### The Sydney Institute Annual Dinner Lecture

It is essential to RSVP for functions and book 2 weeks in advance, no earlier. Thank you for your cooperation!

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**Note:**
- Bookings for functions are required 2 weeks in advance.
- Free to associates & associates’ partners / $5 students / $10 others.
- RSVP: Ph: (02) 9252 3366 or Fax: (02) 9252 3360 or Email: mail@thesydneyinstitute.com.au
- Website: www.thesydneyinstitute.com.au
Has “the reputation” of the ABC been damaged in recent times? Well, according to the (collective) view of over fifty ABC staff, the answer lies in the affirmative. On 30 June 2006 numerous ABC staff put their name to a letter from Four Corners executive producer Bruce Belsham to Murray Green – then the ABC’s acting managing director – condemning the decision taken by the ABC “to withdraw from publication of the Chris Masters’ book Jonestown”.

The letter was soon leaked to the media. It took Mr Green a full five days to reply. This was the first statement made by the public broadcaster on this issue – despite the fact that the Jonestown matter had become an issue of public controversy. On 4 July 2006 Murray Green wrote to Bruce Belsham advising that the decision had been taken on legal grounds since it was believed that Alan Jones, the subject of Chris Masters’ unauthorised biography, might take legal action and that this could lead to the ABC incurring a “significant loss” due to “unrecoverable post-publication legal expenses”. The ABC Board was involved in this decision.

The ABC’s decision led to a predictable outrage. Chris Masters initially said he was “shocked and upset” and later claimed that he had been betrayed by the ABC. The Bruce Belsham letter (which was also signed by the likes of Ian Carroll, Mark Colvin, Quentin Dempster, Geraldine Doogue, Richard Glover, Liz Jackson, Tony Jones, Anna Maria Nicholson and Morag Ramsay) went so far as to claim that “the sight of the ABC caving in under political or commercial pressure invites the powerful and wealthy to believe that threats can deter the ABC from producing controversial material through any of its outlets”. Then Phillip Adams spoke. And then the ABC’s (unofficial) historian Ken Inglis. And then the ABC TV Media Watch program. And so on. What the collectively outraged had in common was an unwillingness to tackle the central issues.

Originally ABC Enterprises commissioned ABC staffer Chris Masters to write an unauthorised biography of one of the ABC’s commercial rivals – Alan Jones, who broadcasts on 2GB in Sydney and on Channel 9 Today program. As an ABC Enterprises production, the book would have been advertised on the ABC – despite its alleged objection to advertising, the public broadcaster flogs its own products at will. When the ABC advertises its own products, the impression is given that they have been sanctioned by the ABC itself. Critics of the ABC’s eventual decision to junk the book have alleged that this was a decision imposed on ABC management by the ABC Board. Not so. It is understood that the ABC’s general counsel Stephen Collins and its chief operating officer David Pendleton opposed the decision to publish Jonestown – as did ABC chairman Donald M cDonald. This is not a matter of censorship because it was known that Chris Masters would find another publisher and, indeed, he has signed up with Allen & Unwin.

There is one final matter. It is understood that a central thesis of Jonestown turns on the allegation that Alan Jones cannot be fully understood without analysis of his (alleged) sexuality. Chris Masters is a considered and able author. Even so, this is a controversial claim. You wonder whether the Friends of the ABC set would have got so uptight if ABC had junked a biography, by an ABC staffer, which sought to examine the sexual history of Phillip Adams or Michael Kirby or Kerry O’Brien. The answer is obvious.
SCALING THE HEIGHTS OF MORAL HUMBUG

Anne Henderson

In these secular times, celebrity styled and self-appointed moral guardians have long replaced church leaders as the average person’s guide to the higher moral ground. Noam Chomsky on capitalism and the military industrial complex, Michael Moore downing Stupid White Men and corporate America, Hilary Clinton on greed, Ralph Nader railing against consumption or Barbra Streisand on workers rights. Closer to home, there’s broadcaster Phillip Adams deriding shock jock John Laws and the nation’s fixation with real estate.

The problem for moral guardians is that often they take the high moral ground while simultaneously dealing themselves in much of what they condemn. It’s called double standards. And right now the world of commentary is full of them.

In his column in the Weekend Australian Magazine for 3-4 June 2006, Phillip Adams lampooned the home ownership preoccupations of many Australians, calling it a “psychiatric pandemic, a financial counterpart to bipolar disorder”. This is the same Phillip Adams who owns property in Sydney’s fashionable Paddington and a 4000 hectare cattle and olive farm in the Upper Hunter. In 2001, he took his Paddington neighbour, Lord Dudley publican James Couche, to the NSW Supreme Court to stop him having right-of-way to an alleyway adjoining their respective properties. Adams had a security door at one end and was using it as a front path to his home. He claimed the lane “is in fact my land”.

On 18 July 2006, Adams took a superior moral stick to conservative broadcaster John Laws, accusing him of flaws of character along with a tendency to air bigotry on his program. Laws hit back with a stinging letter to The Australian in which he pointed to a few flaws in Phillip Adams’ own character, including denying access to “his” Paddington laneway on Christmas Day to a 91-year old woman in a wheelchair who needed to use it to get to dinner with her family. Instead, four men had to carry her down a very steep and narrow flight of stairs.

The hypocrisy industry is alive and well in secular democracies. Not least of all in the USA. Here, decades of campaigns from animal rights protests to anti war marches have offered some notable Americans not only celebrity status but even comfortable incomes. In Do As I Say (Not As I Do) - Profiles in Liberal Hypocrisy, Peter Schweizer has exposed the lifetime lies of eleven of the best.

For Schweizer, left liberal (social democrat) hypocrisy is a stage on from conservative hypocrisy. “Conservatives often,” he writes, “(but certainly not always) confine their moral beliefs to the realm of personal conduct. Liberals on the other hand seek to legislate their beliefs and impose them on others. To correct what they see as economic and social injustice they support a whole litany of policies and principles.” He points out that the hypocrisy of conservatives is easily tested in personal behaviour and when caught they fall. Left liberals, on the other hand, are often advanced by their hypocrisy. The examples make for an absorbing study.

MOORE THE MERRIER

Take Michael Moore, documentary film maker and guru of anti-Americanism and fashionable leftist causes. His hallmark characteristic is hero of the little man against the big corporations. He talks often of growing up in the working class, wrong side of the tracks rust belt of Flint in Michigan. Flint has become a trademark for Moore – on his email address and website. In fact, Moore grew up in nearby Davison, the son of a middle class General Motors worker who owned the family home, drove two cars and played golf after work in the afternoons. Moore, like his four siblings, was educated at a private (Catholic) school and like two of his siblings was put through college by his father. Moore’s working class background is just a myth. As is the claim that he gives away 40 per cent of his income.

Moore’s wealth is now legendary. But he continues to create around himself the image of a “little” man, down on his luck in baseball cap and baggy trousers. He is worth much more than George W Bush with a penthouse in New York and an extensive property on Torch Lake, Michigan.

In Stupid White Men, as part of his denigration of conservative George W Bush, Moore criticised the President’s Texan ranch for its geothermal heating system, water purification and re-cycling system and water-cooling system as if just elite largesse. Moore’s own ten acre sprawl at Torch Lake has no such environmentally friendly characteristics and is made of 70 year old Michigan red pine trees. Moore was recently cited by local authorities for despoiling a wetland in an attempt to extend his private beach.
Moore’s image exudes the ordinary guy, the man who can hack it rough with no interest in consuming goods. He decries the elite for their excess and need for luxury. This is the same man who couldn’t drink Poland Spring when backstage and had to have a ready supply of Evian. The same man who demanded he travel the country in a private jet and a fleet of SUVs for his most recent book tour. And who, in spite of calling conservatives “paranoid”, had his security guards at his book signings ask people to take their hands out of their pockets. And while bagging Americans in Bowling for Columbine for their ownership of guns out of irrational fear, has himself surrounded by gun touting guards at every opportunity.

It’s a long list of double standards. Moore argues pointedly that racism is rampant in America. As Schweizer puts it, Moore “relentlessly exposes those who fail to meet his standards of racial fairness and equality”. He calls Hollywood racist because there are not enough African-Americans in senior positions. In Stupid White Men, Moore spoke of his plans to “hire only black people”. Yet a check of Moore’s own work reveals that out of 134 producers, editors, cinematographers, composers and production coordinators only three have been black. And while denouncing segregation and white flight, he himself spends two-thirds of his time in splendid isolation at his lakeside Michigan home where 95.7 per cent of the population is white.

As for his castigation of US corporations, the “corporate terrorists who rip off old-age pensioners, destroy the environment, deplete irreplaceable fuels in the name of profit” and so on, apparently this doesn’t stop Moore and his wife from a large stock portfolio themselves - conveniently in a private foundation they have created. Stocks they have invested in include the “evil” Halliburton, Pfizer, Merck, Genzyme, Elian PLC, Eli Lilly, Becton Dickenson and Boston Scientific. And energy baddies like Sunoco, Noble Energy, Schlumberger, Williams Company and so on. Amazingly, Moore claims he doesn’t invest in the stockmarket.

Moore’s humbug has made him a very wealthy man - and as Hollywood manager, and former Moore manager, Douglas Urbanski says, “[Moore] is more money obsessed than any I have known and that’s saying a lot.”

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO NOAM

The tenets of Western left liberal sermonising have for decades centred on a few fundamentals - mostly allied with anti-Americanism or anti-capitalism - namely opposition to multi national corporations (formerly the military industrial complex), proactive support for environmentalism and environmentally friendly development, a general call for the rights of workers against employers and affirmative action for women.

In the years of the Cold War, much of the leftist thesis was pro-Soviet as well. These days, with the Soviet gone, anti-Americanism tends to go soft on Islamic fundamentalism as part of its anti-US spiel. Noam Chomsky once used to claim that capitalism was worse than communism and called himself an American “dissident” comparing himself with Alexander Solzhenitsyn who was at one time incarcerated in Stalin’s gulag. Chomsky has continued his evangelising, albeit with updated messages, now comparing the US with Nazi Germany and arguing there is a case for impeaching every US president since World War II. After 9/11, as the war in Afghanistan was about to start, he told an audience in Pakistan that thousands of US citizens did not want Osama Bin Laden taken alive as there was no proof Bin Laden had been behind the attacks in New York and Washington. Chomsky’s comments at the time were so anti-American he was praised by Hamid Mir, editor of the pro-Taliban publication Ausaf.

According to the Chomsky mindset, the Pentagon is as vile an institution as any on earth, the poor are the “victims of capitalism” and private trusts and tax havens merely shift the tax burden away from the rich and on to the general population. Examine the Chomsky personal record, however, and a different picture emerges. This guru, who has made millions from his anti-Pentagon messages, has in fact been happy to take money obsessed than any I have known and that’s saying a lot.”

Chomsky’s first book Syntactic Structures received grants from the US Army, US Air Force, and Naval Research, along with financial support from the Eastman Kodak Corporation, the sort of American corporation Chomsky has described as “as totalitarian as Bolshevism and fascism”. His next book Aspects of the Theory of Syntax was again funded by subsidiaries
of the US Army, Navy and Air Force and the US Air Force Electronic Systems Division. In spite of advocating academics and students should not take Pentagon funded positions and scholarships, he himself worked for four decades with the Pentagon funded Research Laboratory of Electronics at MIT where he was paid a salary 30 per cent higher than for an equivalent position at other universities.

A prolific writer, over decades, Chomsky has attracted a following among millions that now make up something of a Chomsky church. Being so widely read and successful, Chomsky has become a very wealthy man. Yet he continues to pose as the champion of the poor, dressing down on campus much like Michael Moore who might be described as a Chomsky offshoot. And, in spite of his aura of poor man’s messiah, Chomsky is in fact a wily capitalist with investments in the dreaded stock market and has built a “Chomsky” industry any capitalist would be proud of. Also, like Moore, in spite of calling for an end to all forms of racism and white exclusiveness, he and his family live in exclusive Lexington, Massachusetts, where whites make up 98.9 per cent of the population and where the forced busing legislation (anti-segregationist) was not applied.

As for Chomsky’s opposition to family trusts and tax dodging, he himself has a family trust to protect his income from the worst of the tax take. Meanwhile, he continues to rake in income at the rate of $12,000 a speech, many times a year, as well as from selling his Chomsky merchandise from CDs ($12.99 a pop), his many books and even from the downloading of his clips over the internet. While often critical of private property rights, his own company advises others not to try to download audios of his speeches without paying the fees.

And, in spite of the Chomsky cry of the US being a police state as he addresses the masses, when asked in Pakistan how he could risk being so anti-American, he replied with a laugh that he could speak freely because of his American passport and the power of the US which he continues to denounce.

BARBRA STREISAND AND THE CLINTONS

One of the most common calls from the liberal Left is the call for the redistribution of income to bridge the growing gap between rich and poor. The Right is castigated regularly as the party of greed and the rich, while social democrats harbour the illusion that only social engineering can help the less well off. There is a growing frustration on the left of politics as governments lean more and more to freer markets and individual wealth creation and win votes from the ordinary citizen.

But behind some of the most vocal in the campaign for the rights and needs of the poor are some who themselves do not practise what they preach. Barbra Streisand, actor and director and number one fan, friend and fund raiser for Hilary and Bill Clinton when they were America’s first couple, is one such.

Streisand has become renowned in the US for her leftist views and campaigns. But, as Schweizer writes in Do As I Say, “on the three causes with which Streisand seems most concerned - the struggle of the working class against the greed of the rich, environmentalism, and feminism - there is a yawning gap between what she says and what she does.”

Stories abound of how nasty and mean Streisand is with those whom she employs. According to one of her former managers she is generous in putting on shows for charity where she gains credit, but extremely niggardly about salaries for ordinary workers in her employ. One group of Mexicans she employed, who had no green cards, was paid $3.50 an hour. When they asked for an additional 25 cents an hour, she had them fired and replaced. She had her manager sack an older domestic couple within the week so they would be out by the time she came home a few days later. They had worked for her since she had first come to Hollywood. Her gardener went unpaid for months and the story goes that he was threatened with a gun when he came to complain. She was sued by a screenwriter for an unpaid commission. Unpaid bills are a common complaint in her history. And yet this tacky behaviour is no restraint on Barbra’s public image of champion of the worker as she mounts her platforms across the world.

Like others, Streisand also speaks out strongly on the need for free speech - but, when it comes to her own contracts, musicians are asked to sign “secrecy agreements”. When photographer Wendell Wall, also a neighbour on good terms with Streisand, took shots of her at a car dealership looking at SUVs (a clear contradiction of her plea a few months before for Americans to get serious about reducing fuel emissions) she had him arrested, pressed charges that led to bail being upped to $1 million so that he was held for three days. When the matter came to court, Wall was recognised to have been doing nothing offensive and he sued the sheriff’s department for violation of his civil liberties which was settled out of court. So much for Streisand’s belief in rights.

But it is in the area of greed and avarice that Streisand and her good friends the Clintons, in particular Hilary, stand out. They are all great critics of the greed is good scenario. American business, capitalists everywhere, are the chief offenders. Yet Streisand and the Clintons are very good at the money grab wherever it may be.
For Streisand it has been the international tour with fans asked to pay $1000 seat. Tell the world it’s your last concert, and people will takes loans just to be there. Having apparently made $10 million out of her “last” concert, Streisand did the same thing seven years later. Tax avoidance is another of the crimes Streisand condemns. This didn’t stop her donating a $12 million mansion she couldn’t sell to a foundation and taking a $15 million tax write-off. And all this from the champion of narrowing the gap between rich and poor who lives in princely luxury. Just one of her residences contains five separate homes and a 12,000 foot air conditioned barn where she stores her show business gear.

It’s no doubt having friends like Barbara that made Hilary Clinton long for a bit more. Schweizer pulls no punches in his overall assessment: “the Clintons have always been about money, and the selfless liberalism that they promote and encourage others to embrace has nothing to do with how they live their own lives.”

While Bill and Hillary have foregone the life of entrepreneur in the cause of service as public figures, they have lived off the taxpayer quite richly. In the governor’s mansion in Little Rock, Arkansas, Clinton called himself the lowest paid governor in America and pointed to the salary Hillary might have had as a lawyer, a profession she had abandoned to do charity work. And yet Bill’s income put them in the top one per cent of US wage earners, in addition to which they enjoyed an annual $50,000 food allowance, free accommodation in a mansion, an entertainment allowance, free travel, babysitting, health insurance, bodyguards and staff and so on.

On leaving the White House, such was their fan club that Hillary was able to appeal for gifts as she set up new houses - she registered lists at up market retailers and insisted that people make their gifts before the Senate ethics rules kicked in on 3 January as they left the White House. She scored well over $190,000 in gifts. That’s how to sell your influence. And yet Bill’s income put them in the top one per cent of US wage earners, in addition to which they enjoyed an annual $50,000 food allowance, free accommodation in a mansion, an entertainment allowance, free travel, babysitting, health insurance, bodyguards and staff and so on.

When it comes to paying taxes, the Clintons have declared they just love to pay their fair share of tax. This has not stopped them reducing their tax bills like many of the best. Income tax returns for the Clintons reveal that they have consistently paid some seven per cent less in tax than others in their income bracket. They simply claim write-offs of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Used shower curtains, old running shoes, even claiming $4 a pair for Bill’s used underwear. The Whitewater scandal disclosed that Hillary claimed thousands in deductions she knew they were not entitled to. They have failed to report profits from Hillary’s commodities trading, along with other income that should have been reported to the Inland Revenue. The list is a long one. And their family trust enables them to avoid a substantial amount of the inheritance tax their estate would attract.

Hillary’s charitable work has also been lucrative. Her work for the Southern Development Corporation that gave loans to businesses in poor rural areas attracted $150,000 in legal fees for Rose Law Firm where Hillary was a partner. While condemning commodities speculation as greed, Hillary has stayed in the market herself - and taken all the profits. Condemning oil and chemical companies has not stopped her investing in them.

THE DO AS I SAY INDUSTRY

Schweizer’s study of the rich and hypocritical is full of such stories - of how those who preach loudest against the so called evils of modern democracies have themselves the biggest skeletons in their closets.

Ralph Nader can praise communist induced poverty and oppose capitalist corporations while investing millions himself on the stock market. As his criticisms of corporations grow, so does his investment in them. Even to the extent of criticising out-sourcing while investing in companies that live from it. And while speaking out for increased openness, Nader is a most secretive individual, especially about what he does with his money, even using relatives to hide his personal wealth.

Legislator and Democrat Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, one of the wealthiest on the Hill, an anti-nuclear and environmentalist campaigner, owns and invests in property where environmental regulations are ignored. A campaigner for unionised workers, Pelosi prefers to employ non-unionised immigrant labour wherever she can in her extensive businesses in the service industry and on the Pelosi vineyards. Her own accumulation of vast wealth never stops her from decrying the gap between the rich and the poor and pointing to Republicans as the party of the rich.

Teddy Kennedy, whom Schweizer calls the “king of liberal hypocrites”, has benefited hugely from money that comes to him regularly through the extensive Kennedy family trust arrangements while making grand speeches about protecting the poor. Tax minimalisation is a way of life for the Kennedy family. And being close to government can be useful. A Kennedy purchase for the knock down price of $3 million of a whole Washington DC block close to Capitol Hill was later valued at $200 million following redevelopment and rented out to easily found tenants in such a popular area.
On green issues, Kennedy is fulsome in his appeals for “greener” choices. Yet the Kennedys, led by Ted, continue to oppose a wind project off Hyannis where they sail, even though the project is way out to sea. And as Ted preaches against oil companies, the Kennedys have invested in oil in Texas for decades, and even own the drilling rights on land that is not theirs.

