crowd I have ever addressed. After the event some of us went to the journalists' club and there, while someone was ordering the drinks, I passed out into an involuntary sleep for a minute or so, head on the table.

Great sense of recall. Pity about the facts. The Sydney Opera House meeting actually took place on 13 May 1974 – i.e. in the lead-up to the May 1974 Federal election. The function – dubbed "Gurus for Gough" – was reported in *The Australian* on 14 May 1974.

Guest speakers included historian Manning Clark (of course), poet Judith Wright, novelist Patrick White, playwright David Williamson and Frank Moorhouse – along with Gough Whitlam.

Who knows? Perhaps Frank Moorhouse's "involuntary sleep" commenced in the week leading up to the 1974 Federal election and ended on the day of the Dismissal, in the lead-up to the 1975 Federal election. Certainly this would explain the chronology gap. And, given the state of the Sydney Journalists Club at the time, no one may have noticed your man Moorhouse asleep on the job. What's more, the Australia Council was known to dispense (taxpayer-funded) largesse to sonnet writers and the like without too much checking whether or not they were around. So the funding could have continued while Mr Moorhouse slept. It's a theory, anyrate.

MAX TEICHMANN'S (1975) MOMENT

Another commentator whose memory seems to be failing is former Monash University academic Max Teichmann. Once a leftie, Mr Teichmann now writes a column in the conservative National Civic Council's magazine *News Weekly* (founded by the late B.A. Santamaria). On 3 December 2005 Max Teichmann bagged critics of Sir John Kerr's decision to dismiss Gough Whitlam. However, Mr Teichmann made no reference to any past positions he may have held on this issue.

Can this be the very same Max Teichmann who in 1975 in his self-proclaimed capacity as "Senior Lecturer, Politics, Monash University" (i) linked the Governor-General's decision to dismiss the Whitlam Government with events which preceded Adolf Hitler's ascent to power in Germany in 1933, (ii) compared Malcolm Fraser and the Liberals with the Nazis and (iii) predicted that the Coalition would set up an effective dictatorship in Australia? Surely not. (Note Mr Teichmann's 1975 flyer titled *Don't Let History Repeat Itself!* is quoted at some length at Pages 142-143 of Sybil Nolan's *The Dismissal*).

AROUND THE HORNE

Alas, Frank Moorhouse is the only survivor of the UNSW Staff Club lunch of three decades ago. Doug McCallum died on 26 August 1998 and Donald Horne on 8 September 2005.

Donald Horne received a great send-off. The written obituaries were overwhelmingly positive and the electronic media reports were most favourable. Certainly, Donald Horne made a positive contribution to the public debate in Australia and he deserved considerable praise. It's just that no one bothered to mention that the recently departed (i) was overwhelmingly self-important, (ii) could be remarkably abrasive and (iii) during his time as an editor, was prone to an authoritarian management style. Which suggests that a writer's best reviews are invariably his or her last. So much so that the author

of a past critical review may attempt forgiveness in an obituary.

The Australian (9 September 2005) commissioned writer Barry Oakley to do the honours for the author of, inter alia, *The Lucky Country* (1964) and *The Education of Young Donald* (1967). Barry Oakley looked back on the life of Donald Horne – and very much liked what he saw. There were a few hints of criticism in the obit. Barry Oakley (i) referred to his subject's "unassailable self-confidence", (ii) commented that, in his "abundant late memoirs Horne was concerned above all with how he constructed a self" and (iii) concluded that Donald Horne "was not above telling journalists their job". That was about it.

Flashback to *The Bulletin* of 11 April 2000. There Barry Oakley reviewed *Into the Open* which was the fourth volume of Horne's memoirs, albeit duplicating material from the first three volumes. The record shows that Barry Oakley was much more respectful of the Living Horne than the Dead Horne. This is what Oakley wrote when reviewing Donald Horne's *Into the Open* in April 2000:

It [*The Lucky Country*] was a big success, and we're not allowed to forget it. "Donald, it's quite extraordinarily good", says Ninette Dutton, wife of Geoffrey, who published it. In case that didn't register, it's repeated on the next page. It's "a classic", "book of the year". It became a set text and set off "thousands of discussions".