Many sixties and seventies feminists lived to rethink their intransigent and radical beliefs over decades. Some have recanted, others have admitted to modifications needed. But Gloria Steinem, icon of sixties feminist extremes is not one of those. Not in what she preaches that is.

What she does is something else. For years Steinem made herself a priestess of the feminist movement, or what Schweizer calls the “wonder girl”, named woman of the year and regarded by some as a presidential prospect. She lectured far and wide telling her followers, who sought liberation and of which there were millions, that they should avoid marriage - coining the phrase “a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle”. And she railed against women who chased physical beauty.

But Steinem herself did not take her own advice. She prospered, using her beauty to advance her image constantly. Moreover, when it looked like a good thing to marry wealthy South African businessman David Bale, in September 2000, Steinem took the plunge and became Mrs Bale. Her rationalisation was not to say she had had a change of heart but to proclaim that feminism is about “the ability to choose what’s right at each time of our lives”. Meanwhile, many thousands of the sisters who had followed her advice, were living as lonely and penurious older spinsters and wondering if what they had done was any sort of answer.

Then there is George Soros, worth some $7 billion, who speaks as if he has discovered the “truth”. A man whose investment in currencies is like no other. As Schweizer writes, “He has been known to ‘short’ a currency (betting it will go lower) and then publicly state it will drop. When Soros speaks, people listen, and the currency does often drop. He then sells for a tidy profit.” This is the man who has more recently converted to a left liberal position and campaigns against capitalism calling it a “greater threat to open society than any totalitarian ideology”. A campaigner for the legalisation of drugs, Soros has bought up large tracts of land in South America which are ready for the mass-production of narcotics. And so it goes.

As Peter Schweizer demonstrates, page after page, left liberal hypocrisy is alive and well – and lucrative.

Anne Henderson is the editor of The Sydney Papers
MYTH NO.3: The RBA became independent in 1996, via that same agreement between Treasurer Costello and RBA Governor Macfarlane.

In fact, the RBA’s independence was formalised in the Reserve Bank Act 1959. Furthermore, statements by three RBA Governors - spanning the past two decades - suggest strongly that the RBA in Sydney was running its own race on policy well before 1996. In practical terms, the floating of the A$ in 1983, the separation of the RBA’s debt management and monetary policy functions, and the deregulation of interest rates and other controls on banks between the late-1970s and the late-1980s each mattered much more for RBA policy independence than anything that occurred in 1996.

THE EARLY-1990S RECESSION AND COLLAPSE OF AUSTRALIAN INFLATION

Let’s go back to the late-1980s boom. Private demand was growing rapidly, Australia’s current account deficit was running near 6 per cent of GDP, inflation was about 7 per cent and prices and wages growth was threatening to accelerate (remember the pilots’ strike?). In response, the RBA lifted its cash rate gradually to 18 per cent, prompting a 3.5 per cent increase in the standard-variable mortgage rate to an all-time high of 17 per cent.

The plan was to slow private spending and bring the economy in for a “soft landing”. Treasurer Paul Keating highlighted the need to reduce the current account deficit, while the RBA was more focussed on dampening growing wage and price pressures and eventually delivering a reduction in trend inflation.

In the event, the economy began to slow in the second half of 1989, and then slipped unexpectedly into recession a year later. Unemployment surged, from a low near 5.5 per cent in late-1989 to a peak near 11 per cent in late-1992.

Pretty well everyone - in both the public and private sectors - underestimated the size of the recession, the rise in unemployment and the associated drops in inflation and interest rates. Inflation collapsed to 2 per cent in 1992, perhaps 2pp lower than what the RBA had in mind before the economy fell over.

As Head of Research and then Assistant Governor (Economic) at the RBA between 1988 and 1992, Ian Macfarlane was one of the architects of the early-1990s recession. Accordingly, he’s always highlighted the broader picture, pointing to the silver lining of lower inflation (and thus lower interest rates).

In May 1992, with inflation already having fallen into the 2s, newly-appointed Deputy Governor M acfarlane in a speech to The Sydney Institute emphasised the “structural” nature of the drop in inflation. By July 1993, the RBA’s cash rate had been reduced all the way from 18 per cent to a generational low of 4.75 per cent. By November 1995, Deputy Governor Macfarlane observed “...five years of low inflation behind us” and hailed the fact that the Australian economy was “...back in a world where low inflation is the norm”.

In M ay 1996, M acfarlane highlighted the good things that had emerged in the wake of what Treasurer Keating famously called “The Recession We Had to Have”:

At the Reserve Bank, we are pretty happy with how things have turned out in Australia. Over the past five years, the underlying rate of inflation has averaged 2.5 per cent per annum... This is the best result over a five-year period for 30 years... At the same time, real GDP has grown at an average annual rate of 3.3 per cent.

By then, the Australian economy already had enjoyed almost one-third of our “Golden Decade and a Half”. Unemployment already had fallen from 11 per cent to 8 per cent, and the RBA was expecting the good news to keep flowing regardless of who was in Canberra claiming credit:

We are optimists about the future of the Australian economy. We think that we will achieve a lot more years of sustainable growth, as long as prices and wages remain under control. Our chances of doing this are good, and have improved during the course of 1996 as a stream of lower inflation figures have come in. On wages, there has also been recent good news in the form of the March quarter earnings figures. ... If inflation can be prevented from getting out of control in the first place by early monetary policy action, there is no reason why expansions could not go on a lot longer than the six or seven years we have been accustomed to in the past. ... In essence, prevention is a lot better than the cure.

It turns out that Governor Macfarlane’s optimism a decade ago was well-placed. The RBA’s “prevention is better than the cure” strategy has worked a treat, assisted greatly by the competitive pressures unleashed by a couple of decades of microeconomic
reform at home, as well as greater global competition in general. In any case, low and stable inflation has bred low and stable interest rates, and our record-breaking economic expansion soon will complete its 15th year.

**DID WE PAY TOO HIGH A PRICE FOR LOW INFLATION?**

So, the early-1990s recession broke the back of high inflation in Australia, once and for all. But great progress on the inflation front came at great cost in terms of output and employment forgone.

Deputy Governor Macfarlane argued at The Sydney Institute back in 1992 that there was no alternative:

> ...on this occasion we had to run monetary policy somewhat tighter than in earlier recessions, and take the risk that the fall in output would be greater than forecast. To do less than this would be to throw away the once-in-a-decade opportunity for Australia to regain an internationally respectable inflation rate. The question is - did we pay an unacceptably high price? I know of no country in the post-war period that has achieved a significant reduction in its core rate of inflation without a contraction in output. ...we paid a substantial price to reduce inflation, but we had to do it at some stage.

In other words, it was indeed "The Recession We Had to Have". That's because painful recessions are pretty well the only way economies ever shift from an era of high inflation to an era of low inflation. Unfortunately, there are no easy options, notwithstanding the fantasy of "costless disinflation" that once made the grade in academic discussions. In Australia, as elsewhere, wage and price-setters' longstanding expectations of high ongoing inflation needed to be crushed.

If Governor Macfarlane were to undertake a cost-benefit analysis today - a decade and a half down the track - he surely would conclude that the long-run benefits from Australia's early-1990s recession are greater than its massive short-run costs.

So, has the early-1990s recession been given a "bad rap"? Governor Macfarlane evidently thinks so. Answering questions (from me) at the Australian Business Economists Annual Dinner last December, he observed:

> ... if ever I was tempted to write about a particular economic event which I think has been misunderstood, ... I would write about the 1990s recession where I think some of the understandings in the popular imagination are completely wrong. ... some of the economic interpretations are completely wrong and, even more importantly, the political interpretations are completely wrong. ... It is interesting, I mean the episode in Australia which returned us to a low-inflation, sustainable-growth economy is regarded as a policy error, whereas in America it's regarded as a policy triumph.

He was referring of course to the US Federal Reserve in 2004 celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the "Volcker Disinflation", America’s episode involving 20 per cent policy rates followed by a major (global) recession. That episode is regarded by many as a policy triumph, because it returned the US economy to low inflation after a decade and a half in the high-inflation wilderness.

Similarly, the purpose of the high interest rates the RBA put in place in Australia in the late-1980s was to lean hard against the unhealthy boom and to steer inflation down from the 7-8 per cent level that policymakers gradually had come to see as unacceptably high.

While many regard the early-1990s recession that followed as a complete disaster, it was this episode - way more than anything else - that jolted our economy from the high inflation, high-interest-rate era of the 1970s and 1980s to the low inflation, low interest-rate era we have enjoyed ever since. Accordingly, the RBA one day may become brave enough to embrace the infamous 1989-1992 episode involving 17 per cent mortgage rates and the "Recession We Had To Have" as its own once-in-a-lifetime policy triumph.

For now, the good news is that the RBA - under Governor Stevens as under Governors Macfarlane and Fraser before him - remains determined to ensure that we'll never go back to the bad old days of high inflation.

**"LOCKING IN" LOW INFLATION: THE RBA'S 2-3 PER CENT INFLATION TARGET**

In the wake of the early-1990s recession, the RBA grabbed what it saw as a "once-in-a-decade opportunity" to "lock in" low inflation and low interest rates. After the downtrend in inflation bottomed-out near 2 per cent in 2002 - and after a great deal of internal debate - Governor Fraser in March 1993 announced the RBA's flexible 2-3 per cent inflation target:
My own view is that if the rate of inflation in underlying terms could be held to 2 to 3 per cent over a period of years, that would be a good outcome.

In choosing its 2-3 per cent inflation target, the RBA rejected many other options, including the 0-2 per cent target proposed in the Coalition's 1991 Fightback! manifesto. As time passed, the new target was given a higher public profile. By 1994, it was featured in the first two sentences of the RBA's Annual Report:

Monetary policy in Australia seeks to support economic growth while limiting inflation to around 2 to 3 per cent. The objective is being met.

It's clear to anyone paying attention that the hard slog behind the RBA's 2-3 per cent target - the painful reduction in inflation to 2 per cent, the decision on the form of the target, and the first big rate hikes in defence of the new target - was over before 1996.

So it's amusing to observe the Howard Government's enthusiasm these days to nominate 1996 as the year it all happened. Treasurer Costello, for example, reckons his 1996 “Exchange of Letters” with incoming RBA Governor Macfarlane - “on an inflation target and on the independence of the bank” - has been a “critical” driving force behind the economic good times of the past decade.

The 1996 Statement on The Conduct of Monetary Policy itself makes only the modest claim of being “designed to clarify” already existing “roles and responsibilities”, noting in particular the RBA’s 2-3 per cent target and its longstanding policy independence. For the RBA, the Statement was yet another step towards increased transparency. In Ian Macfarlane’s subsequent words, “… really to formalise a situation that already existed”.

The 1996 Statement on The Conduct of Monetary Policy essentially was a marketing document, designed to promote a better understanding of Australia's monetary-policy arrangements. Nothing of substance actually changed. The Howard Government simply endorsed the RBA’s existing 2-3 per cent target. For the RBA, it was business as usual.

Indeed, without a (politically controversial) change in the Reserve Bank Act 1959, the scope for Canberra to shift the RBA from its settled policy framework is rather limited. In any case, the RBA celebrated its 2-3 per cent inflation target's tenth birthday in 2003.

Reading through the 1996 and 2003 Statements on The Conduct of Monetary Policy, it strikes me how little the policy framework has changed since the early-1990s. That’s because the RBA got it right the first time around in March 1993 - putting a world-class policy framework in place - after a great deal of soul-searching in the wake of the early-1990s recession.

RBA'S INDEPENDENCE EMERGED WELL BEFORE 1996

Just as the RBA’s 2-3 per cent inflation target was firmly in place well before the 1996 “Exchange of Letters” between Governor Macfarlane and Treasurer Costello, so too was RBA independence.

Perhaps the clearest evidence that the RBA was running its own race on monetary policy before 1996 still sits unrecognised right under many observers’ noses. In case you didn’t notice, the big rate cuts that might have helped Keating & Co. cling to power came after - not before - the March 1996 election.

Critically, it was the Howard Opposition not the Keating Government that benefited hugely from the RBA’s interest-rate decisions during the latter’s final term in office. Recall that the RBA had hiked by an aggressive 2.75 pp in just four months over the second half of 1994, then held its cash rate steady at 7.5 per cent for 19 months. The mortgage rate jumped from 8.75 per cent to 10.5 per cent and stayed at that politically damaging level for well over a year before the election.

The RBA did indeed cut rates aggressively in 1996, but after not before the 2 March election that sent the Keating Government into political oblivion. The first cut came in July 1996, and by July 1997 the cash rate had been reduced by 2.5pp, to 5 per cent. The Howard Government not the Keating Government reaped the political rewards.

In my opinion, claims that the RBA was not making its own decisions on interest rates well before 1996 lack any real credibility. Certainly, evidence of inappropriate influence by Canberra always has remained conspicuous by its absence.

Of course, perceptions about RBA independence were savaged in 1989 when Treasurer Keating bragged that “they do what I say”, and again in 1990 when he claimed to have the RBA (among others) “in my pocket”. Paul Keating subsequently has complained that the RBA had cut rates too slowly in the early-1990s and then again in the mid-1990s. So much for him running the monetary-policy show!

Opposition Leader John Hewson’s regular wild claims of political interference also were damaging to perceptions of RBA independence. Citing zero
evidence, Fightback! in 1991 reported that the “Reserve Bank-Hawke Government link has been a sorry saga of compromise and influence”. Governors Johnson (1982-1989) and Fraser (1989-1996) always denied such claims as uninformed rubbish. Even the most-sceptical observers should have been convinced in 1992 by Deputy Governor Macfarlane’s famous “Blame Martin Place” statement at The Sydney Institute:

... all the decisions, all the reductions in interest rates, have occurred because they have been recommended by the Board of the Reserve Bank - the timing has been determined by the Reserve Bank and the size of the changes has been determined by the Reserve Bank. So if you don’t like how monetary policy has turned out, if you think it is a terrible mess, blame us. Blame Martin Place. It would be very comfortable if every time people didn’t like monetary policy they complained to Canberra. But they would be wasting their time.

As outsiders, perhaps we can never know for sure, but the forceful say-so of two decades worth of RBA Governors is pretty strong evidence that independent monetary policy was alive and well long before 1996. The very circumstances in which the Howard Government won power - and the Keating Government lost it - in the March 1996 election surely prove the point.

In any case, the RBA since 1997 has not moved the cash rate more than 1.25pp either side of 5 per cent, while the standard-variable mortgage rate has averaged about 7 per cent. So, low and stable inflation over the past decade and a half has brent low and stable interest rates and solid and stable economic growth, allowing unemployment to drop slowly but surely to generational lows.

With unemployment today at 4.8 per cent, the Australian economy is closer to “full employment” than it has been in three decades. The lesson here, quite simply, is that low-inflation economies work better than high-inflation economies. As a key driver of today’s low-inflation era, the early-1990s recession should take a bow! So too, the RBA.

Rory Robertson was an economist at the Reserve Bank between 1988 and 1994. He is currently Interest-Rate Strategist, Macquarie Bank.
reforms during Malcolm Fraser’s prime ministership – but not many. The few that there were involved John Howard – either in his position as Minister for Business and Consumer Affairs or, later, as Treasurer.

Between March 1983 and March 1996 the Hawke/Keating government floated the currency, deregulated the financial system, commenced the privatisation process, substantially reduced protection, reformed the tax and welfare systems and commenced the process of deregulation of what had become perhaps the most centralised industrial relations system in the Western world.

After March 1996, the Coalition – under the leadership of John Howard and Peter Costello – continued the reform process. The budget was moved from deficit to surplus and the independence of the Reserve Bank to determine monetary policy was formally acknowledged. There was more privatisation, more tax reform and substantial additional industrial relations deregulation – along with some reform in the areas of health and education and welfare plus long overdue reform of the waterfront.

Economic reform in Australia has been underway for close to a quarter of a century. It was preceded by the immigration changes – which commenced in the mid 1960s and were legally implemented in the late 1970s – that saw the end of the White Australia Policy. As a result of social and economic change, Australia has one of the strongest economies in the world. This has made it possible for Australia to experience the impact of the Asian economic downturn of 1997, the United States recession of 2001 and the worst domestic drought in a century – while the Australian economy grew at 3 per cent or more with low inflation and an unemployment rate which halved to under 5 per cent in just a decade. A truly remarkable achievement – which was possible only because of the implementation of economic and social reform by both Labor and the Coalition.

I was in general agreement with the economic and foreign policies of the Hawke/Keating Government. And I have generally agreed with the economic and foreign policies of the Howard Government. From time to time, I have had public disagreements with the Prime Minister. In my view, Australia should have an Australian head of state. So I voted “Yes” – along with Kim Beazley and Peter Costello – at the referendum on the republic. I have also criticised the unduly harsh administration of mandatory detention for asylum seekers and have generally supported multiculturalism. And I believe that John Howard could have demonstrated more empathy with respect to reconciliation and should have been more critical of the positions of Pauline Hanson and her One Nation party in the mid 1990s.

FAILING IN THE CULTURE WARS

Such disagreements aside, I believe that the Howard Government has been very successful in doing what many administrations find difficult to do – actually implementing policy change. In my view, there is only one area where the Coalition has failed to have a significant impact – namely, in what some have termed “the culture wars”.

The Prime Minister has certainly played a prominent role in the public debate – he has bagged what, in July 1993, Geoffrey Blainey termed the “Black Armband view of history”. What’s more, Mr Howard has attempted to present a more positive interpretation of the Australian achievement. In short, John Howard has taken on what I termed (in an article in the Australia Day issue of The Bulletin on 26 January 1993 – i.e. before Professor Blainey’s entry into the debate) the left-wing interpretation of Australian history to a much greater extent than his predecessors as Liberal Party leader. Including such significant Liberal leaders as Robert Menzies and Malcolm Fraser. Even so, John Howard has had little success in overturning the impact of what has been called the left’s long march through the institutions. A few examples illustrate the point.

THE COALITION AND THE ABC

There is no record of John Howard having made any public criticism of the ABC before he became prime minister in March 1996. The fact is that, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bob Hawke and Paul Keating had a better understanding of the prevailing leftist orthodoxy at the public broadcaster than did Mr Howard and most of his colleagues in the Liberal and National parties. John Howard is the best informed Liberal of his (political) generation. Yet, for whatever reason, he remained quiet about the left-wing interpretation of Australian history through the 1970s, the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s.

In its March 1993 report titled Our ABC, a Senate committee (which was chaired by Richard Alston and which included Liberals Grant Chapman and John Tierney) actually found that “the basic structure of the ABC is sound and that the organisation is considerably stronger and more relevant to the Australian community now than it was ten years ago” and made no recommendation to abolish the staff-elected direction position on the ABC board. How about that? In government, of course, Mr Alston became one of the ABC’s most vocal critics.

It was as if Richard Alston and his politically conservative colleagues were completely unaware of the fashionable leftist which had prevailed at the public broadcaster since at least the 1960s – and which still prevails today. In other words, the
conservatives were not as aware of the culture wars of that time as were such social democrats as Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. Mr Hawke and Mr Keating knew, from first-hand experience, that the ABC’s in-house leftists invariably criticised Labor from the left. Some conservatives, from the Opposition benches, misunderstood the ABC’s criticism of social democrats as entailing political “balance”. They failed to understand that the left has virtually always opposed social democrats – just as it has always opposed political conservatives.