Having identified Horne's tendency to megalomania, Oakley continued the tale. He commented that, in *Into the Open* "we are told what he did and, too often, what we ought to think of what he did". And Oakley concluded:

But even public intellectuals shouldn't take themselves too seriously. "In my congratulatory note [to Bob Hawke], I told him he must have a reserve stock of policies on everything. Bill Hayden was advised in his note to speak more firmly and slowly". He goes global: "What Kissinger should do." To adopt his style for a moment, what Donald Horne should have done was apply his old editorial ruthlessness to *Into the Open*, which starts so entertaining then slowly succumbs to inflation.

So there you have it. Barry Oakley once reckoned that the Living Horne was a self-praising egotist who was forever telling others what to do. Yet Barry Oakley maintained that the Dead Horne possessed merely "unassailable self-confidence" and was "not above telling journalists their job". No more than that.

Strange, really. Donald Horne was a life-long critic of others who just happened to be extremely sensitive

to any criticism of himself. In view of this, it would have made sense for Barry Oakley to self-censor his criticisms of the Living Horne and, later, thoroughly bag the Dead Horne. After all, in an R.I.P. condition, Donald Horne can no longer snub critics at parties nor make angry phone calls.

LOUSY, SEXIST, DRUNKEN, CROOKED, BULLY DEAD

In his obituary for journalist Tony Curtis (1937-2005), which was published in *The Australian* on 7 October 2005, Graeme Leech took a somewhat different tack. He told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about Tony Curtis – who ended his career as a sub-editor with the *Daily Telegraph* in 2003 – but then squibbed on coming to an unambiguous conclusion.

This is what *The Australian's* obiturologist wrote about the late Tony Curtis. He was "a joker, a drinker and a journo's journo...often tactless, habitually cynical and could be deliberately blunt". Also "he could be tight-fisted; if Curtis bought you a beer, he would say it was a moment of weakness and it wouldn't happen again". Curtis "liked women...but was a difficult man to live with". He "would take bets and then refuse to pay up". And then there was his personal cruelty – as told by Mr Leech:

He had a mildly cruel streak which he mistook for a brand of humour. He once visited a mate in hospital who had suffered a stroke. The mate could understand what was being said but could not speak. The mate hated asparagus. Loathed the stuff. Curtis told the nursing staff that his mate loved asparagus and could not get enough of it. The mate was given asparagus everyday until the nurses realised he was not eating it. Curtis was proud of that story and told it in the pub. Everyone believed him.

Pretty funny, eh? Makes you wonder about Tony Curtis's "humour" as enforced on the crippled and the insane. No doubt, he also possessed a talent for gallows humour. Graeme Leech gave an example of the late journalist's "shabby behaviour" viz:

He would sometimes arrive late when invited for dinner and then teasingly abuse the host. If he ran out of cigarettes he would think it natural to instruct his girlfriend to fetch a packet from the corner shop. Yet people stuck by him.

You wonder why. And what was he like with other people's money? Well, that's an interesting story – as described by Graeme Leech.

Curtis was canny with money and made several property investments that kept him comfortable. He was on the board of the old Journalists' Club in Sydney's Surry Hills, which was sold for redevelopment.

Any inquiries about what fee he earned from the sale were met with an enigmatic smile.

Graeme Leech left it at that. To summarise, Tony Curtis was a drunk, mean, spiteful, a bully and overwhelmingly rude. Also, it seems that he acquired a large amount of money when the Journalists Club was sold – merely by virtue of the fact that he was a member of the Club’s board – but refused to reveal the amount. This implies a gross lack of accountability at best – and dishonesty at worst. Yet how did The *Australian* sub-editor head the obituary of the late sub- editor? “Old-school journo who knew his trade”. That’s all.

MUNGO’S MEMORY TOUR

While on the topic of drinkers, consider the case of Mungo MacCallum – who on Radio National Breakfast on 11 November 2005 described the late John Kerr as a “drunken buffoon”. Remember Mungo? Recently his partner Jenny Garrett told the *Good Weekend* about your man Mungo: “When 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).

How about that? Many of us can recall Mungo as early as the 1960s and 1970s tackling-the-turps, so to speak. But, no – apparently. Mungo’s embrace of the bottle is really all John Howard’s fault. So, presumably, the Prime Minister is also to blame for Mungo’s recent memory failures – based on the thesis that the more one drinks the less one remembers. If that’s what the thesis really is, (it’s difficult to recall sometimes). Consider some recent examples:

- Mungo writes an obituary on his uncle – William Charles Wentworth – for *The Australian* (16 June 2003). He recorded that Robert Menzies and Harold Holt had declined to appoint W.C. Wentworth to the ministry but wrote that “Wentworth supported John Gorton for the leadership and was rewarded with the joint portfolio of Social Services and Aboriginal Affairs”. Fair enough. But Mungo went on to write that “Billy McMahon ousted Gorton early in 1971 and Wentworth...was an inevitable tragedy” and that “his return to the backbench finally brought his frustrations to the boil”. Not so. W.C. Wentworth served as Minister for Social Services during the entire period of the McMahon Government – from 10 March 1971 until 5 December 1972. In other words, Wentworth was in no sense a casualty of William McMahon. So, whatever the reasons for his frustrations, they were not caused by Mr McMahon.

- **23 September 2005:** Writing in the *Crikey* on-line newsletter, Mungo refers to his “admittedly hazy recollection of the ‘70s” and maintains that “there was about as much dope smoked in Parliament House as

in the rest of society – i.e. quite a bit”. Well, Mungo should remember – albeit in a hazy sort of way. Or perhaps not.

One of *Crikey’s* anonymous sources, under the name of “Humphrey Bogart” – who claimed to be a former Federal Press Gallery correspondent – added to the theme. He wrote about the late Kevin Newman M.P. (who was a minister in Malcolm Fraser’s Coalition government):

Back in the late ‘70s, a Reps Committee – which the late Kevin Newman and some other notorious wowsers sat on – all tried the evil weed as a social experiment. I kid you not. The results were not at all pretty: the honourable members were all reeling around red-eyed and ripped off their melons at the back of the chamber, giggling like lunatics.

The fact is that Kevin Newman was a Minister in the late 1970s. Consequently, he was not a member of any House of Representatives committee – they all consisted of backbenchers. Also, Kevin Newman was in no sense a wowsers. Eric Beecher and the *Crikey* team should be able to do better than to run such rumours from anonymous sources.

- **19 October 2005:** Mungo writes to the *Crikey* on-line newsletter under the heading “Mungo MacCallum on the proud tradition of parliament punch-ups” at State and Federal levels:

There have been less actual fisticuffs in federal parliament, though I remember one occasion when a member (Lew Kent, ALP, Hotham) had to be restrained as he tried to crawl over the benches to get at an insulter on his own side of the house.

In fact, the year was 1984. And Mr Kent attempted to confront a member of the Coalition on the Opposition benches – not a fellow Labor member on the Government benches. But, so as not to let the facts get in the way of a you-beaut story, Mungo continued:

In the early days a verbal stoush over the 1911 fusion of the free-traders and the protectionists to bring down a Labor government actually led to a fatality: at the height of the uproar the speaker, Sir Frederick Holder, moaned “Dreadful Dreadful” collapsed in his chair and was dead before morning.

In fact, as a quick reference to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* demonstrates, Sir Frederick Holder died in the House of Representatives at about 6 am on 23 July 1909. Labor was not in government at the time – rather, Alfred Deakin was prime minister of the Fusion Government. The fusion between the Protectionists and the Free Traders took place in May 1909 – some months before Holder died. In any event, Sir Frederick was known to be in poor health

at the time of his collapse (due to a cerebral hemorrhage) and the political behaviour which appalled him was that between the two major parties of the day – i.e. the Fusion and Labor.

So, who is to blame for Mungo's poor memory? Surely, John Howard – of course. Let's drink to that.

A NON-AFFAIR TO FORGET

It's not just Mungo McCallum who is suffering memory loss. For some years now, Bob Ellis has been rumoured to have had an affair with the actress Jackie Weaver. The matter is dealt with in Ms Weaver's memoirs *Much Love, Jac X* (Allen & Unwin, 2005). The actor refers to Bob Ellis turning up unexpectedly in Albury one day to see her:

Bob Ellis was very peeved that I had to spend the only afternoon he had in Albury doing a publicity photo opportunity at the local dog food factory and he later sent me a classically Ellis vicious letter of bitter reproach. I was a little frightened of him for some time afterwards. All's fine now though...