John Howard became a public critic of the ABC for the first time soon after he became prime minister. In July 1996 Donald McDonald was appointed chairman of the ABC. This evoked two responses – one initial, the other delayed. First up, supporters of the ABC – of the Friends of the ABC genre – alleged that the Howard Government had commenced stacking the ABC Board with conservative appointees and that this would adversely affect ABC programming. Later, critics of the ABC maintained that Mr McDonald had become a victim of the Stockholm Syndrome – that is, the tendency of hostages to empathise with their captors – since his appointment had made virtually no difference to the prevailing ABC culture.

This is another way of saying that Donald McDonald culturally bonded with the ABC’s prevailing leftist ethos and became a defender of the institution he was expected to reform. Well, that’s a theory. Yet it always seemed to me that Donald McDonald was residing in Stockholm at the time of his appointment – so to speak. In my view, Mr McDonald was never likely to reform the ABC because – irrespective of his many abilities – he did not have the political acumen to know what the problem was. Put it another way. John Howard’s decision to appoint Donald McDonald as ABC chairman indicated that the Prime Minister, too, lacked political judgment about what was required to prevail in the culture wars within key Australian institutions.

JOHN HOWARD’S ABC AGENDA – A BALANCE SHEET

Soon after the Donald McDonald appointment, John Howard and several ministers of his government – including Communications Minister Richard Alston – let it be known what reforms they believed the ABC needed to undertake. Put simply, the Howard Government wanted greater pluralism among ABC presenters and a significantly reformed complaints procedure.

• The (Failed) Quest for Pluralism

Shortly after becoming Prime Minister, John Howard actually called for the ABC to appoint what he termed a “right-wing Phillip Adams”. This was an unfortunate message since it gave special attention to Mr Adams, whose self-importance led him to run, on 9 May 2001, a “Where is the Right-Wing Phillip Adams?: A Public Forum” segment on his ABC Radio National Late Night Live program. His ego was such that he actually named on air a few conservatives who were invited on the program but who declined to partake of his publicly funded self-indulgence. Around this time senior members of the Howard Government also let it be known that they were not pleased with Kerry O’Brien’s continuing role as presenter of the ABC TV’s 7.30 Report.

A decade later, Phillip Adams remains the public face of ABC Radio National – he is also a self-declared Howard-hater. Witness his claim that John Howard is “as much in control of this country as Ceausescu was in Romania” and his proposal that “a stretch in Guantanamo Bay might be good for the PM”.

And, a decade later, Kerry O’Brien also remains very much the public face of ABC TV News and Current Affairs. Mr O’Brien’s apparent discomfort with the Howard Government is evident in his tendency to interrupt answers from Coalition ministers which he does not like and to make long statements disguised as questions. Kerry O’Brien has been known to make a statement at the Prime Minister – disguised as a question to the Prime Minister – of some 103 words. Yet the 7.30 Report presenter has been known to interrupt a response to him from a female interviewee after a mere 87 words with the refrain: “I’m sorry; can I get a word in?”

It is notable that Mr O’Brien’s curriculum vitae – posted on the 7.30 Report’s website – makes ample reference to his journalistic experience (including awards won). But it does not refer to Kerry O’Brien’s past employment in Gough Whitlam’s private office, when Mr Whitlam was Labor leader – at a time when the ALP was gripped by irresponsible Whitlamism and before the reforms initiated by such responsible Labor leaders as Bill Hayden and Bob Hawke in the late 1970s and early 1980s. There is no reason why a time as a political staffer should prohibit employment at the ABC. Yet there should be no need to disguise such an event.

These days the sixty-something Mr O’Brien (who lists no personal details in his Who’s Who in Australia entry) is wont to ask the 66 year old John Howard whether the Prime Minister should retire after a decade in the job. No such query is ever raised on the 7.30 Report about its own presenter. Fancy that.

In fact, the ABC is less balanced now than when the Howard Government came to office in March 1996. The ABC has found no conservative presenters – after an apparent ten year search. Sure, on 3 May 2004, the ABC proudly announced that Michael Duffy would present a program titled Counterpoint on
Radio National. The implication was that Mr Duffy, on his own, would provide a counterpoint to the prevailing view on the entire network. But has he?

Well, if you happen to be able to listen to Radio National between 4 pm and 5 pm on Monday you will note that Mr Duffy is no “right-wing Phillip Adams”. Nor is he a dedicated follower of the Prime Minister. Take a couple of issues, for example. Michael Duffy gives the impression that he disapproves of private education and favours the government system. In this sense, he sounds more like Mr Adams than Mr Howard. Also, it is just two years since, in his biography of Mark Latham, Mr Duffy depicted the erratic former Labor leader as one of the finest politicians of his generation. Really.

In any event, Mr Duffy does not consider himself a conservative. When his Counterpoint gig was announced, Michael Duffy told The Australian (6 May 2004) “I’m really a small-l liberal. I’m not such a conservative. I’m not a Christian, for example.” There have been no such other “counterpoint” appointments of presenters within the public broadcaster - in radio or television.

• The (Failed) Quest for a Revamped Complaints Procedure

In the early days of the Howard Government, Communications Minister Richard Alston let it be known that he believed that the ABC’s complaints procedure should be substantially revamped. Some changes were made, but they were of a minor kind. The inadequacy of the ABC’s response was demonstrated by its woeful handling of (then) Senator Alston’s own complaint concerning the ABC and the Second Gulf War.

On 28 May 2003, Richard Alston wrote to the (then) ABC managing director Russell Balding complaining that, on some 68 occasions, presenters on the ABC Radio AM program had exhibited “bias” or made assertions which “were highly subjective and not factually based”. It is a matter of debate whether or not this was a wise move for a Communications Minister to take. In any event, it happened. So how did the ABC handle a complaint from its own Minister?

Well, first up, Richard Alston’s letter to Russell Balding was treated as a complaint. So, under the ABC’s complaints procedure, it went first to Murray Green, the head of the ABC’s Complaints Review Executive (CRE). The ABC maintained that this amounted to an “independent review”. This conveniently overlooked the fact that Mr Green, at the time, held the full-time position of the ABC’s State Director Victoria. How independent is that?

On 21 July 2003 Murray Green released his determination on Richard Alston’s complaints. The one-man CRE upheld 2 of the 68 complaints. In the body of his report, Murray Green chose to give his Minister a lecture about the media. He accused Mr Alston of selectively quoting material, of arguing for partisanship, of not understanding political reportage, of not being aware of the international debate, of not being straightforward, of engaging in value judgments and so on. In other words, Mr Green used the occasion of the release of his report to bag the complainant. How professional is that?

On 21 July 2003 Russell Balding issued a statement welcoming Mr Green’s report and declaring that “it vindicates the AM program and its staff in relation to the Minister’s complaint”. It was as if Mr Balding was certain that the matter was resolved - in almost the ABC’s total favour. How wise is that?

When Richard Alston expressed displeasure at the CRE report, Mr Balding referred the remaining 66 matters to the ABC’s Independent Complaints Review Panel (ICRP) - the members of which are appointed by the ABC. The ICRP issued its report on 10 October 2003 and upheld 17 of the extant 66 complaints. This meant that, as of mid October 2003, Richard Alston had won 19 of his 68 complaints - i.e. a 28 per cent success strike rate. Not bad, really, in view of the circumstances.

So how did the ABC respond to the determination of its own complaints handling creation? Not very well.

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

- On 3 November 2003, ABC TV Media Watch presenter David Marr devoted the entire program to what he described as “the biggest media story of the year; the Senator’s 68 complaints of bias against the ABC”. Mr Marr proceeded to comprehensively bag the ICRP report - concluding that it was just “not good enough”.

It so happened that, in an article in The Australian published on 31 July 2003, Russell Balding had defended the ICRP against some (earlier) critics and had described any “questioning of the integrity and credibility” of ICRP members as “nothing short of offensive”. So what did Mr Balding do when such
Senior ABC identities as Ms Mottram and Mr Marr publicly questioned the integrity and credibility of the ICRP? Answer – nothing. Absolutely nothing.

I wrote to Russell Balding about these matters on 28 June 2004. He replied on 2 July 2004, in the following terms:

As I stated publicly at the time the ICRP released its findings, I instructed senior News and Current Affairs management to take note of the ICRP review, particularly in relation to the upheld complaints. This has occurred. How one of the journalists concerned chose to respond publicly to the ICRP report was irrelevant to management’s handling of the findings.

Media Watch is, as you know, a program of opinion and comment. Its critique of the ICRP report was a matter of its own assessment, in accordance with the program’s brief. Media Watch does not represent, and nor does it claim to present, ABC management’s view on particular issues. Given the role of the Media Watch program, it would be quite improper for me as Managing Director to seek to restrict the program from analysing or criticising particular issues, simply because they relate to the business of the ABC.

Talk about the cop-out. Here was the ABC managing director, who also happens to be the ABC’s editor-in-chief, saying that Ms Mottram’s public rejection of the ICRP report was “irrelevant” to him and that he exercised no editorial control whatsoever over Media Watch – despite the fact that it was (and remains) the public broadcaster’s only high profile media commentary outlet.

In time, Richard Alston took his case to the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA). As is its custom, the ABA initially brought down a preliminary investigation report which was circulated only to the respondent for a right-of-reply. Guess what? The ABA draft report – which found for Richard Alston on a further four matters, involving six of Mr Alston’s original complaints – was leaked to Media Watch – despite the fact that it was (and remains) the public broadcaster’s only high profile media commentary outlet.

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Then, on 1 March 2005, following the publication of the final ABA Investigation Report No. 1362 (into the Alston complaint), Russell Balding said that the ABC welcomed “the ABA’s finding” that “AM’s coverage of the war in Iraq…was balanced”. He simply chose to overlook the ABA’s specific finding that the “total…incidences of bias and partiality” found in response to the Alston complaint “compromised the quality of AM’s valuable and extensive coverage of the Iraq War”.

In short, despite the odds against him, Richard Alston prevailed in about a third of his specific complaints. Throughout the process senior ABC operatives bagged him, the ICRP and the ABA – while the ABC managing director said nothing. Clearly the Howard Government’s desire that the ABC’s complaints procedures be substantially improved came to naught.

WHO’S “IN” AT THE ABC?

Meanwhile, have a look at the appointments on the other side of the “balance” equation.

As if the ABC did not have enough in-house leftists, in recent years the public broadcaster has (i) recruited Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton from SBS to present At the Movies on ABC TV; (ii) employed Arena Magazine editor Guy Rundle for the position of executive producer in the ABC arts department; (iii) instituted a round-robin of fashionable leftie presenters for the ABC TV Media Watch program – from Stuart Littlemore, to Richard Ackland, to Paul Barry, to David Marr, to Liz Jackson and on to Monica Attard; and (iv) inaugurated a comedy sketch each Thursday on the 7.30 Report where John Clarke and Bryan Dawe mock conservative and social democrats alike – but invariably from a leftist perspective. Can anyone remember Messrs Clarke and Dawe mocking, say, Senator Bob Brown or his fellow leftists in the Greens, including Senator Kerry Nettle?

It is a matter of amusement to me that, even the increasingly high profile presenter of ABC TV Gardening Australia program, Peter Cundall, has a background in the Communist Party.

Contrary to what the Friends of the ABC set claims, the views of the presenters (and their producers) do matter. A few examples illustrate the point.

• At the Movies

Ms Pomeranz and Mr Stratton have taken their political views to At the Movies.

On 25 November 2004 David Stratton railed against Team America: World Police declaring that he was “really disgusted by this film”. The reason? Well, the ABC reviewer accused the film’s director Trey
Parker of “playing into the hands of George W. Bush”. Shocking, eh? So he gave Team America: World Police just one star out of five.

On 15 February 2006, Margaret Pomeranz reviewed Sam Mendes’s film on the First Gulf War titled Jarhead. During the course of her comments, Ms Pomeranz declared that she was “anti-war” (wow) and maintained that “the First Gulf War was an air war”. She should have told that to those ground troops who, sanctioned by the United Nations, drove Saddam Hussein’s army out of Kuwait and into southern Iraq in 1991. Apparently Ms Pomeranz believes that Saddam’s regime should have been allowed to conquer Kuwait. In the event, she gave Jarhead three stars but only on account of the fact that it was “well made”. It seems, that according to At the Movies, films should be primarily assessed according to leftist political principles rather than on whether or not they are well made.

• Guy Rundle and Vulture

In 2005 the ABC chose Guy Rundle, one of Australia’s leading Howard-haters, to produce its brand new arts program titled Vulture. At the time Ms Rundle had been on the board of the faintly (or is it quaintly?) quasi-Marxist magazine Arena. The comedy writer-cum-arts guru engaged a series of overwhelmingly fashionable leftist panelists who, inter alia, used such concepts as “white middle class” and “capitalism” as terms of abuse. Not one conservative got a gig on the panel. However, the social democrat Peter Craven made some important contributions against the all-pervading fashionable leftism on Vulture. Needless to say, he stood alone.

• ABC TV’s Media Watch

Monica Attard has continued Media Watch’s leftist tradition. Here’s the litmus test – The Age’s in-house leftist cartoonist Michael Leunig.

In 2002 The Age’s (then) editor-in-chief Michael Gawenda refused to publish a Leunig cartoon which equated “Auschwitz 1942” with “Israel 2002”. Media Watch editorialised on 6 May 2002 in favour of Michael Leunig and against Michael Gawenda. No surprise there.

On 20 May 2006 The Age’s (current) editor-in-chief Andrew Jaspan ran a Leunig cartoon proclaiming the “Prime Minister’s inerference falls to the person most willing to appeal to the lowest appetites of the population”. No surprise there. However, Alan Oakley, the Sydney Morning Herald editor, decided not to publish Leunig’s cartoon in Fairfax’s Sydney broadsheet. In a personal note to Leunig which was leaked to Media Watch (no surprise there), Mr Oakley said that “regardless of the subject (i.e. the Prime Minister)” he “found the whole idea somewhat coarse” and commented that “SMH readers expect something a little more sophisticated, if not subtle”. Monica Attard described Mr Oakley’s decision as simply “wrong”. No surprise there.

• Peter Cundall’s Rave

You would think that the former Communist Party of Australia operative Peter Cundall (he stood as a CPA Senate candidate in the 1961 Federal Election in Tasmania) would concentrate these days on such worthy causes as, say, organic farming. But no. Mr Cundall is still very much a political activist. Billed to address the National Press Club on 3 December 2003 on the topic “The View From The Compost Heap”, Mr Cundall quickly moved into standard-fare leftist rave mode. He bagged “uncontrolled greed”, “the most powerful”, “the invasion of Iraq”, George W. Bush and so on. As Ian Warden commented in the Canberra Times (4 December 2003), Peter Cundall emerged from the address as “someone way to the left of Greens Senator Bob Brown”. Little wonder that he is such a hit with organic farming types at the public broadcaster – see Peter Cundall’s (self-indulgent) self-profile on page one of the April 2004 issue of Inside the ABC.

• Insiders

In mid 2001 – during Jonathan Shier’s time as managing director – ABC TV News and Current Affairs commenced the Insiders program at 9 am on Sunday morning. This was intended to provide balance on current affairs television – and has done so, to an extent at least. Insiders usually engages one political conservative each week but frequently the remaining panelists argue with the conservative. Yet it’s better than ABC programs where everyone agrees with everyone else, in a fashionably leftist kind of way.

• Terry Lane

There is an old joke told about the debutante who came out – but only until public opinion forced her back in. I was reminded of this when life-long ABC leftie Terry Lane – who wound up his career by presenting The National Interest on ABC Radio National – retired. As soon as Mr Lane announced that he was out – ABC management invited him back in, on a part time basis. It seems that old ABC leftists never die – they just go part-time. So it came to pass that Mr Lane accepted an offer to present a dozen Big Ideas program in 2006. Celebrating the occasion, Terry Lane declared: “I’m not a journalist. I’m an opinionist. Actually, I think I’m really a sort of pseudo-Marxist pessimist”. No wonder he feels at home at the public broadcaster. [See Postscript No. 1]
WHO’S “OUT” AT THE ABC

And then there are the very real exits over the past decade.

• Jana Wendt

After just one series in 1998, Jana Wendt’s Uncensored program was junked by the ABC. It seems that she simply did not fit in with the prevailing ABC culture – and she was publicly bagged by the ABC TV Media Watch program. It was not only that Uncensored was an out-sourced program – i.e. it was shown on, but not made by, the ABC. More importantly, large numbers of ABC staff disapproved of the fact that Ms Wendt did not embrace the prevailing ABC fashionable leftism.

• Sally Loane Out – Virginia Trioli In

Last year Sally Loane was dumped as the presenter of the 702 morning program in Sydney and replaced by Virginia Trioli. The word went out from the ABC that Ms Loane did not rate well enough in inner-suburban Leichhardt. Meaning, apparently, that she did not appeal to Green-voting-leftist-luvvies or to the Labor left and, horror-of-horrors, was just too middle class. The ABC even ran such criticism – if criticism is the correct word – on its web chat-room. The public broadcaster happens to be about the only media outlet which likes to publicise the views of critics who bag its own products and presenters. Usually, of course, the critics are leftists.

So Ms Trioli was called in from 774 in Melbourne where, shortly after 9/11, she had appealed to the inner-city leftist-luvvies in Fitzroy by suggesting that the best way to handle al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was to invite him around for a chat to discuss (in the parlance of the modern cliché) his issues.

Well, the good folk of Leichhardt may well be happy with Virginia Trioli – who has a tendency to preach at, rather than listen to, callers to the program. It is a matter of record, however, that her current ratings (at 7.4 per cent) are still lower than Sally Loane’s final figure (at 9.0 per cent) – in spite of the fact that Ms Trioli’s program commences and finishes earlier than that of her predecessor and, consequently, should rate higher since it benefits from the popular News and AM programs which precede it. Well, it might still do so – but it has not as yet. Ms Trioli has the talent to present a metropolitan radio program. But the manner of Sally Loane’s axing, and Virginia Trioli’s subsequent employment, was handled with a high degree of unprofessionalism.

Soon after taking up her Sydney gig, Ms Trioli headed back to Melbourne where, on Sunday 5 February 2006, she took part in a performance of Sedition!. According to the pre-performance advertising: “Sedition!” will bring together a coalition of comedians, commentators and satirists to protest against the Howard Government’s recently introduced sedition laws...”.

ON BALANCE – AND ALL THAT

The fact is that there is much more political diversity on Rupert Murdoch’s Fox News Channel in the United States than there is on the public broadcaster in Australia.

Recently ABC TV seemed to be in a rush to screen Robert Greenwald’s film Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch’s War on Journalism. This was very much the case for the prosecution – in that only views critical of Mr Murdoch and Fox News were heard on air. No surprise, then, that in her review on At The Movies (on 7 October 2004) Margaret Pomeranz gave Outfoxed four and a half stars out of a possible five. She described the documentary as both “riveting” and “scary”, compared the contemporary West with the totalitarian Soviet Union and used the occasion to self-indulgently proclaim the value of the ABC and SBS “where the flag is still flying high for truth in journalism”. Yeah, sure.

Needless to say, no counterpoint to Outfoxed was shown on the ABC. The public broadcaster maintains that it is only required to balance news and current affairs and not opinion – and Outfoxed fitted into the opinion category. The fact is that some liberal presenters – in the American sense of the term – are heard on Fox News. Fox News even has a balanced media watch style program – titled News Watch – where the opinions of two conservatives (Jim Pinkerton, Cal Thomas) are contrasted with the views of two liberals (Neal Gabler, Jane Hall) with discussion guided by a presenter (Eric Burns) who contributes little to the arguments. Mr Gabler frequently uses his on-air time to criticise Fox News.