I was just one of Bob's dozens of crushes back in the early seventies. I went out with him once only, to an afternoon screening of *The Last Picture Show*. However, I never even held his hand, never mind kissed him. Or anything else, for that matter. Yet to this day Bob Ellis is still telling people we had an affair. Only last week, in fact, he told my friend Manuela that he had "had a fling" with me. "Fling" means sex, Bob. And sex means genital contact. (Of any kind, Bill Clinton) In ya dreams, Bob, you big fibber!

Which demonstrates that, if demonstration were necessary, Bob Ellis has a vivid imagination. And that Jackie Weaver has good taste. It seems that Ms Weaver's approach to Mr Ellis involved a re-working of the Beatles song – as in "I don't want to hold your hand". Apparently the Sage of Palm Beach has been somewhat upset that Jackie Weaver wrote the truth in her memoirs. As she told Gillian Lord (*Canberra Times*, 12 November 2005):

"He's been saying for years that we were an item", she says, cheerfully. "I didn't really mind but I thought I'd set the record straight. He spoke to me about it and I said, well, if we're going to talk semantics, 'fling' implies sexual relations." His response was that he'd never use a word like 'fling'. She laughs....

The good news is that, on this occasion at least, there will be no paternity payment requested – and, consequently, no paternity payment defaults. Which means that Bob Ellis will be in an overall better

situation (than otherwise would have been the case) to repay the remaining \$750 of his failed wager with Gerard Henderson. All (and any) further payments received will be forwarded to the Australian Jesuit Mission in India and Geraldine Cox's orphanage in Cambodia. Come on Bob, pay up NOW.

A SAGE'S ADVICE

While on the topic of setting the record straight, what is to be said of Robert Manne's lead column in *The Age* on 15 November 2005, titled "Labor's way to seize the day"? Not much, it seems. Professor Manne went into Donald Horne mode, with lotsa advice to Kim Beazley as to what he SHOULD do to counter the Howard Government:

Beazley should now offer a non-revocable promise that as soon as Labor is elected, if and when there are the Senate numbers, the Workplace Relations Act will be repealed, the Fair Pay Commission scrapped and a new bill reinstating the rights of wage and salary earners introduced. Beazley should work tirelessly for this result in the next two years. He should make it clear that there is indeed something (other than security) for which he stands. And, to show that he does indeed have ticker, he should make it clear that he will not be intimidated by the predictable hostility of the Murdoch press and that, if his party will not back him absolutely in this campaign, without hesitation he will resign.

Good advice, surely? Well, not really. An endnote to Robert Manne's article indicated that it was based on a speech which he gave to the Fabian Society in Melbourne on Friday 11 November 2005. Had Mr Manne done the relevant research he would have been aware on Saturday 5 November 2005, speaking in Parramatta, Kim Beazley had said:

All over Australia today, Labor Party members of Parliament are out campaigning against the Government's industrial relations laws. If these laws go through we will campaign right down to the next election against them. We will rip up these laws and put in place a fairer system for ordinary Australians. So Australians can get back to the things they have been used to for a century – penalty rates, decent redundancy pay, holiday pay – all the things that make life worth living for the family and mortgages sustainable.

Doesn't Robert Manne, or the collective membership of the Fabian Society, even know what the Labor leader is saying? Er, apparently not. Robert Manne SHOULD do more research.

THE GUARDIAN ON THE YARRA: AN UPDATE

Talking about *The Age*, just how is “The Guardian on the Yarra” going? Pretty well, it seems. Recent highlights include:

- Alan Taylor in his “Eye on Britain” column (24 October 2004) devoted his entire space to an in-depth analysis of, wait for it, the “Cornish pasty” and related matters. Or, perhaps, unrelated matters – it was hard to tell. The column commenced relating how, “in a moment of abject weakness”, Mr Taylor “fell for a Cornish pasty”. The “location was London’s Charing Cross railway station, the excuse a very late lunch”.

Never a person to use one word when two or more will do, Alan Taylor reported that he was “starving, ravenous, famished”. No doubt he was also “peckish” not to mention plain “hungry”. Alas, “the crusty pasty had the consistency of plasterboard and the filling...had the whiff of a waste disposal unit”. So what happened? Well, Mr Taylor wrapped the lot in the final edition of the *Evening Standard* and dumped it on the bin. How about that?

- Demonstrating, once again, that *The Age*’s obituaries section needs a fact-checker, the paper reported the death of long distance Australian athlete Les Perry (1923-2005). Len Johnson, *The Age*’s athletics editor, wrote that Les Perry finished “sixth in the 5000” meters at the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki. He continued:

Three other Australians – Albie Thomas (1956), Dave Power (1960) and Ron Clarke (1968) – have finished one place higher in an Olympic final, but not until Mottram’s bronze medal this year did an Australian do substantially better at a world championships or Olympics.

Not so. Dave Power finished third (not fifth) in the 10,000 metres at the Rome Olympics in 1960. And Ron Clarke finished third (not fifth) in the 10,000 metres at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. In other words, Power and Clarke won bronze medals at the Olympics – as did Craig Mottram in the 10,000 meters in the 2005 World Championships.

VULTURE’S CULTURE

The talented Guy Rundle writes occasionally for *The Age* – and is usually described as being “on the board of *Arena*” Magazine, the Melbourne based leftist tome (see *The Age*, 22 October 2005). Yet Mr Rundle is much, much more than this. He is also Executive Producer ABC Arts and, as such, was executive producer of the new ABC TV *Vulture* program which commenced its eight week run on 27 September 2005.

Let’s fast-forward to the end. The program, which under Guy Rundle’s direction is part arts discussion and part comedy, runs a send-up of what is claimed to be a 1956 issue of the very first *Vulture*. It consists of

three blokes and one sheila sitting around a table discussing cultural issues which most viewers would not/could not understand. The (alleged) early *Vulture* is long on pomposity, name-dropping and unintended self-parody. Hang on a minute. Let’s fast-rewind to the first edition of *Vulture*, 2005. Believe it or not, the real *Vulture* in 2005 is remarkably similar to the make-believe *Vulture* circa 1956.

Before the program commenced, Guy Rundle described *Vulture* as an attempt to deal with the crumbling barriers between high art and popular culture. So how did he go in achieving this aim? Well, he got four panelists to sit around one table – Peter Craven, Helen Thorn and Michael Williams got the most gigs. And they talked and gestured, gestured and talked – at the direction of that able compere Richard Fidler.

So the divide between high and low culture was broken by: (i) Lyndal Walker’s attack on “white middle class classics” and her obscure reference to “Camberwell market” (Week 1 – which was her first and last appearance); (ii) Helen Razor’s eyes-wide-shut appearance while fellow panelists continuously spoke over each other (Week 2); (iii) Helen Thorn’s habit of laughing at her own jokes (she laughed alone – Week 3); and (iv) Peter Craven’s surprisingly self-perceptive comment that “we’ve got no idea who we are” (right on – Week 4).

But there was more. Consider: Fiona Katauskas’s statement that “every man” claims to love Jane Austen “when he wants a root” (which suggests that she mixes in metrosexual land – Week 5); (ii) Helen Thorn declaring, over a much visible and substantive cleavage, that the Melbourne Museum is “a great salute to capitalism” (Week 6); (iii) Michael Williams advising viewers that “quite frankly” he “shat” himself at a horror movie (horror, Week 7) and (iv) Michael Williams’ condemnation of something or other as a “searing indictment of contemporary capitalist society” (come to think of it, this sounds like an article in Mr Rundle’s *Arena Magazine* – Week 8).

Humphrey McQueen might have said something significant in Week 5 – but at times he could not be heard. And Mary Zournazi might have provided a cultural realigning aside during her Week 7 “Come on Peter, bloody hell” exchange with Mr Craven – except that her argument was incomprehensible. For all his pretension, Peter Craven was the most sensible panelist. However, after two months and a large slab of taxpayers’ money, the gap between high art and popular art just remains as great as it was before *Vulture* went to air. Or 1956. Or whatever.