There are very few conservative presenters on the ABC and there is no such debate on the ABC TV Media Watch program. Under all its (various) leftist presenters, Media Watch hands down judgments – like a Pope speaking ex-cathedra. Take last Monday’s program, for example. Monica Attard laid down the law about what we should all believe about the decision taken by the ABC not to publish Chris Masters’ unauthorised biography on Alan Jones (titled Jonestown) which had been commissioned by ABC Enterprises. No other view was canvassed. Using the royal “we”, Ms Attard laid down the line – and that was that. She declared: “We don’t believe that media release [from ABC Enterprises] is accurate” – implying that senior ABC staff were not telling the truth about the decision not to proceed with the publication of Jonestown. And she
Likewise, there is much more diversity in News Limited’s The Australian than there is on the ABC. The Australian’s regular columnists include leftists Phillip Adams, Ross Fitzgerald and David Salter along with the social democrat Michael Costello. Come to think of it, there is also much more balance on The Australian’s opinion page than on that of The Age. The Age’s political culture is very much set by Michael Leunig and is part of the same fashionable leftist culture which prevails at the ABC – and which does not recognise the necessity or even the legitimacy of alternative views. The Age has no regular weekly or fortnightly conservative columnist and the views on its Opinion Page on such issues as national security and industrial relations, for example, have been overwhelmingly one-sided. So it comes as no surprise that The Age regularly comes to the defence of the ABC – just as ABC Media Watch automatically comes to the defence of The Age’s Michael Leunig. The Age was the only major Australian newspaper to editorialise against the Howard Government’s decision to remove the staff elected director position from the ABC board. The Age also ran one opinion piece on this issue – by the (then) ABC staff elected director Ramona Koval. No alternative opinion found expression within the newspaper. Much like the public broadcaster. It is as if (so-called) error has no rights. [See Postscript No. 2]. Fortunately The Age is an aberration within the John Fairfax Limited stable – there is balance within the Australian Financial Review, the Sun-Herald and the Sydney Morning Herald.

DONALD MCDONALD’S MISCONCEPTION

In a speech to the National Press Club on 1 June 2005, Donald McDonald could not see the implications of his comment that the ABC’s financial requests have been rejected by governments “both Liberal and Labor”. Apparently he does not understand that, in government, both Labor and the Coalition believe that the public broadcaster criticises them from the left – and that there is no “balance” in criticising both major parties from the left. Unwittingly, Mr McDonald found himself supporting the existence of a prevailing leftist ethos at the ABC – and not for the first time.

This, after all, is what some ABC types concede – when somewhat off their guard. In 2004 David Marr attended (in his capacity as Media Watch presenter) one of those self-indulgent media gigs where journalists receive awards from their peers. The occasion was held at the University of Technology, Sydney and audience was, well, enthusiastic. In receiving a gong on behalf of Media Watch, David Marr proudly declared:

The natural culture of journalism is a kind of vaguely soft left inquiry, sceptical of authority. I mean, that’s just the world out of which journalists come. If they don’t come out of this world, they really can’t be reporters. I mean, if you are not sceptical of authority – find another job. You know, just find another job. And that [journalism] is the kind of soft leftie kind of culture. (ABC Radio National, Big Ideas, 26 September 2004)

The former ABC TV Four Corners producer Gordon Bick said much the same when he wrote to The Age (24 January 2006) in the following terms:

Governments continually condemn the ABC’s left-wing bias and yet without the ABC there would be little account for the government’s decisions. It is necessary and essential for the ABC to always be left of centre – whichever government is in power. To be completely “unbiased” and not be opinionated is to be weak in my terms.

Well, Mr Marr and Mr Bick should know. A POLICY FAILURE

The fact is that, whatever its intentions, the Howard Government has manifestly not succeeded in changing the public broadcaster’s culture. In a sense, then, appointments to the ABC Board are little more than a distraction – since they give the impression that something is being done when, in fact, virtually nothing has been done. The ABC Board does not run the ABC on a day-to-day basis – nor should it – although it has an oversight role in accordance with the principles of corporate governance. The only important role for the ABC Board is to choose the ABC’s managing director. Mark Scott takes over as ABC managing director and editor-in-chief today. He may, or may not, be successful. But, on his track record so far, Mr Scott does not present as a radical political conservative in, say, the Peter Costello mode. The ABC Board, under Donald McDonald’s chairmanship, appointed (and then sacked) Jonathan Shier, appointed Russell Balding and then appointed Mr Scott. Mr Shier’s period turned out to be essentially counter-productive in so far as reform of the public broadcaster was concerned while Mr Balding had no reform agenda at all. As to Mr Scott – well we shall see.
POLITICAL IMPOTENCY - CONTINUED

I have focused on the ABC today because it provides a ready example of the Howard Government’s relative impotency in the culture wars. Its record is better than that of the Menzies Government or the Fraser Government – but not by much. It is much the same with other key institutions in the public debate.

• **Australia Council, The Archives And All That**

The Howard Government has appointed all the non-executive members of the Australia Council – including the current chairman James Strong – along with the members of the various sub-boards, i.e. the Librature Board, the Major Performing Arts Board and so on. However, as with the ABC, the Australia Council is essentially run by its senior management who report; in the first instance, to the sub-boards. In fact, the actual operations of the Australia Council have changed little over the last decade.

Also, over the past three years, the National Archives of Australia has virtually handed over the release of the Cabinet Records for 1973, 1974 and 1975 to former Labor prime minister Gough Whitlam. Yet these are government papers and not Mr Whitlam’s personal papers. (See the editorial in The Sydney Institute Quarterly, Issue 28, May 2006).

• **SBS**

SBS TV is no less leftist, and no more balanced, than it was a decade ago – despite the appointment of the chairman and Board members of the Howard Government. For evidence, there is no need to look beyond the appointment of George Negus as presenter of the SBS Dateline program. This is the very same Mr Negus who wrote in his appalling book The World From Italy (HarperCollins, 2001) that “Australia is probably nowhere near as sophisticated…as many of the less developed countries”. How alienated can you get? In this woeful tome, George Negus had a predictable bash at John Howard and Peter Costello. (For all the dreadful details, see The Sydney Institute Quarterly, Issue No. 14, July 2001).

In June 2005 SBS ran Carmel Travers’s documentary on Iraq titled Truth, Lies and Intelligence where only critics of the Bush, Blair and Howard governments were heard. You get the picture. The presence of the likes of Christopher Pearson on the SBS board have yet to change the ethnic broadcaster’s political culture. Nor is it likely any time soon – for the obvious reason that non-executive directors do not run organisations.

• **National Museum of Australia**

Nothing better illustrates the weakness of the Coalition in the battle of ideas than the saga of the National Museum of Australia (NMA) in Canberra. This was effectively constructed on the Howard Government’s watch, which appointed the chairman and the board members. The Prime Minister himself opened the NMA on 11 March 2001 and the plaque proudly declared: “This was a Commonwealth Government initiative under the Federation Fund”. The Federation Fund was financed from the sale of shares in the first tranche of Telstra’s privatisation. Richard Alston was the senior Arts Minister in the early years of the Howard Government. The opening ceremonies ended, after sunset, with a performance by Peter Garrett’s band Midnight Oil. How appropriate.

It took some time for the Howard Government to discover that, in fact, it had funded and created a monument to the left-wing interpretation of Australian history. What’s more, the Gallery of the First Australians was physically constructed in a way to resemble the Jewish Museum in Berlin, which focuses on the Holocaust. The implied message was clear – that the Nazi genocide of the Jews can be equated with the treatment of indigenous Australians by governments since 1788. Later still, it was revealed that the unusual markings on the NMA’s walls contained, in fact, messages in braille which bagged the Howard Government. The signage in braille, which has now been removed from the NMA’s walls, included such missives as “Forgive Our Holocaust”, “Sorry” and “Resurrection City”. All brought to you, albeit unintentionally, by the Howard Government and the Australian taxpayer. In time the Howard Government realised it had to reform the NMA, its very own creation. This was one battle in the culture wars where John Howard and his colleagues could not blame past Labor governments.

Even before the NMA opened its doors, there was disquiet about the museum’s message. This was led, in private, by NMA board member David Barnett who was supported by fellow board member Christopher Pearson. News of their concern leaked to the media and NMA chairman. Tony Staley decided to set up an inquiry. At the suggestion of Geoffrey Blainey, he appointed Monash University historian Graeme Davison, in time, who found that none of David Barnett’s “criticisms could be supported by reputable scholarship”. So there. (See Graeme Davison’s article in The Age, 12 December 2002).

But the criticism did not go away. Following public criticism by the likes of Keith Windschuttle and Ron Brunton, in January 2003, Mr Staley announced another inquiry. This time by conservative academic John Carroll. Following Dr Carroll’s report Review of the National Museum of Australia, which was released in July 2003, the NMA’s focus began to change and the Howard Government set in place a reform of the Howard Government’s very own...
creation. It was a belated admission that all was not quiet on the cultural war front - just over two years since the Prime Minister had opened the NMA and seen fit to praise the way it sought "to interprete the history of our nation".

WHERE ARE AUSTRALIA'S CONSERVATIVES?

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the Coalition won successive Federal elections. However, this disguised the fact that the left was winning the debate in its long march through such institutions as universities, schools, trade unions and the media (including the ABC).

Today this is reflected in the fact that there are so few home-grown political conservatives born before, say, 1960 who are prominent in the public debate. Many of Australia's most influential contemporary political conservatives, of a certain age, have a background on the left (Piers Akerman, David Barnett, Tim Blair, Ron Brunton, Jonathan King, P.P. McGuinness, Christopher Pearson, Imre Salusinszky, Max Teichman, Keith Windschuttle) or within the social democratic tradition (Andrew Bolt, Bob Catley, David Flint, John Hirst, Ross Terrill). [See Postscript No. 3]

Quite a number of contemporary political conservatives chanted "It's Time" in late 1972 in support of Gough Whitlam and Whitlamism. It is somewhat ironic that the authors of the sympathetic biography John Howard: Prime Minister - David Barnett and Pru Goward - both voted for Gough Whitlam in 1972.

Don't get me wrong. It's good to have one-time leftists and social democrats now standing up against the left. (By the way, I have defined what I mean by the contemporary left in the December 2004 issue of The Sydney Institute Quarterly). Yet it says something about the relative failure of Australian conservatives in the culture wars that there are so few from-cradle-to-grave conservatives in the public debate. Here the situation in Australia differs significantly from that prevailing in North America and Western Europe. Per head of the population, there are many more articulate political conservatives in the United States and Britain than there are in Australia.

Like the Menzies Government, the Howard Government has been very successful at elections. Yet the voice of the Howard-haters and Bush-haters and Blair-haters is still heard loudly in the humanities departments at the universities, within some professions, among many journalists and overwhelmingly at the various taxpayer subsidised literary festivals or so-called festivals of ideas (which are all too frequently festivals of one leftist idea). In other words, the left still prevails within many of Australia's key non-government institutions.

CONCLUSION

Certainly the Australian Liberal Students Federation is more politically attuned today than it was when I was a student at Melbourne University in the late 1960s. But there is much more work to be done. No doubt in a decade or so there will be many more natural-born political conservatives prominent in the public debate than there are today. Just as the political generation of Peter Costello, Alexander Downer, Michael Kroger and Tony Abbott has produced many more politically astute Liberal Party and National Party MPs and operatives than were present during the governments of Robert Menzies and Malcolm Fraser.

So I wish you well in your deliberations - and in your future careers, whether within or outside politics.

POSTSCRIPT NO 1. - BELIEVING WHAT YOU WANT TO

Terry Lane's leftism is so engrained that, as he himself has acknowledged, it affects his judgment. In his Sunday Age column on 30 July 2006, Mr Lane did a usual far-leftist rant on Iraq and all that. He claimed that "the Australian Army was sent to a country with which we had no quarrel to oppress and kill its citizens". It's as simple as that, apparently. For evidence that the Coalition of the Willing (the United States, Britain and Australia) are nothing but Nazi-like murderers of Iraqi citizens including women and children, Mr Lane turned to the (alleged) admissions of a certain "US Army Ranger Jessie Macbeth" whose message could be seen on Google Video. Yes, it could. But, alas, it was a fake - which had been widely known some months before the Lane column appeared in the Sunday Age.

When the error was revealed by blogger Tim Blair, Terry Lane went into instant remorse and fessed up to how he had failed to check his facts:

My attention was drawn to what looked like a professionally packaged documentary video in which "US Ranger" (I now know that that is bogus) Jessie Macbeth recounts his experiences as a soldier in Iraq, where he claimed to have served for 16 months. I was completely taken in by his fake sincerity. That, I suppose, could be excusable for any person with no responsibility to check bona fides, but in my case I fell for it because I wanted to believe it. That is inexcusable. (Crikey, 1 August 2006).

Interesting admission. Mr Lane confessed that he believes what he wants to believe - so much so that, on occasions at least, he does not bother to engage in
fact-checking. However, the true confessions had a limited life span. Terry Lane corrected the error in his Sunday Age column on 6 August 2006 but devoted his entire space to maintaining that his general point was correct. Obviously Mr Lane came to see that his acknowledgement that he believes what he wants to believe was a bit too honest for his Sunday Age/ Radio National fan club.

In his article Terry Lane attacked the US and its allies for civilian deaths in Iraq – but made no criticism whatsoever of militant Islamists who target Iraqi civilians in markets, playing fields, etc (Sunday Age, 6 August 2006). Presumably, Mr Lane does not believe that most civilian deaths in Iraq are caused by Islamists because he does not want to believe it.

POSTSCRIPT NO 2. – “ERROR” HAS NO RIGHTS

Sometimes ABC and Age types do not seem to realise that there are alternative opinions. Two examples illustrate the point – one occurred before this speech, the other after.

On 1 November 2005 the ABC Radio National Law Report devoted an entire program to the Coalition’s proposed anti-terror laws (which happened to enjoy the broad support of Labor). Presenter Damien Carrick interviewed only critics of the legislation. First barrister Rob Stary, followed by legal academic George Williams, followed by German lawyer Christopher Michaelsen (currently studying in Australia). No view supporting the legislation was heard. It was as if Mr Carrick could not even imagine that an alternative view existed.

On 20 July 2006 the ABC Radio National Media Report interviewed Matthew Ricketson – The Age’s media and communications editor – concerning the Howard Government’s new media legislation. Believe it or not, Mr Ricketson actually boasted: “...In The Age, which is the newspaper that I work for, there’s been...five opinion pieces, or pieces of commentary, written about the legislative package and all of them were quite strongly critical of it.” In other words, Matthew Ricketson believes it proper that 100 per cent of all commentary pieces published in The Age on the new media legislation were critical of the Howard Government. How about that?

POSTSCRIPT NO 3 - DOWN MEMORY LANE

Ah, memories. Memories. In chronological order, of course.

• 1966-67. Padriac Pearse McGuinness A.O. (as he became) works in London as manager of the economist department of the Moscow Narodny Bank. Meanwhile, back in the USSR, Leonid Brezhnev’s regime is heavily into communist-style repression. (See Mr McGuinness’s entry in Who’s Who in Australia).

• 27 November 1971 the leftist National Review carries a full-page advertisement sponsored by the leftist Association for International Co-operation and Disarmament. Signatories include well known communists (Laurie Aarons, Jack M undey), assorted leftists (Jim Cairns, Lionel Murph, Jennie George) and militant trade union leaders (Elliott V. Elliott, Pat Clancy). This is not a pro-forma expression of opposition to the Australian commitment in Vietnam. Rather, it is a hard-left manifesto which accuses Robert Menzies of war crimes, depicts members of the Australian Defence Force as “mercenaries” taking part “in one of the most obscene crimes of the 20th Century” and refers to the “cesspool of American imperial politics”.

Among the signatories is the 21 year old Piers Akerman. Over three decades later, Mr Akerman still maintains that he was correct in lining up with the hard left AICD types in 1971 – presenting his position as merely involving opposition to Australia’s Vietnam commitment. He’s not for apologising, it seems. Unlike Christopher Pearson.

• It’s April 1975 and Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge has just conquered Phnom Penh. Christopher Pearson and his fellow students in Adelaide University’s Contemporary Social Theory course adjourn to the Staff Club and toast the Khmer Rouge in Great Western Champagne. But Mr Pearson came to express “shame” for his action. (See Christopher Pearson, “The Ambiguous Business of Coming Out” in Peter Coleman (ed), DoubleTake, (Mandarin, 1996).

• On 11 November 1975, the Governor-General (Sir John Kerr) dismissed the Whitlam Government. Soon after, Max Teichmann – in his capacity as Senior Lecturer Politics, Monash University – issues a pamphlet titled Don’t let History Repeat Itself!. Mr Teichmann draws parallels between Germany circa 1932/1933 and Australia circa November/December 1975 and predicts that the election of Malcolm Fraser’s Coalition at the December election would lead to the establishment of a dictatorship in Australia. This, declares Max Teichman, is a “fearsome prospect”. It turned out that Max Teichman survived the Fraser Terror and went on to become a columnist for News Weekly (founder B.A. Santamaria – whom Max Teichman used to bag weekly).

• 2 December 1975. No fewer than 1650 Australian academics issue a statement titled “Democracy In Danger” in which they “urge the people of Australia to vote for the Australian Labor Party in this election”. This academic collective believes that the dismissal of the Whitlam Government has “created
the prospect of unstable government in Australia for years to come” and declares that “there is a grave risk that large sections of our community would not accept the validity of a non-Labor government after this election”. There follows a prophecy about “the prospect of an irreversible breakdown in the almost universal acceptance by our community of the legitimacy of our government”. And so on. Signatories include Professor Manning Clark and Dr John Hirst (The Age, 2 December 1975).

* On the eve of the December 1975 election, The Age publishes a letter from Ross Terrill – c/- Harvard University. He lavishes praise on Gough Whitlam and urges Australians not to “turn the clock back” by voting for Malcolm Fraser. Professor Terrill declares that the Whitlam Government has “given Australia the best standing she has ever had in the world” and refers to Whitlam Government has “given Australia the best standing she has ever had in the world” and refers to Whitlam Government time as having imposed on Australia a “bleakly negative” foreign policy which “was only half-Menzies time as having imposed on Australia a “bleakly negative” foreign policy which “was only half-Australian”. (The Age, 12 December 1975).

* 14 June 1976. The Age publishes a letter by Imre Salusinszky (then, national affairs correspondent, Farrago newspaper, Melbourne University). Mr Salusinszky supports the actions of demonstrators – himself included – who had recently protested against the Governor-General Sir John Kerr in Melbourne in the following words: “There was some damage done to Sir John’s Rolls-Royce. Though I did not do it, I do not disassociate myself from that. I do not feel overwhelming remorse at seeing some dents in a luxury Rolls-Royce containing the man who destroyed what history…will see as the best government in this nation’s history.” Yes, Imre Salusinszky is referring to Gough Whitlam’s government, which was dismissed by the Governor-General on 11 November 1975.

* It’s 1978 and Jonathan King’s leftist rant Walthing Materialism reaches the bookshops. Mr King bags the “great antipodean disease of complacency” along with Australia’s “maddening smugness”. Manning Clark is praised; Robert Menzies is bagged. Under the mocking title “Our Glorious Anzacs”, Jonathan King runs the line that Australia has invariably fought “other nations’ battles” and opines that “the Anzac tradition was founded on an act of murderous folly”.

* 1985 sees the publication of Keith Windschuttle’s book The Media, in which the author criticises “the political program of the New Right which originated as part of the baggage of monetarist economics and which, from the mid 1970s onwards, has set out to change the capitalist world”. He argues for “government restrictions and regulation” and against “private enterprise and free markets”. Yet Keith Windschuttle circa 1985 is but an ideological shadow of Keith Windschuttle of a decade earlier. Mr Windschuttle told Jane Cadzow that his disillusionment with Marxism was triggered by the 1978 murder, while on a visit to Cambodia during Pol Pot’s time, of the British Marxist Malcolm Caldwell. (See Jane Cadzow’s profile in the Good Weekend, 17 May 2003).

* 1987. Geoffrey Blainey reviews the last (and worst) of Manning Clark’s six volume History of Australia titled The Old Dead Tree and the Young Tree Green (MUP, 1987). Professor Blainey makes no substantial criticism and refers to this “triumphant volume”. He concludes that Manning Clark’s “power of observation, sense of wonder and stately prose unite to make these six books something of a tower in Australian history and literature”. (Melbourne Herald, 24 August 1987).

* September 1998. Ron Brunton goes into true-confessions mode and commences his column with an admission: “I must begin by acknowledging something that fills me with deep shame. In my youth, I was favourably disposed towards communism and believed that anti-communists in the West were greatly exaggerating the brutality of Marxist regimes in Europe and Asia”. Dr Brunton adds that he “once ridiculed men such as B.A. Santamaria and Melbourne academic Frank Knopfelmacher”. (See Ron Brunton’s column in The Courier Mail, 19 September 1998).

* November 2002. Tim Blair joins the true-confession set. He tells readers of his column that he was “once a teenage socialist idiot” – at one of “Victoria’s wealthiest private schools”, no less. (See Tim Blair’s column in The Australian, 28 November 2002).

* June 2004. Michael Duffy informs Jennifer Byrne that, as a youth, he rejected his parents’ support for B.A. Santamaria and joined the anarchists instead. (See The Bulletin, 15 June 2004).

* July 2004. David Flint tells Jane Cadzow that he joined the Labor Party in 1975 due to his indignation at John Kerr’s dismissal of Gough Whitlam. He adds: “I liked Whitlam. I think I was attracted to him because he was so polished.” (See the Good Weekend, 3 July 2004).

* August 2004. David Barnett tells Jennifer Byrne that he was once a radical leftist and that he voted for Gough Whitlam in 1972 (The Bulletin, 31 August 2005). Maureen Hickman – Mr Barnett’s first wife – writes a letter to the editor providing somewhat more detail. She recalls that, when they married in 1957, “David had been the proverbial left-wing groupie: duffle coat, beard and a copy of To the Findland Station under his arm”. (The Bulletin, 14 September 2004).

Ah, memories.
SENSE & NONSENSE IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY
John Hirst
Black Inc Agenda, an imprint of Schwartz Publishing Pty. Ltd.
pb, 2005
Rrp $ 34.95

Sense & Nonsense in Australian History contains a collection of John Hirst's essays published over three decades. Hirst is a Reader in History at La Trobe University. His writing is perceptive and reflective.

An independent mind is at work. “The great majority of the historians of Australia over the last forty or fifty years,” he observes, in an important introduction to the essays, “have been left-leaning, progressive people.” Three historians, Russel Ward, Robin Gollan and Ian Turner, exercised particular influence on the young John Hirst. All three had been members of the Communist Party. Their sympathies were plain, Hirst writes. But they were “under tighter control of their discipline”, he believes, “than the next generation of radicals”.

John Hirst's historical interpretations reflected the left wing views of his mentors. His bedrock assumptions, however, were to change when he was 40 years of age when he questioned the basic assumptions he brought to researching convict society in New South Wales. Hirst began to struggle with the libertarianism notion that the loosening of social ties and the questioning of all authority represented the path to a better world. And, so, he parted company with the left. He has been quarrelling now with the standard left-liberal view of Australian history for more than two decades. “I wonder if my study of history has changed my views,” Hirst writes, “or whether my views changed and then my history writing.”

The essays in Sense & Nonsense in Australian History range from convict and colonial society to discussion of an Australian republic. Hirst's essay on the penal colony provides a markedly different interpretation from the approach of Robert Hughes. Hirst provides powerful critiques of both Manning Clark and Keith Windschuttle. Windschuttle, he says, has a misplaced faith in the documents and lacks sympathy for the plight of dispossessed Aborigines. But Manning Clark became a barracker for the “progressive” side, to the point that he wrote with an uncritical acceptance of a left view of the world. Hirst also suggests that Geoffrey Blainey's The Tyranny of Distance diverted attention away from the mobility of people, goods and information that made the Australian experience distinctive. And he argues that politics determined the nature of rural society rather than the reverse.

The political defeat of the squatters, Hirst says, allowed small-scale land settlement by owner-occupiers. This is why a landed oligarchy never established itself, as occurred in Argentina.

John Hirst displaces commercial justification as the primary force for federation, arguing that the creation of the nation represented a sacred cause to federalists. He argues that the no-conscription principle is one of the most damaging faiths held by Australians. Hirst's essays on egalitarianism and democracy are intriguing. Australian democracy is distinctive. We oppose military conscription but not compulsory voting. We pride ourselves on egalitarianism but support targeted rather than universal welfare.

Australian egalitarianism, Hirst argues, is essentially about the way we relate to each other in society. We have a democracy of manners, a society integrated from the bottom up. And rather than being anti-authority, Australians are merely suspicious of persons in authority and, in fact, very obedient to impersonal authority. There is a lack of attachment between Australia's democratic society and its democratic institutions of government. Hirst criticises an ambiguity present in much writing about communism in Australia. Left historians, he observes, treat communists seriously. However, they deride anti-communists for doing so.

He also challenges conventional thoughts about Australian Aborigines and reconciliation. A “liberal fantasy” is at work, he alleges. The “fantasy” lies in thinking that conquest could have been achieved nicely. He accuses Henry Reynolds of adopting the “liberal imagination” in This Whispering in Our Hearts. Hirst criticises Mabo and reconciliation. An apology to Aborigines is morally impossible, he believes. Why? He belongs to “the hard realist view of Australia's origins” that says settler Australians are in no position to regret or apologise for the conquest on which colonial Australia was constructed. “The critic only exists because of the deed he criticises,” Hirst writes. Indeed, the concept of Aboriginal is our creation. He addresses five fallacies of Aboriginal
policy, arguing at times for an approach not dissimilar to the position advocated by Noel Pearson.

John Hirst rejects the assertion that migrants created the tolerance evident in our multicultural society. Tolerance existed already in the society that welcomed the migrants, he says. He exposes the contradiction inherent in the approach of extreme multiculturalists who celebrate migrants identifying with their origins, yet display a much less generous attitude towards the practices of third or fourth generation Australians. Multiculturalism, Hirst argues, devotes insufficient attention to creating core institutions and values. He disagrees with the view that Liberal Party leaders rather than Labor Party leaders supported the British connection. It was on both sides, he contends. And both sides had “a lively sense of Australia’s separate interests.” Even Robert Menzies. Neither group of leaders, he argues, tugged the forelock of Britain.

Hirst believes that an Australian republic will enable the mismatch that exists between the substance and symbols of independence to be resolved. The Australian identity then will acquire the civic dimension that it lacks. It is Hirst’s belief that his essays can establish the interpretative framework for an alternative history of Australia. They certainly challenge and provoke. Regrettably, this particular collection understates Australia’s economic history. Predominantly, the essays deal in social and political history.

On the book’s cover, Stuart Macintyre refers to John Hirst as “the gadfly of Australian history, stinging and provocative”. Geoffrey Blainey says that Hirst is “one of the nation’s most independent and original historians.” In the midst of Australia’s “history wars”, this is indeed high praise.

GIBLIN’S PLATOON: THE TRIALS AND TRIUMPH OF THE ECONOMIST IN AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIFE
William Coleman, Selwyn Cornish, Alf Hagger
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Giblin’s Platoon is the story of four economists who were central to Australian economic thought and policy-making from the 1920s to the 1950s.

L F Giblin, J B Brigden, D B Copeland and Roland Wilson anticipated and stimulated areas of economic thought here and overseas. They participated in public debates about protection, industrial relations, federalism and central banking. Their interests encompassed the gold standard, multiplier theory, the quantity theory, the impact of protection on real wages, and the relationship between capital flows and the terms of trade. These four economists were influential in establishing the Commonwealth Grants Commission, in setting the tone of the Premiers Plan during the Great Depression, in shaping Australia’s World War II effort, and in exploring Australia’s place in the post-World War II international economic order. Needless to say, their advice was not always heeded. Nor was it always successful. Unfortunately, they advocated a protectionist path for Australia. Their work anticipated contemporary concern known variously as the “two-track” economy, the “Dutch disease” or the “Gregory thesis”. They did not always agree with each other but their friendships endured for their lifetimes.

William Coleman, Selwyn Cornish and Alf Hagger are the authors of Giblin’s Platoon. William Coleman is a Reader in the School of Economics at ANU. He is the author of a number of books and president of the History of Economic Thought Society. Selwyn Cornish is an Associate Professor in the School of Economics at ANU. Alf Hagger is an Honorary Research Associate of the School of Economics at the University of Tasmania. The four economists were to meet between 1919 and 1924 at the University of Tasmania. Lyndhurst Falkiner Giblin was the leader. The son of a Tasmanian premier, he had risen to the rank of major in the AIF during the First World War and been severely wounded three times. He was a typical “left-liberal” of the pre-1914 world. An hesitancy characterised his approach throughout his professional career.

James Bristock Brigden helped to found the Shop Assistants Union. A (pro-) tariff report commissioned by Prime Minister Bruce and published in 1929 is often referred to as the Brigden Report (The Australian Tariff: An Economic Enquiry). Brigden tended to adopt idealistic and lonely positions. Douglas Copland was born in New Zealand. He was appointed Professor of Economics at the University of Melbourne at 30 years of age. Later, he became the first vice-chancellor at ANU. Copeland established the Economic Society. With R C Mills, he began its journal, the Economic Record. Despite having a nervous driving personality, he had a confident presumption that he was leading the charge. Roland Wilson, the youngest of the four, became an adviser to the Treasury and Commonwealth Statistician.

Giblin knew renowned English economist, John Maynard Keynes. He also had connections with the Bloomsbury Group with which Keynes was
associated. Maynard Keynes' *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* confidently explored how government should manage trade cycle fluctuations inherent in capitalist economies. Giblin's work was less adventurous. Despite sharing a "rationalism, 'paganism', footloose radicalism and intuitive modernism", the two never developed a close intellectual association. Keynes attributed the multiplier concept to a former pupil (Richard Kahn). The multiplier envisages a relationship between aggregate employment, income and the rate of investment. Spending stimulates a higher level of economic activity that represents a multiple of the initial stimulus. The concept therefore implies the potential to reduce unemployment arising from insufficient spending.

Giblin's work on the multiplier concept which predated the Cambridge multiplier by more than a year led him to conclude that real wages should be reduced. When he was acting Commonwealth Statistician in 1932, Giblin forwarded to Keynes a copy of a confidential letter he had sent to Prime Minister Lyons. In this letter, Giblin proposed raising money through Treasury Bills to pay unemployed men to shift sand. This would lead him to "the rapid re-absorption into ordinary industry of the whole of the unemployed". But Keynes was not interested in exploring the multiplier concept with Giblin.

Why, the authors ask, did Giblin, Brigden and Copland recommend spending cuts and tax rises during the depths of the Great Depression? They conclude that the economists' instincts led them during a time of adversity necessarily to a policy solution involving sacrifice. During the Second World War, Giblin was Chairman of the Treasury's Financial and Economic Committee, Brigden Secretary to the Department of Supply and Development, Copland an economics consultant to the Prime Minister in 1941 and Commonwealth Prices Commissioner and Wilson Secretary to the Department of Labour and National Service.

Giblin's Platoon is the product of careful research. The discussion is quite detailed and technical at times. It provides valuable insights into a period that the authors describe as the advent of the economist in Australian public life.

*John McConnell is the author of several senior textbooks*
Sheahan’s effort could be easily distilled into a piece for the Australian Financial Review’s pop management mag, Boss. Perhaps Rebecca Huntley would have been better served if she had condensed her book into a couple of newspaper colour supplement stories. And any student newspaper would be pleased to publish Heath’s homilies.

None of them tell us much more than what their authors and the people in their immediate circles think. And they are all based on a decidedly debatable premise - that cohorts of people born between certain years, arbitrarily defined according to events, share a collective identity. Not only will this provide them with shared experiences, it will ensure they are united by values and characteristics that distinguish them from generations before and after.

German sociologist Karl Mannheim turned such commonsensical suggestions into sociology with his theory of generations. Writing of the generation that fought the First World War, Mannheim argued that people born at the same time have a bond of shared experience, which means they respond to the ideas and ideals their elders impose on them in the same way. And because of the common context they interpret events in the same way. Generational identity did not exclude all other senses of self, or motivation, but it was important.

It is an idea that made sense for the generation of young men who had endured the terror of the trenches, and everybody whose youth was blighted by the privations on the home front. People in early middle age in France and Britain who feared fighting Hitler in the late 1930s were understandably responding to what they had experienced in their youth. So were the Germans who voted Nazi or Communist in 1933.

The same sort of argument is utilised by baby boomers who carry on as if 1968 saw the epochal events of our age and established the culture of self-indulgent masquerading as a philosophy of politics that plagues us still with its contempt for capitalism. And it is mostly nonsense. Certainly the generation that fought the First War, and their children who endured the Depression before fighting the Second, shared common experiences that shaped, more likely scarred, their lives.

But without extraordinary events that physically and psychologically affect everybody of a certain age in much the same way it is hard to imagine how people born in the same set of years, but whose experiences are otherwise quite different, will share the same attitudes and reactions to events in their time.

For a start there is the academically unfashionable idea of class. Even in a society with a flat social structure like Australia, the experience of individuals of all ages with a quid in their pocket and few economic fears for the future is quite different from that of people at the bottom of the pile. The impact of money likely transcends the more fashionable attributes of age, gender and ethnicity. Desperately poor people, whatever their origins, have more in common with each other than they do with affluent individuals of similar background.

Demographer Bernard Salt similarly suggests that what unites us is where we live. Certainly people of all ages who choose to live in inner cities because they like the access to food and films have more in common with their neighbours, regardless of any age difference, than they do with their generational peers living in country towns.

And as for the idea of automatic alienation among the young who are upset that older people are getting in their way, it is probably a good thing that these three books were published before the release of a report from the Australian Institute of Family Studies in May 2006, which makes a mockery of ideas that the young are at war with their elders. The report suggests adolescents do not mind their parents, except when they like them a lot, with 70 per cent of boys and 60 per cent or so of young females “very satisfied” with their parental relationships.

And, if things are so crook for kids starting out in life, how do we account for the claims that the cohort after Y (will it be Z or are we going to for Roman numerals now?) is the best since the so-called Great Generation that won World War II?

One journalist with an acute eye for trends the AFR’s Deirdre Macken suggests that as people born in the 1990s, “skirt past the dangers of adolescence with a juice on one hand and a CV in the other, they may be the first generation in decades to enter into adulthood full of enthusiasm, confidence and healthy livers” (14 August 2004).

And the AIFS’s work suggests she has a point. It makes a case that the current crop of teenagers are sane and sensible, eschewing alienation or indulgence as self-expression. Instead of wanting to discover themselves they want to work out how to make money. They want to make money, partner and be parents.

Of course people of the same age share common experiences, but this does not mean that they all stand in solidarity against other generations, which is what these three authors assume. Just like older authors before them. While it might surprise the trio, they have not written anything we have not heard before, and not all that long ago. Mark Davis set the scene for these books a decade or so ago in his 1997 book Gangland, (discussed in SIQ 2 (1) February 1998 pp 20-24).

Back then, Davis argued that the political views of young people, at least young people who agreed with him, were being shut out by a clique of greying beards who controlled all the good jobs in the media, and would not do the decent thing and get out of the way. The villains he identified were old oldies, pundits including Michael Gawenda, P P M McGuiness, Gerard Henderson, Robert M anne and Helen Garner. And he named young oldies who were just as bad, like Luke Slattery and Rosemary Neil. Yet despite Mr Davis’
outraged exhortations none of them did the decent thing and faded away. The young oldies are now older, which must make the old ones ancient. And they are still active in the media. And we are none the poorer for it. Because they have been joined by all sorts of new names. (Although unaccountably Mark Davis himself is not famous.)

In Davis’ defence, this inane argument was only a subordinate aspect of his core purpose, which was to explain the failure of everybody outside universities to take cultural studies seriously. But he did hang his hat on the claim that young people, at least right thinking young people, shared common cultural assumptions that united them against their elders. And he was dead wrong. As are these three authors in their assumption that people of a certain age stand united against the old by the special characteristics they share.

PETER SHEAohan’S POP MANAGEMENT GUIDE

Certainly Peter Sheahan argues that his subjects have a definable set of characteristics:

> It is logical then, that, groups of people born around the same time will have similar characteristics. Why? Because certain social, cultural, economic and technological environments remain relatively consistent for pockets of time. These ‘pockets’ can be used to define a generation. (2)

Except that they can also define lots of other people, making Gen Y more a state of mind than an age group. According to M r Sheahan;

Generation Y is not just about a demographic – it’s about a mindset! A mindset which is permeating all ages and levels of the workforce. It may be starting with those between 1978 and 1994, but their attitudes, demands and desires are spreading well beyond. Generation X are already making some of the same demands, and so will the Baby Boomers as they approach the end of their careers. (ix)

What’s more Gen Y, at least Sheahan’s Gen Y, is not defined by their aspirations but their status:

> There are plenty of other, probably less glamorous characteristics of those Generation Yers who are representative of what I would call “labour”, not talent. This book is NOT designed to give you an insight into the mindset of the lowest common denominator. (6)

Everybody got that? GEN Y covers people born anywhere between 1978 and 1994, but only those whose talents appeal to M r Sheahan. Which makes this book less an analysis of a generation, than a pop management guide designed to deal with a booming employment market where skilled staff have the whip hand. And it is awash with generalisations unsupported by scholarly research. Some seem sensible; like the claim that the Y generation has separated effort from reward in establishing their sense of workplace worth (37).

And sometimes he makes a case, like his claim that Generation Y is cynical about politics, on the basis of generalisations that are unspecific and emotive. Like the reference to rapists sentenced to only 18 months. Really? Where and when? And then there is the suggestion that Generation Y went to under resourced state schools and accordingly angry at defence spending.

I hear, and so would many members of Generation Y, that Australia is going to spend $50 billion on tanks and missiles and unmanned planes for the military over the next ten years. Generation Y would have probably heard it on the radio on the way to school. That is to a school with old and out-of-date textbooks, no toilet seats and horrible toilet paper, no money for a decent gymnasium or sporting equipment, where they can no longer go on a school camp because the school can’t afford the insurance. ... Maybe the government should use their missiles to flatten some of these schools and rebuild ones that will instil a sense of pride in those who work there and attend school there. (75-76)

What ordinance does he not want and why? Since when did Canberra have sole responsibility for schools? If Sheahan does not like defence spending how does he suggest we meet our obligations in Iraq and Afghanistan, let alone East Timor and the Solomons?

People with long enough memories may fondly remember this sort of rhetoric from the 1960s, when the line was life would be better if the Air Force and not schools had to rely on cake stalls for funding. But whatever the age of the ideologue arguing, it is self-righteous nonsense. As an exercise in pop sociology, this book is all over the place. But Sheahan is much more focused when it comes to explaining how to motivate Gen Y workers. The book is awash with aphorisms and advice for the engaged employer. Like:
Is it time you did something different with your training department? ... There is no place on our platforms and in our seminar rooms for people who are not inspired by the opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of others. (187)

And:

Why not complement your programs with someone from the outside. Someone who gets paid to add WOW to conferences and training programs all the time. Hire a WOWer! (187)

And, what a surprise! Just pages later Sheahan sets out his tips for presenters and trainers, which he uses in his own training business. Every now and then, he makes a reference to Gen Y, but much of his advice is not age-specific. And there is some spectacular selling in this book. Thus he suggests buying recalcitrant managers copies of this book, "because education will be the key" (245), unless of course you "stick them in one of my workshops". (246)

Some of Sheahan's most convincing points are that Gen Y sometimes has trouble understanding the connection between effort and reward. Given the content of this book, he should know.

REBECCA HUNTLEY ON GEN Y

Rebecca Huntley's is a much better book. But that is not saying much and she certainly suffers from the same flawed premise - that Gen Y has definable characteristics that distinguish its members from everybody else. As with Sheahan, Rebecca Huntley has trouble backing her own argument from the very beginning. Thus she warns that the distinctions between Gen X and Y demonstrate that:

... social change is not a progression along letters of the alphabet but more like a pinball in a machine, reacting (sometimes unpredictably) to the hits and misses of our society and our culture. (5-6)

Perhaps social change shapes people of different ages in the same way. Perhaps class or geography, education or football allegiance, explain how people will react to events as much as birthdays do. Or perhaps Gen Y as presented is just a transitory phenomenon, which will evolve as its members grow up. Thus Huntley reports how she asked her interview subjects how having children would change their lives:

... the girls were forensic in their understanding of how being a mother and wife would transform their bodies, their working life and social life. (51)

As to what these changes will be, don't ask Rebecca, who obviously needs to assert that Gen Y will have an impact on society, she just does not have a clue what it will be. Thus she ends her argument:

I have seen the potential in this generation for both radical transformation and terrible conformism. The world according to Y has not yet arrived ... but it is coming. Get ready. (188).

But for what?

It is an appropriate end to a book that asserts, rather than proves, all sorts of stuff about Gen Y. Huntley's methodology doesn't help. The book is based in part on interviews with 50 people in her world, and they are all identified as writer Candace Bushnell described the characters in her Sex in the City. Thus 'Meg, a "20 a year-old arts graduate" and Tony "an astute trainee accountant" make an appearance on the same page. And then there is "Jackie ... a glamorous and articulate 23-year-old, working in public relations", as opposed to all those plain, quietly spoken PR women.

While this research style ensures a rich vein of quotes, it is hardly research that explains what an entire age group is thinking. Perhaps it is not surprising that Huntley praises Hugh Mackay, who has built a business on explaining society on the basis of small group discussions for his "humane, thoughtful and relevant work". (viii)

But everybody who has been waiting for an extended magazine style story on what young people think will welcome Huntley's work. In 11 short chapters she covers all sorts of pop culture issues, ensuring the book reads like the op ed columns by media studies students The Sydney Morning Herald used to regularly run. But there is neither statistical, nor even sociological substance to her selected subjects.

Thus she begins with a chapter on how the young are most loyal to their pals rather political parties or even "sexual partner". Friends, she argues, provide security in an insecure world and are more important than family. But perhaps not for all that long. After making this case she admits that Gen Y might reconnect with their families as they age and have children of their own. Just as Huntley has watched happen to Gen Xers. Which gives her argument all the substance of dinner party prognostications about the way young people will tolerate anybody they don't share a bathroom with.

And then there is feminism. Huntley's stance on the sisterhood is conflicted. On the one hand she likes the idea of sisters doing it for themselves, on the other she writes as if the founders of feminism deserve more respect. Which they don't get, because young men and women "have internalised feminism to such an extent that many of them question its relevance". (43)

But lest anyone mistake her for an apologist for patriarchy she asserts that the battles the founding feminists fought for are not all won. "A significant percentage" of young women (she does not tell us what it is), "still identify either as feminists or, more likely, with the goals and ideals of feminism. Many still recognise that whilst women have come a long way, we still have a gendered world where discrimination, albeit subtle and intermittent, still
exists”. But in line with her general theme that Gen Y knows everything except fear, she says Y women “know who they are and what they want”. (45) As for men, they are much more confused because too many stereotypes about masculinity have not been banished by the men’s movement. Among rhetoricians the technical term for this style of argument is having a bob each way. But at least it is an improvement on her conclusion on gender issues:

However we look at it, the parent generation or the society it leads has yet to prove immediate and practical solutions to the Y generation’s oncoming struggle with balancing work and family commitments. Until that happens, both Y men and women will feel as if the stormy gender seas will have to be navigated with their own compass.

As anodyne aphorisms go this is first rate, just hard to work out what, if anything, it means.

The (inevitable) chapters on dating and sex are chatty and Ms Huntley’s generalisations about the private lives of an entire cohort of Australians are as useful as anybody else’s, as long as the anybody is a columnist on Dolly. Her take on Mr Sheahan’s turf is more intriguing in the way it acknowledges the contradictions in the behaviour of Gen Y at work. She makes the point that in a world of possibility where they assume the right to do whatever they want Gen Y understand that the jobs they want are hard to get. So, with HECS and housing problems they adjust their expectations and only work as hard as they want, when they want and for what they want. So, she warns, employers will have to adjust their practices to suit the young. But if the jobs Y-ers want are rare, why should employers do anything of the sort?

It is a contradiction she does not address. Nor does it appear to occur that Y-ers keen to succeed will do what everybody else who has ever wanted to prosper has done down the decades, try to work harder and smarter than the competition. Rather, she writes of the way they want:

*to achieve the work/life balance that still eludes their parents. Many of them are therefore turning down jobs or overtime that spills over into their social time, regardless of the pay on offer.* (99)

And despite all the evidence that they will have to work like everyone else has, Huntley still hopes that Y can have it all: “If Y desires to achieve a balanced life are strong enough and can be sustained into homeownership and parenthood, this generation may yet transform the world of work.” (99) As well as getting the bike and the pony that are theirs by right of being such neat people.

Huntley is happier when she can present Gen Y as fighters for causes she appears to approve of. Thus she explains how they have turned their backs on conventional politics and embraced:

the diversity, difference and challenge of international politics. They support NGOs … and are active in local politics because it affects them more directly and because it seems possible to bring about some change there. (117)

In fact, the vast majority of them are involved in community, campaigning and protest activities (113). One of the few sources for this surprising assertion is a poll undertaken for the Democrats, a wreck of a political party with less credibility than it has members. And as for the idea that local politics is where the action is for the young, has Huntley ever been to a council meeting?

It is typical of a book which is little more than a collection of generalisations, some making more sense than others, some supported by evidence and others only with anecdotes. But overall Huntley fails to explain why Gen Y is either united or all that different to any other group of young people who have grown up over the last 30 years or so.

**MARK HEATH AND THE NECESSARY MEDIA MURDERS**

Yet, for all its faults it is a better book than Mark Heath’s. Please just F* off is not especially badly written and contains some astute political judgements. Heath is certainly far more politically astute than either Sheahan or Huntley. While the former comes across as an ambitious Rotarian and the latter an all-purpose advocate for soft politics, Heath understands the main political game:

*For the first time ever capitalism is now a global economic system and my generation is the first global generation. Capitalism makes sense in our world. Just as liberal democracy is the most scaleable of political systems, capitalism is the most scaleable economic one. In our flexible hyperactive world any system that isn’t scaleable is doomed to failure. But we shouldn’t live with capitalism just because it’s there. We can improve it and the society that surrounds it. Change is no threat to capitalism, it is its lifeblood.* (26-27)
And his critique of the Greens (164-165) is spot on. There is, in short, some sensible stuff, well expressed in this book. Which makes it strange that a writer with such a clear grasp of politics can write such drivel on most other issues that occur to him. But drivel is what Heath provides in a book that is badly structured and poorly argued. For a start, he does not sustain the theme of the title all the way through. Certainly he argues:

... those with radical ideas and innovative ways of living, producing, and consuming rarely hit the homogenised public conversation for more than a few seconds (xvi).

He asserts (but does not explain) that Australia could be richer - and rid of John Howard - if young people got more of a go at running things (84). And despite an excellent discussion on the implications of new media he fails to explain why his peers have not acted on their promise and used the world wide web to wipe out free to air TV and newspapers. His suggestion that 60-year-old newsreaders should be shot, and replaced with “Jessica Rowe types (of either sex ...)” (138) sums up his approach.

Most of the book consists of Heath’s aggressive opinions and generalisations about issues that excite him. Not to mention generalisations about generalisations such as, “when the essence of a generation is diversity, a single label is always going to leave out the majority” (8), which rather reduces the impact of some his own assertions, such as his description of the skills of Gen Y workers:

When given the opportunity to be managers in our workplaces we often take different approaches. Our ethics and experience of working in teams and networks rather than hierarchies makes us skilled at consulting when devising strategies and work plans. ... This adaptability does not only refer to specific roles in an organization, but also to our capacity to work for all sorts and sizes of organizations. A real benefit of the constant cycles of change we live in, and tangible evidence that we are a global generation, is our ability to do things to scale. (66)

Not to mention the authorial assumption that his personal experience and attitudes apply to tens of thousands of people. There is much else that is egocentric in the book, like Heath’s two page diary style description of his day, including important information like, “7.30: Shower (city living just ruins your skin – moisturising essential)” (18) As well as some score settling, like his square-up with Citibank, and plug for ING, (126-127). And when Heath offers practical proposals that demonstrate Gen Y thinking they include calling on employers to provide free bicycles for staff to ride to work. (195)

And his self-serving sense of entitlement on behalf of Gen Y knows no bounds, like the assumption that the housing market is somehow unreasonable. Except when it makes no sense. Such as the suggestion that HECS is “morally wrong” because people, mainly women, will never pay off their debt. This ignores the obvious point that because HECS payments are income, contingent people who are out of the workforce, being mothers for example, are exempt for years.

Heath writes like a man moaning with his mates about how everything he does not like in life is somebody else’s fault. And he proclaims, without bothering to explain in credible detail, how much better everything would be for everybody, if old people just got out of the way and let Gen Y run things. He fails on all fronts. Heath has the makings of an astute political thinker but he is simply not as clever as he appears to think he is, which is very clever indeed.

SOME GENEROUS REVIEWS

Perhaps the reviewers found the confidence of these three authors endearing. Perhaps some of them actually believe that Gen Y has all the expertise the world needs in everything from management consulting to male skin care. Whatever the reason, Huntley and Heath got a good run. So did Sheahan, but the coverage was more about him than his book. The tone was set by Mathew Charles’ story in the Herald Sun (10 March 2006), which began, “Peter Sheahan sent us a press release yesterday”.

Deirdre Macken (AFR, 8 April 2006) wrote a long piece on the way generational labelling is a useful way of identifying social trends, which respectfully quoted Huntley and Heath. So did Julia Baird (SMH, 23 March), in a piece that was more complimentary than coherent:

Heath and Huntley make substantive contributions to the sparse literature on fresh, emerging views on work, sex, relationships, celebrity and politics –
cultural shifts which are fascinating but inevitable.

It was a far more original piece than most of the reviews. Guy Humphreys (AFR, 10 March 2006) summarised rather than analysed Huntley's book. Kath Kenny did much the same in a review that praised “the PhD-wielding Huntley ... for her accessible style; she wears her considerable research lightly” (SMH, 8 April 2006). It was a compliment almost immediately undercut when Kenny endorsed Huntley's argument with a Gen Y anecdote of her own. It takes spectacular solipsism for a writer to assume that anything that happens to them makes a trend.

Which also afflicted Steve Dow who began his review, “recently I sat at a pub with a group of 20-somethings”. (Sun Herald, 5 March 2006) While he said nice things about the book - “Huntley does a marvellous job” - a better review would have included more about her and less of him.

It was left to Andres Vaccari (Weekend Australian, 18 March 2006) to provide the detailed discussion of its ideas that any book worth reviewing merits. It was a review that strove to be fair, discussing the book's core issues, sexual politics and economics. While Vaccari found both sections wanting the review's conclusion was generous, “Huntley avoids complexities and steers clear of the larger historical picture, but her book does accomplish what it sets out to do, providing a breezy snapshot of a neglected generation”.

As generous as possible, given the way the piece began:

While the notion of a generation is largely a fabrication, it is immensely useful to market researchers and sociologists as a way to study populations who have lived through similar historical circumstances and share certain attitudes and beliefs.

Some of the commentators were also kind to Mark Heath. Like Jim Soorley (Sunday Mail, 26 February 2006) who said he was with him in holding baby boomers to account:

Heath's arguments are well developed and he's not malicious. He only wants to shift boomers to one side rather than throw them overboard.

Apart, that is, from the newsreaders he wants to shoot.

Patrick Allington (Weekend Australian, 25 February, 2006) called Heath's book, "an optimistic and mostly constructive polemic". Certainly Allingham made the sensible point that all social issues are not understandable through the prism of what he called “generationalism”. However, his overall judgement was positive:

[the book] does not have all the right answers, it does not always pose the right questions and its sharp humour is sometimes beside the point but, read as a launching pad for further investigation, it is an achievement.

Clare Wright (The Age, 24 June 2006), on the other hand, was not having any of it. She did not like Heath’s argument that the best and the brightest of Gen Y are seeking opportunities overseas because opportunities for the young and the brilliant so restricted in Australia. In fact, she argued the young have never had it so good. And in the process she told us all almost as much about herself, “a 36-year-old professional woman and mother of three living in the suburbs of Melbourne” as she did about Heath's book.

According to Dr Wright, Heath has it wrong. The real reason young and youngish people don't have satisfying working lives has nothing to do with exclusion from the corridors of power “or swanky places to have a drink” (not, in fairness to Heath, one of his major concerns). Oh no, the problems that matter most are issues that afflict people with whom Dr Wright appears to empathise:

The problem is lack of opportunity to balance work and family commitments for working parents. What this country really needs is not more inductees to the Young Rich (and Beautiful) List, but more flexible working hours, more and higher quality child-care places, more affordable housing and, most importantly, more resources allocated to public health, education and transport so that those who are not middle class and educated can participate in the body politic too.

And in case Heath missed the point, she concluded:

It is only through collective action and cohesive movements for social change, not nihilism or narcissism, that such ambitions might be realised. I know the hip crowd don't think they'll ever be anything like their boring, old parents, but it is this sort of short-sighted logic that will ultimately preserve the status quo.

It was a spectacularly self-indulgent piece that sermonised instead of reviewing. If anything makes Heath’s point that inflexible advocates of established ideas exclude the young it is reviews like Dr Wright's. The irony is that in their delight in generalising about all sorts of complex issues and assumption that they speak for everybody author and critic may well have a greater deal in common. After all they both come from that school of public policy who think they should be given a red bike and a pony and that if they don't get them the only rational response is to announce, loudly and at great length how it is not fair.
NO LEADS ON MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

The leader writers were quick to grasp the dangerous dimensions of the latest Middle East crisis, but, like everybody else they are light on for answers, Stephen Matchett reports.

Not many months back there were hopes, however humble, of some sort of settlement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Certainly the Israeli evacuation of Gaza and the promise of withdrawals on the West Bank did not give the PA anything near what it wanted to make a permanent peace. But the Israeli electorate at the polls endorsed the strategy. And the prospect of the Israelis disengaging to shelter behind their national fortification was enough to encourage PA president Mahmoud Abbas to talk of taking a proposal for peace to the voters.

The Sydney Morning Herald (19 June) saw a case for “nervous hope” for peace in the way Palestinian leaders were trying to restrain their factional fighters, the first step towards any deal with Israel. But not much of one. For a start, the paper wondered whether the Palestinian leadership could stop militias “firing home made rockets” at the Israelis. And whether “calls for restraint will be heeded by radicals, or Israeli commanders”.

And in case anybody missed the assumption that, in the damage they can do, terrorists and the Israeli army are on the same level the leader made the same point in its conclusion:

But even if Hamas can restrain its own hotheads, it has no control over militant groups like Islamic Jihad. Israel still targets suspected terrorists in rocket attacks in heavily populated areas where civilian casualties are almost inevitable. Meanwhile the gap between what Palestinians would settle for and what the Israelis would concede looks as unbridgeable as ever.

Yet even ever-so slight prospect of a permanent peace was crippled when Hamas operatives sabotaged President Abbas nascent plan by kidnapping an Israeli soldier in the Gaza. Again the SMH (3 July) spread the blame around:

Certainly, the Palestinian militants dangerously upped the ante by kidnapping 19-year old Corporal Gilad Shalit. It is an alarming tactic which can only invite comparisons with events in Iraq, and further erode confidence in the ability of the Palestinian political leadership to rein in violent factions. The overwhelming Israeli military response, however, has left hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza without power, with limited water supplies and within close range of Israeli shells; actions which look very much like the kind of collective punishment prohibited in international law.

And once Hezbollah started rocket attacks on Israel from Lebanon the whole argument became academic, because in place of a peace, a ceasefire was the best anyone could hope for. The leader writers certainly stopped looking for a way forward.

Some confined themselves to statements of the absolute obvious. Like The Advertiser (18 July) which warned:

As long as Hezbollah launches rocket attacks on towns in northern Israel, the superior firepower of the Israelis will continue to inflict hideous casualties and damage in Lebanon. If the first step is to negotiate a ceasefire, the second must be to ensure that the conflict is contained and does not spread into Syria and beyond.

Sadly, the paper offered no advice on how this was to be done. The Herald Sun’s suggestion was equally accurate and just as productive (8 August):

The ability of the United Nations to bring about and maintain a ceasefire in the bloody Israel-Lebanon conflict will depend on the presence of an international peace-keeping force. But providing an effective buffer in south Lebanon between Hezbollah and Israel will depend on the two foes accepting the peacekeepers’ presence.

But for the most part the leader writers were reduced to restating arguments in place throughout the half-century struggle between Israel and its enemies. The Courier Mail (17 July) set out the essence of the issue:

...many in the region, including Hizbollah (sic), do not accept the Jewish state’s right to exist. Until that right is accepted unconditionally, along with the need for a separate, viable Palestinian state, wars such as the current conflict – which has arisen partly because of the Lebanese government’s inability and unwillingness to curb Hizbollah’s activities will inevitably flare up.

The Brisbane paper also addressed the issue of innocent deaths at Israeli hands:

Israel demands – and has won – the right to exist in the Middle East, a right constantly challenged by a number of its neighbours since Israel’s foundation in 1948. It’s morally difficult – and no less in international relations – to argue the means justify the
end. Reports of innocents, including children, being killed are always unsavoury. But when contrasted with Hizbollah’s illegal and provocative actions threatening regional stability, the Israeli response appears more reasonable and is easily the lesser of two evils. (21 July)

The Australian (28 July) made the same point - just more bluntly - in supporting Israel in the face of criticism that it was going too far in pursuing Hizbollah:

Even Israel, with its historic restraint and willingness to make peace in the face of several hundred million Arabs and Iranians who would happily push the Jewish state into the sea tomorrow, is now seen by many as the bad guy. … While Israel’s attacks on Lebanon have sparked the usual outcry from those who are appalled whenever the Jewish state has the gall to fight back, from the perspective of Jerusalem they make perfect strategic sense.

And in case anybody missed the point, the national broadsheet had another go the following day:

When one strips away all the emotional and political baggage from the situation in the Middle East, the present conflict is at its heart a battle between a liberal democracy and a fascist dictatorship. It should be no trouble to figure out which side is in the right. Yet events in the Middle East are seen through one’s individual prejudices. In the West too many on the Left are unable to put aside their reflexive anti-Americanism and romantic beliefs that Islamic radicals are simply freedom fighters to judge the situation fairly. (The Weekend Australian, 29 July).

In contrast, The Age (2 August) confined itself to hand wringing:

Hizbollah, aided by Syria and Iran, has acquired large numbers of rockets that can hit targets deep inside Israel. Hizbollah did fire the first shot and has launched about 100 rockets a day, so Israel has a right to defend itself. Even so its tactics and judgements about what it hopes to achieve with aerial bombing that has claimed hundreds of Lebanese lives, most of them civilians, must be questioned.

And in the leader’s conclusion there was more than a sense that somehow Israel, and the West in general, have brought terrorism on their own heads in the leader’s conclusion.

The war on terror cannot be won by unilateral military action – the evidence from Iraq and Lebanon, past and present, is of extremism feeding off human suffering. The Orwellian satire of “peace through war” in 1984 is uncomfortably close to reality in 2006. Today’s wars will be ended, rather than paused, only when world powers stop paying lip service to peace and consistently support multilateral diplomacy and observance of international law as the basis for security. World leaders’ lamenting of human tragedy and calls for peace are empty unless they commit their energy and resources, including peacekeeping forces to ending conflicts as they begin.

Just how this sentiment fits with Hizbollah starting a fight on the Israel-Lebanon frontier is not clear. Nor does all the talk of peace make much sense in the context of the failure of a UN presence in Lebanon to save the peoples of that sad state and its Jewish neighbour from the depredations of terrorism over the last three decades. The paper was also light on for ideas on how to fight militias operating in areas with large civilian populations without putting innocent people at real risk.

Nor did The Age address how terrorists who want blood, rather than any outcome that can be delivered by practical politics, can be encouraged to embrace peace.

As The Australian (8 August) explained it, there is no sense in seeking to explain Middle East conflicts through the prism of rational politics.

Unlike the Cold War which was decided by the hard and demonstrable realities of economics, conflicts in the Middle East are conducted and judged in a far less objective arena, where values of religion and honour are very often the ultimate arbiters of right and wrong. This makes it very difficult for Western observers to take the measure of the Hizbollah-Israeli conflict, despite it being a battle between competing world views – medieval theocracy versus secular, liberal democracy – that are the political matter and anti-matter of the 21st century. (8 August)

And while the paper did not accuse Israel’s critics of being appeasers, it did not stop far short.

Hizbollah is winning the propaganda war in the West, where decades of postmodernism have atrophied the culture’s moral musculature and accorded the terrorist group privileged victim status.

There was, The Australian argued, no hope of Hizbollah making peace with Israel. The best the Jewish state could hope for was a buffer zone.

It was not an optimistic conclusion but compared to talk of Israel somehow defending itself more moderately it was, regrettably, a realistic one.

Stephen Matchett can be found at stephen4@hotkey.net.au
CORRESPONDENCE


In the May 2006 edition of The Sydney Institute Quarterly, Stephen Matchett claims:

“... all Peter Costello does at each budget is to reimburse bracket creep to PAYE income earners who pay the top marginal rate of 47 per cent on income above $125,000, which they cannot shelter in trusts and family companies.”

Every attribute to this claim is wrong.

Firstly, all taxpayers are paying less tax now than they would have if the tax scales had been indexed by the CPI from 1995-96. That is more than returning bracket creep – the Government has cut incomes taxes by substantial amounts.

Fiscal drag or “bracket creep” occurs when average personal tax rates rise on the same real income. The Government has in fact lowered average tax rates on the same real income. For example, in 1995-96 someone earning $125,000 would have had an average tax rate of 41.0 per cent. In 2006-07, on the same real income (nominal $163,858) the average tax rate will be 34.5 per cent.

Secondly, if the top threshold had been indexed from 1995-96 it would be less than $64,000 on 1 July 2006. In fact it will be $150,000 on that date. In addition, the rate above this threshold will be 45 per cent, and not the 1996 rate of 47 per cent.

Thirdly, Treasury analysis from 2005 showed that of taxpayers with taxable incomes over $125,000 in 2006-07:

• 41 per cent will have less than half their income from wages and salaries, and
• 31 per cent will have less than one quarter of their income from wages and salaries.

Accordingly, it is not true to say that people with significant investment and business income would not have paid the top tax rate as announced in 2005. It is also not true that only wage and salary “PAYE” earners would have paid the top rate.

Peter Costello, Canberra, ACT

Dale Budd responds to comments made by Sir David Smith in The Sydney Institute Quarterly Issue Number 27, January 2006

In your January 2006 issue you published statements by Sir David Smith disputing parts of my contribution to a recent book about the events of 11 November 1975.

In your article, you say that “Sir David doubted Dale Budd’s account of the first phone call”. I am not the first to have reported the fact of this call, although I am possibly the first to record its precise timing. I have in my possession a photocopy of the handwritten notes which Malcolm Fraser made at the time of this call, which set out the provisions applying to a caretaker government. The page of notes was signed and dated by Fraser and marked to show the time of 9.55 am.

Second, David Smith disputes the second phone call he made to me that day, following the dismissal of Gough Whitlam and the commissioning of Malcolm Fraser. This phone call was trivial in comparison with the main events of the day, but I strongly object to it being described as a fiction. I cannot swear to the exact time that it was made, but it must have been around 1.30 pm.

I have kept in my possession the page on which I made a note of this call while it was being made, including the instruction that Malcolm Fraser wanted to see Senator Withers, John Menadue and Geoff Yeend as soon as possible.

I have phoned David Barnett and David Kemp to check their recollection of events. David Barnett clearly recalls me telling him of the dismissal, and of the fact that Malcolm Fraser was now Prime Minister. He believes that this happened before Fraser returned from Government House. David Kemp has a very clear recollection that I told him the news before Fraser returned. How could I have done so, unless I had been informed by the Governor-General’s office?

Sir David Smith’s account of the actions at Parliament House which resulted in Malcolm Fraser arriving at Government House in advance of Mr Whitlam is incorrect. I have described what happened as a stuff-up, the result of a misunderstanding between David Smith and me. This is also an unimportant matter, but it should be recorded accurately. David Smith’s instruction to me about sending Malcolm Fraser out to Government House in advance of Mr Whitlam is incorrect. I have described what happened as a stuff-up, the result of a misunderstanding between David Smith and me. This is also an unimportant matter, but it should be recorded accurately. David Smith’s instruction to me about sending Malcolm Fraser out to Government House failed to take account of the possibility that Gough Whitlam might delay his departure from Parliament House for a few minutes instead of leaving immediately after he finished speaking in the House of Representatives. There was no instruction to “watch out for Mr Whitlam’s car”. The circumstances of what happened are exactly as described in my contribution to the book.

Dale Budd, Yarralumla ACT

Gerard Henderson comments:

The Sydney Institute Quarterly is pleased to print Dale Budd’s letter. I understand that Mr Fraser has withheld permission for Mr Budd to publish the initial document referred to in his letter. I also understand that the second document referred to in Mr Budd’s letter reads, in its entirety: “PM/ Sen Withers ASAP/ M r Menadue Yeend –>to see ASAP”. 

Gerard Henderson
**OBITUARIES**

**VALE ROBERT STRAUSS**

Robert Strauss MBE, who died in June, was the embodiment of Australia as a successful immigrant nation. Born in Budapest Hungary in September 1925, he went to university in Budapest and settled in Australia in December 1947 - along with his young wife M arianne and son Andrew. When Robert Strauss disembarked in Sydney he had virtually no money and spoke virtually no English. But, like many immigrants, he gained employment in Australia's strong post-war economy - initially cleaning the wiring underneath Sydney trams, then undertaking repair and maintenance work on large printing machines. And, like many of his immigrant peers, Robert Strauss took part-time work at weekends - including stints at milk bars (as they were then called) and on jackhammers.

Soon after establishing himself in Australia, Robert Strauss took up part time study. First, he gained his matriculation in English then, in 1949, he enrolled in a five year accountancy course from which he graduated in 1953. Early on, Robert Strauss found it difficult to obtain his preferred employment as an accountant. At home he worked on his written and spoken English and quickly mastered the language. However, he never got rid of a distinctive Central European accent.

In time the Hungarian immigrant attained employment where he could make full use his talents. Initially at Email and then at Charles J Berg accountancy firm where he became a senior partner (the business changed its name to Borough & Partners in 1980). Robert Strauss remained in this position until 1991. In 1980 he had become executive chairman of Bridge Oil, staying there until the company was taken over in 1994. He combined this with a number of public company positions and board memberships - retiring from most appointments in 1994. Robert Strauss’ retirement was active - he retained a city office until his death, from where he kept his business contacts and engaged in considerable, albeit little known, acts of philanthropy - particularly concerning the arts, childrens’ institutions and medical research. He enjoyed a life long commitment to music and travelled widely.

Robert Strauss was a very reserved man but developed close friendships with many who got to know him. He was a long-time corporate supporter of The Sydney Institute and frequently attended the Institute’s functions. Robert Strauss will be much missed by The Sydney Institute’s board and staff. However, his memory will live on - as a proud and fine Australian who came to provide a case study of the immigrant experience and the immigrant achievement.

*With assistance from John Kaldor.*

**VALE MARGARET JONES**

Margaret Jones, who died in July, was a first rate journalist who was a trail-blazer - albeit a quiet one - for women in the media profession. Born in 1923 in Rockhampton Queensland, she was educated in the Catholic system and then at a teachers college in Brisbane. She soon moved into journalism working initially in Mackay before transferring to Sydney. In 1954 she successfully applied for a position on the Sydney Morning Herald, remaining there until her retirement in 1987.

In his obituary in the Herald (3 August 2006), Tony Stephens quoted from Margaret Jones’ job application with the SMH. It was typically direct and truthful viz: “As you may see by my signature, I am a woman and I know that, even yet, a certain amount of prejudice still exists against women in journalism.”

It sure did. Yet Margaret Jones got the job. She had postings in New York and Washington in the second half of the 1960s followed by positions in London and Beijing. She returned to London during the Margaret Thatcher years - which led to her book Thatcher's Kingdom. She also wrote two novels - The Confucius Enigma (1979) and The Smiling Buddha (1983). Margaret Jones’ journalism was invariably considered and empirical. This was most evident during her time in China in the early 1970s. Unlike some journalists and academics, she did not become a barracker for Mao Zedong or for his disastrous Cultural Revolution - possessing far too much common sense to fall for mass murdering ideologues, of either the extreme left or extreme right.

Margaret Jones enjoyed an active retirement. Between 1988 and 1998 she served on the Australian Press Council and in 1991 was appointed to the newly established Independent Complaints Review Panel which set up to examine complaints into the ABC. Margaret Jones was on the ICRP when it examined Richard Alston’s complaints against the ABC Radio AM program (see Pages 14-15). She was upset by the harsh criticism made of the ICRP by David Marr on the ABC TV Media Watch program - primarily because she and her colleagues had no right of reply. Quite correctly, this offended her sense of professionalism.

For many years, Margaret Jones was one of The Sydney Institute’s associate members. Her
contributions at the Institute functions reflected her distinguished career - they were always intelligent, considered and unequivocal

**VALE NORMAN WHITE**

Captain Norman White OAM - “Knocker” to his close mates - died in August. Born in 1922, he joined the Flinders Naval Depot in Victoria in 1936. He was sent to sea in September 1939, following the outbreak of World War II, and served initially on the heavy cruiser HMAS Canberra before transferring to the heavy cruiser HMAS Australia. During the latter commission, the Australia was involved in the destruction of the Vichy French destroyer L’Audacieux off West Africa in September 1940. HMAS Australia was slightly damaged during this battle. In the latter part of 1941, Norman White was sent to Britain for training and was subsequently posted to the light cruiser HMAS Perth. Around this time, he learnt that his father, a major in the AIF, had been killed at Tobruk.

In February 1942, the HMAS Perth was involved in the Battle of the Java Sea – as part of an Allied naval force comprising American, Australian, British and Dutch ships, which was led by the Dutch. The Allied Fleet suffered a devastating defeat by the Japanese. The HMAS Perth and the USS Houston survived the attack but, a few days later, came under Japanese fire during the Battle of the Sunda Strait. After a prolonged combat, both ships were sunk by an overwhelming Japanese naval force. Norman White, a good swimmer, made it to a raft and, along with some other survivors, found a damaged lifeboat and attempted to sail to Australia. However, they were captured by the Japanese. Some were sent to the Thai/Burma railway but Norman White served out the war in POW camps in Java. He returned to Australia in October 1945 and remained in the Navy until 1964.

Norman White worked in business in Sydney before setting up his own consultancy N.H.S. White and Associates. He kept his interests in sailing and golf. Then a remarkable career became even more remarkable. Norman White met a visiting Japanese professor, Tor Yamaguchi, on a ferry and accepted an offer to co-ordinate functions for the Japanese trade organisation, Jetro, in Sydney. These monthly luncheon get-togethers commenced in February 1980 and continued for 23 years. When Norman White finally retired, the Japanese Government invited him and his wife, Lesley Ann, to Japan for a holiday. He was subsequently awarded The Order of the Rising Sun with Gold and Silver Rays in recognition of his work in fermenting Australian-Japanese relations.

Norman White possessed many Australian attributes, including pragmatism. While a victim of Japan’s POW system, he devoted over two decades of his latter years in cementing relations between Australia and Japan. Norman White was a valued member of The Sydney Institute who provided key support when, following the wind-up of another organisation, the Institute was founded in 1989. At functions at The Sydney Institute, Norman White was known for his direct comments, which were frequently of a humourous vein.

*With assistance from Rear Admiral Andrew Robertson AO, DSC.*

**CORRECTION**

In the May 2005 issue of The Sydney Institute Quarterly, there was an error in the section titled “Down The Aarons’ Memory Hole”.

Mark Aarons was quoted as having said, at the end of the ABC TV Dynasties program on 2 January 2006:

I personally stopped believing in the possibility of revolution quite early in my life and I look at it more from the point of view of what we achieved and what we got wrong. Certainly it won’t be over for me personally until I take my last breath because I’ll go on doing the things I believe in. Whether or not it’s over in the future – well that’s up to the next generation of Aarons.

This quotation is correct. However, the following words were wrongly attributed to Mark Aarons. In fact, they were spoken by his niece Bronwyn Healy-Aarons viz:

I just don’t think they believe that our side can lose so it’s up to the people like us to just keep working and working and working.

The quotation was taken from the ABC TV Dynasties website, where the erroneous attribution originally appeared. The Aarons family worked closely with Dynasties in the production of this program. The SIQ assumed – incorrectly as it turned out – that the ABC transcriber would have correctly distinguished between a male (Aarons) voice and a female (Aarons) voice.
The inaugural issue of *Gerard Henderson’s Media Watch* was published in April 1988 – over a year before the first edition of the ABC TV *Media Watch* program went to air. Since November 1997 “Gerard Henderson’s Media Watch” has been published as part of *The Sydney Institute Quarterly*.

**THE MASS MURDERER AS INFLUENTIAL AUSTRALIAN**

The Bulletin’s “100 Most Influential Australians” (which was published on 4 July 2006) provides the text for this quarter. Let’s think Influence.

Readers who picked up this special issue of The Bulletin at a newsagency might have been surprised to see photographed on the cover not only the likes of Rupert Murdoch, Germaine Greer, Robert Menzies and Paul Keating but also, wait for it, Martin Bryant. This is the very same Martin Bryant who holds the record for the most victims killed by a mass murderer Down Under. He shot to death 35 people (men, women and children) at Port Arthur, Tasmania, on 28 April 1996. Now, Bryant certainly had an important impact on Australia – in that his mass murder led to the tightening of the gun laws. However, this is not the same as influence. If Martin Bryant had real influence, he would not be serving 35 life terms in Hobart’s Risdon Prison, would he?

Another of the 100 most influential Australians was Ned Kelly (1855-1880). Once again, the Victorian bushranger had an impact. Not only as a murderer (of police), an armed robber and a horse thief. But also in that he has inspired numerous writers of fiction and non-fiction – sometimes, with the Kelly legend, the division is blurred – to tell the Kelly story. It’s just that if Ned Kelly were all that influential he would have escaped the hangman’s rope at Melbourne jail on 11 November 1880 and gone to establish a republic in northern Victoria. Neither eventuality occurred.

And then there were 98 Influential Australians. What was significant about this lot was not so much who got a guernsey but, rather, who missed out. Take the Labor Party, for example. Four former Federal Labor leaders got in the list – James Scullin, Arthur Calwell, Gough Whitlam and Paul Keating. All just happened to lead the ALP to dreadful election losses – in 1929, 1966, 1975/1977 and 1996 respectively. In all fairness, Scullin, Whitlam and Keating won elections in 1929, 1972/1974 and 1993 respectively. Calwell was a three times loser – in 1961, 1963 and 1964. Meanwhile John Curtin and Bob Hawke did not even make the list.

John Curtin’s role as Australia’s prime minister during the greater part of World War II (he became prime minister on 7 October 1941 and died in office on 5 July 1945) has become a matter of controversy. However, he was the war-time leader at a hugely important time in Australian history. Also, the Curtin Government set in place the economic policies and commitments which led to Australia’s international economic involvement after the end of the Pacific War. A man of substantial influence, surely. But not according to The Bulletin.

Then there is Bob Hawke. On any analysis, he is Labor’s most successful leader with electoral victories in 1983, 1984, 1987 and 1990. What’s more, the Hawke Government (with Paul Keating as treasurer) commenced the process of economic reform in Australia. Yet Bob Hawke could not make The Bulletin’s 100 Most Influential Australians list.

Unlike Pauline Hanson. Remember her? Ms Hanson contested Oxley (based on Ipswich) as a Liberal Party candidate in 1996 but was disendorsed during the campaign and won the seat as an Independent. She lost her House of Representatives seat in 1998, unsuccessfully contested the Senate election in 2001 and subsequently failed to win a seat in the New South Wales Legislative Council. Of late, Ms Hanson has become a professional celebrity due to her role in Channel 7’s *Dancing with the Stars* celebrity TV series. Her most recent engagement with the Australian community was as a real estate agent. If Pauline Hanson had achieved real influence, you might have expected that she would have achieved more than one term in the House of Representatives.

And then there is the matter of keeping up with the Hughes’s Social commentator Robert Hughes – who reckons that Josef Stalin and Adolf Hitler looked to Australia for inspiration as to how to set up a totalitarian state – made the list. No so Billy Hughes. Billy Hughes – who was Labor leader during the early years of World War I but split with the ALP and moved to the political conservatives over the issue of conscription for overseas services – did not get recognised by The Bulletin.

This despite the fact that Billy Hughes led Australia when the nation was perhaps the most influential it has ever been – namely during and immediately after World War I. Australia played a leading role in the military victories on the Western Front in 1918 and, in the subsequent Treaty of Versailles, Billy Hughes achieved real outcomes. Robert Hughes is an art critic.

So, how did this all come about? Step forward the judging panel – academic historian Michael Cathcart, journalist and author Phillip Knightley and radio presenter/lawyer/comedian Julie McCrossin. Cathcart and Knightley are part of the left-wing interpretation of Australian history school. As the historians on the
panel, it would seem that Cathcart and Knightley would have been primarily responsible for the decisions concerning politics. It is a matter of record that the left have always liked Labor radicals like Gough Whitlam and invariably downplayed the significance of Labor moderates like Bob Hawke.

According to The Bulletin, the judging panel “ignored achievement per se, and tested each name by asking: “Would the way we live today, the way we think and feel, or the way our surroundings look, be any different if he/ she had not existed?” According to Michael Cathcart and Phillip Knightley, the likes of Billy Hughes, John Curtin and Bob Hawke did not make a difference to Australia – but the likes of Martin Bryant and Pauline Hanson really did. Really.

AGE NOT WEARIED BY WHITLAM

Few would dispute The Bulletin’s finding that Gough Whitlam was an influential Australian. But that was circa three decades ago. Yet, on 8 July 2006. The Age actually led with a story that it was Mr Whitlam’s 90th birthday – he was born on 11 July 1916 – and that this event would be celebrated by a lunch in Sydney (on 8 July) followed by another lunch in Sydney (on 11 July) at Machiavelli’s. Gee wiz.

Under the heading: “Gough at 90: A giant enters his tenth decade” – and to the side of a large colour photograph of the Great Man – Michelle Grattan gushed:

Gough Whitlam, 90 on Tuesday, keeps up a punishing round of functions, loves a good lunch and delivers plenty of advice and admonitions for those who carry Labor’s mantle in the 21st Century. For many baby boomers, the Whitlam years were their political coming of age. Now, as they start to turn 60 and contemplate retirement, Whitlam, entering his 10th decade, is the model of one who has never put work behind him. His government lasted only three years, but its sweeping changes and his dramatic dismissal by Sir John Kerr have made the Whitlam era a watershed in modern Australian politics. National living treasure, Labor icon and among Australia’s most controversial prime ministers, Mr Whitlam will today sit down at a restaurant at Sydney’s Brighton-le-Sands...

And so it went on. And on. All frightfully interesting to baby-boomer members of the Gough Fan Club, no doubt. But hardly Page One news. In Mr Whitlam’s home city of Sydney, the Sydney Morning Herald took quite a different tack. On 8 July 2006 Tony Stephens reported Gough Whitlam’s coming birthday – but not on Page One. Then, on 11 July 2006, the Herald published an editorial which actually questioned the Great Man’s legacy:

Behind the gloss of Mr Whitlam’s persona, beyond his distinct and dramatic historical profile, there is, however, less to his legacy than his burnished image suggests. History will judge him as a leader of more style than substance, more symbolism than success. His arrival as prime minister was a glamorous break from 23 years of largely stodgy conservative government. In some ways, Mr Whitlam was a visionary... But by the time Mr Whitlam had led the country for three years, his government had become shambolic. Many of his ministers had proved themselves unfit for office. His government entered the fateful year of 1975 in a state of financial instability, led by some ministers who were either deceitful, intemperate, incompetent, or all of the above.

Mr Whitlam, at age 90, graciously concedes that he does not make appointments “very far ahead”. However, it seems likely that the obituary writers for the Fairfax broadsheets in Sydney and Melbourne already have a draft obituary on file – as is the newspaper custom. The differing coverage of Gough Whitlam’s 90th birthday suggests that The Age and the Sydney Morning Herald will make differing assessments of the Great Man’s long-term influence when the final version of the Whitlam obituary is required. Stand by for a gushing south of the River M urray and a more realistic assessment to its north.

EX TROTSKYITE PRAISES CURRENT WHITLAMITE

But probably not the Sun-Herald in Sydney judging by its past form. On 26 February 2006, the “Naked Eye” column – written by (retired member of the Fourth International) Alex Mitchell and Kerry-Anne Walsh – opined:

With the Howard decade being celebrated with sickening triumphalism, it is instructive to recall what Gough Whitlam achieved in less than a third of the time between 1972 and 1975. The list includes: establishing Medibank, abolishing university fees, creating Telecom and Australia Post, withdrawing troops from Vietnam, releasing conscientious objectors from jail, ending conscription, opening diplomatic relations with China, giving independence to Papua-New Guinea, ending appeals to the Privy Council of England, abolishing imperial honours and instituting Australian honours, pushing land rights for indigenous Australians, amalgamating the army, navy, airforce, defence and supply, taking sales tax off women’s sanitary products and appointing the first women’s adviser.

How about that? Quite a list – even if the Whitlam Government only withdrew Australia’s military advisers from Vietnam; the combat forces were actually withdrawn by William McMahon’s Coalition government which preceded Whitlam. Even so, Mr Whitlam’s “achievements” seem somewhat incomplete. How about adding to the list such “achievements” as presiding over huge increases in expenditure, inflation and unemployment, recognising the Soviet Union’s conquest of the Baltic States which occurred as a consequence of the infamous Nazi Soviet Pact.
fawning before China’s murderous dictator Mao Zedong, blocking Vietnamese asylum seekers from entering Australia in 1975 and so on? How about them?

**KERRY-ANNE WALSH AS SOOTHSAYER**

While on the topic of Kerry-Anne Walsh, consider her prediction on the short term influence of John Howard. John Howard was one of only three members of Australia’s mainstream political conservative party to make The Bulletin’s list – the others were Alfred Deakin and Robert Menzies. Labor, however, got a total of seven slots – Don Dunstan, Arthur Calwell, Sydney Einfield (who’s that again?), Al Grassby, Paul Keating, Jack Lang, James Scullin and Gough Whitlam. Readers of The Bulletin might have got the (false) impression that Labor had held office most times in Australia – rather than the other way round.

In any event, Kerry-Anne Walsh suggested that John Howard’s influence on Australia would be curtailed by his imminent retirement. Writing in the Sun-Herald on 30 July 2006, Ms Walsh commented:

> Despite attempts by Mr Howard to douse it, speculation continues to mount that he will announce his retirement at the start of the next parliamentary sittings.

That was Sunday 30 July 2006. On Monday 31 July 2006 Mr Howard announced that he would not retire any time soon. Perhaps he does not read the Sun-Herald.

**DITTO KAREN MIDDLETON**

Ms Walsh was not the only member of the Canberra Press Gallery who punted on John Howard departing the prime ministership. Certainly, this was always a possibility. Yet some Canberra journalists just happened to read too many tea leaves, so to speak. Take Gallery president and SBS TV chief political correspondent Karen Middleton, for example. Writing in her inaugural Canberra Times column on 8 July 2006 – which was headed “Howard proposes his exit” – Ms Middleton declared:

> At the Press Gallery’s annual Midwinter Ball two weeks ago, the Prime Minister gave a very funny speech, “I enjoy coming to these balls,” he began. “And I’ll keep coming to these balls for as long as my party wants me to.” The play on his own favourite evasive phrase brought the house down. But it was the aside as he wound up that had the more sober tongues wagging.

> “I’ve enjoyed working with you all,” Howard said, sounding like he was saying goodbye. He then said he looked forward to working with the gathering media “in the coming weeks and months”. Weeks and months? Shouldn’t any man aiming for a fifth election win be looking forward to jousting for years to come? Sure, it’s a reading of the tea leaves which some will find far too esoteric and the wily Prime Minister may well be just toying with those of us fond of looking in the bottom of every cup….

After much tea leaves examination, Karen Middleton concluded her column with almost a prediction:

> Before he was elected, John Howard said he believed the times would suit him. Now he’s looking for the suitable time to go as only Robert Menzies managed it voluntarily, with history lingering on his achievements, and giving his successor the best possible chance to carry on. He’s behaving, at least publicly, like he thinks those times might soon be upon him.

Well it is – or, rather was, an interesting story. But, alas, it was based on a false premise – as all too many tea leaves inspired theories are. John Howard became prime minister in March 1996. His comment that the times suited him was actually made a decade earlier – in 1986. As it turned out, the times did not happen to suit Mr Howard in the 1980s. But they came to suit him in the 1990s. The evidence suggests that the Prime Minister believes that the times will continue to suit him. Which will give Kerry-Anne Walsh and Karen Middleton a chance for further speculation sometime in the future. They should hang on to their tea leaves.

**STONE QUOTES STONE**

One person delighted that the Walsh/Middleton speculation had not been fulfilled was none other than John Stone – former Secretary of the Treasury, former National Party senator and continuing critic of Peter Costello. Writing in The Australian Financial Review on 12 July 2006, just weeks before John Howard announced his decision to remain as prime minister, John Stone quoted at length from authority – i.e. HIMSELF – to make the case for the Prime Minister continuing in his current job.

In the article which gave self-indulgence a bad name, Mr Stone used the words “I” or “my” on five occasions in just 750 words and quoted no fewer than five of his previous articles. Just five. There were references to “I first addressed”, “my article asked”, “I wrote” and “I felt”. Mr Stone, on occasions, even referred to himself in an indirect sense – as in “four months later the topic resurfaced” (meaning, “I wrote this again four months later”) and “that prediction was repeated after the 2004 federal election” (meaning, “I predicted that John Howard would stay on as prime minister before the 2004 election and I repeated this prediction after the 2004 election”).

Not surprisingly, in his AFR article, John Stone once again agreed with HIMSELF that John Howard should remain as prime minister and that Peter Costello should not only be prevented from becoming prime minister but should be dumped as treasurer. This is most unlikely to happen – especially since Peter Costello enjoys a 70 per cent approval rating for the job he is doing as Treasurer. Nevertheless Mr Stone might have taken some pleasure from the fact that Peter Costello did not make The Bulletin’s influential Australians list. Unlike, the Stalin-lover Jessie Street.
LEUNIG’S CHRISTMAS LUNCH

The Age cartoonist Michael Leunig did not make The Bulletin’s list. But he remains one of Australia’s designated National Treasures and he has an Honorary D.Litt from La Trobe University. So there.

Since the last issue of The Sydney Institute Quarterly went to print, Leunig (as he likes to be known) was interviewed by Andrew Denton on ABC TV Enough Rope program. So how did the lover of peace – and the detester of war – go? Quite well, in fact. Until he had to respond to some questions about family life. Let’s go to the video tape where Leunig speaks defensively, and at times inarticulately, about family life:

Andrew Denton: You’ve got four siblings. Are you close to them?

Michael Leunig: No, I’m not particularly.

AD: Why is that?

ML: I don’t know.

AD: You must have thought about it.

ML: Oh, look, deep in my heart I am, they’re my siblings. But we don’t see each other very much. Some I haven’t seen for many years. We’re apart.

AD: Why is your family apart?

ML: How long have you got?

AD: Taxpayers’ money – go your hardest.

ML: OK, I’ll just relax a bit and talk about this. No, I, obviously. This is a very tender subject. Would you like to press the button here? I’ve heard you were very good at pressing people’s buttons. No. No. This is a very. This is a very tender subject, of course. And it’s personal and it’s private but it’s not, once again, not unusual. Families are meant to be so happy, aren’t they? And so jolly and all functioning well. And they all get together at Christmas and they give birthday presents. It’s always got to look that way and it’s lovely to see it when it’s genuine. But not all families, or very few families, are like this. They are human beings. They are made up of conflicting parts and emotions and sad stories and things happen and there are injuries and sadnesses and people don’t get on.

AD: Are all your family somewhat estranged from each other or is it you that’s estranged from them?

ML: I’m what you call a black sheep, I think, to some extent. I have another sister who’s sort of a grey sheep. No, she’s a black sheep too, and the others are grey sheep. No-one’s a white sheep. No, look, I have great affection and fondness for my family and what my parents gave to me were glorious and where they failed me was natural. I think it doesn’t matter that much. I had a beautiful time with those people and I may have a beautiful time again....

How about that? Leunig does not talk to his siblings who happen to be both “human beings” and “those people”. Not even at Christmas. But, hang on a minute. Isn’t this the very same National Treasure who lectures-at-large about love and all that and who advises the rest of us to open up our homes at Christmas to all – even to those people who are not our siblings? Yep, sure is.

Flashback to 24 December 2001 when Leunig provided his very own Christmas message to Age readers. There he urged all of us to “love our enemies” and to “turn the other cheek”. He also advocated “mercy, forgiveness, compassion” and maintained that “sooner or later we all need to give and receive these precious gifts”. Leunig went so far as to propose that we invite Osama bin Laden to our homes for Christmas 2001:

Might we, can we, find a place in our heart for the humanity of Osama bin Laden and those others? On Christmas Day can we consider their suffering, their children and the possibility that they too have their goodness? It is a family day, and Osama is our relative.

So there you have it. Osama bin Laden is welcome at the Leunig family home for the “family day” of Christmas. However, Leunig’s brothers and sisters never receive such an invitation.

Meanwhile in The Age on 24 June 2004 Leunig was back in (prose) action with an article titled “Ourselves and each other”. It was a familiar rant about John Howard and his (alleged) unnamed “gatekeepers” – whoever they might be. There was a suggestion that terrorism was not a problem, Leunig’s political opponents were depicted as “suckholes” and Australian leaders were accused of waging “war against defenceless peoples abroad, or against the environment and the remnant innocence in our own land”. All in the name of mercy, forgiveness and compassion – apparently. It seems that Leunig is prepared to love bin Laden but not prepared to “turn the other cheek” towards, say, John Howard or Tony Blair. Or, indeed, his own siblings.

Here’s a (useful) suggestion. If Leunig’s siblings really want an invite to Leunig’s home this Christmas, perhaps they should sign-on with al-Qaeda. Then “those people” would not miss out on lessons about loving our enemies, turning the other cheek and so on. Just a thought.

Yet the most interesting part of Leunig’s article turned on his reflection as to how he sees himself and fellow Leunigites during the time that has been termed the Howard Fascist Dictatorship:

In one’s own beloved native land...it is a particular paradoxical sadness to sense such a growing mood of alienation, national dispossession and lost identity among the significant proportion of its intelligent citizens resulting from an abusive government impulse that nobody much had foreseen or thought possible.

Now, granted, Leunig is only talking about a “significant proportion” of Australia’s “intelligent citizens” – a group in which he and his fellow Leunigites place themselves. Somewhat elitist, eh? But is it true to say that a significant proportion of intelligent types Down Under share a “growing mood of alienation”? Or is this merely an example of Leunig-style projection? Sure, Leunig is alienated. Yet it is a big step to project this feeling on to the
nation as a whole - or, rather, the “intelligent” members thereof.

**MR QUANTOCK’S FEE-FOR-ALL**

One influential type who is obviously alienated is Melbourne comedian Ron Quantock – but not at any price. As the Herald-Sun reported (16 June 2006), Mr Quantock recently agreed to lead a protest of cleaners who oppose the Howard Government’s WorkChoices legislation. His gig was sanctioned by the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union. The protest march commenced at St Francis Church in Melbourne’s Lonsdale Street and ended up at the Melbourne CBD – where the comedian presented the manager of CBD building with a golden toilet brush. How funny can you get?

Many cleaners receive very low pay. So the cause was a noble one. Enough, you would think, to make Ron Quantock give freely of his time in support of the toiling (cleaning) masses. But no. The Herald-Sun revealed that Mr Quantock was paid $500 for his comedy routines in the protest march. Quite funny, really. It seems that Mr. Quantock is prepared to perform in support of the proletariat – provided it is understood that the performer is worthy of his hire.

**INFLUENCE VS. COMMONSENSE**

Influential Australians have been widely heard throughout the land during 2006 – demonstrating, once again, the distance between influence and common sense. Consider the following examples.

- **David Barnett on Satan etc.**

  David Barnett writes a weekly column in the Canberra Times. On 4 May 2006 he gave hyperbole a real nudge with the following declaration:

  > Republicanism is like Satanism. You can’t be a Satanist unless you believe in a whole lot of Manichean mediaeval claptrap, otherwise you wouldn’t be committing the sin that is the whole point of whatever it is you and your friends are getting up to. It would just be a frazzle. And the same thing goes for Republicanism. You really have to believe in the royal family. You have to believe that the royal persons are a danger to society, that the world would be a better place if they were all trundled off to the Tower. You have to believe that the Queen harbours ambitions to suspend the parliament, that Charles, when he becomes King George, would be another Charles I, whose head did indeed have to be removed, or another George III, whose ineptitude cost Britain the American colonies.

  And so the column continued, in its (barking mad) way. Apparently Mr Barnett believes that such republicans as George W. Bush in the United States and Peter Costello in Australia have an attitude to republicanism which equates with Satanism. Really. And he maintains that the likes of President Bush and Peter Costello really believe that the Queen and the rest of her family should be “trundled off to the Tower” and that if Charles becomes king a modern-day Cromwell would cut off his head. David Barnett concluded his column feeling sorry for Prince Charles and reflecting: “I am glad I didn’t have to wait for my mother to die to give my life its purpose.”

  What was that, again?

  As the (so far only) biographer of John Howard, you would expect that the influential David Barnett would be well acquainted with the political history of the Prime Minister’s hero – namely, the Liberal Party founder Robert Menzies. But, no. In writing about the death of Eric Butler - the Australian League of Rights founder and well-known anti-Semite – David Barnett happened to believe what Butler had once told him.

  Barnett did not fall for Butler, describing him as a “fundamentally disgusting man”. Fair enough. But he did fall for Butler’s favourite dinner-party story and, consequently, overstated his influence on Australian history. The heading for David Barnett’s column for 15 June 2006 gave an indication of what was to come viz: “League of Rights founder helped change Australian history”. According to David Barnett:

  > By his own, rather convincing account, he [Eric Butler] changed the course of Australian history. In 1941 he persuaded Arthur Coles, an Independent member of the House, who had been elected with United Australia Party backing, into withdrawing his support for the wartime government of Robert Menzies. Coles, the founder of G.J. Coles and another conservative independent, A.N. Wilson, who was a Wimmera farmer, gave Menzies his majority after the 1941 election. Menzies’ government fell on October 3, 1941…There are other explanations for the defection of Coles and Wilson, but the way Eric Butler told it at a rally in Canberra some 20 years ago had a convincing ring…

  Well, no doubt it did. Pity about the facts. Robert Menzies stepped down as prime minister on 29 August 1941, when he lost support in his own party room. He was succeeded as prime minister by the Country Party leader Arthur Fadden. The Independent MPs Arthur Coles and A.N. Wilson brought down the Fadden government - not the Menzies Government - in early October 1941. This suggests that David Barnett knows as much about political conservatism Down Under as he does about republicanism – or is it Satanism?

- **Cate Blanchett’s Son’s Nation**

  Cate Blanchett is one of Australia’s most influential actors. So it came as no surprise that she achieved headlines last February when she bemoaned the absence of an Australian national identity until —. Well, let’s hear from Ms Blanchett (as reported in The Australian, 9 February 2006).

  Cate Blanchett related how, after winning an Oscar in 2005, she returned to Australia only to begin tearing her head off due to what she regarded as the lack of cultural identity in the land of her birth. You see, the Chauvel (Sydney) and Lumiere (Melbourne) art house
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cinemas had closed and the Sydney Theatre Company was not receiving sufficient (taxpayer subsidised) handouts from the Howard Government. Shame. And all anyone wanted to talk to Cate Blanchett about was the weather. Yes, the weather. Shame again:

If I heard one more person say what a beautiful day it was, with the blue skies and the searing heat in the middle of what was meant to be winter with the Warragamba Dam at an all time low, I just wanted to tear my head off. My then three-year-old son (Dashiell) turned to me and said, “Mummy, I love this nation”, and I thought: “Nation? [From] under what hat did he pull the term nation? And what was he picking up from the white noise around him? It made me think yet again: “What is this nation? Where are we as a nation? And god forbid we engage in any questioning of who we are as a nation.”

Cate Blanchett concluded with the observation that Australia needed to make “deep time investments” in Australia to “safeguard us and our children against living unexamined lives”. Translated, this seems to mean – “let’s give producers and directors more taxpayer funded subsidies so that writers and actors can be employed to examine our (allegedly) unexamined lives”. Come to think of it, why not give young Dashiell a grant to do some workshops at his kindergarten? If a three year old boy can declare: “Mummy, I love this nation”, he is clearly deserving of such support. Why, by the age of six Dashiell will be saying: “Mummy, I’d love an Australia Council grant.”

• Les Murray as Poor White - or Poor Black

The influential Les Murray has given yet more interviews. Is there any living Australian poet whose private life has been so examined? Probably not. In any event, the saga of The Poet’s persona is set to continue. For, as Murray told Rosemary Neill (Any event, the saga of The Poet’s persona is set to continue), “Mummy, I love this nation”, and I thought: “Nation? [From] under what hat did he pull the term nation? And what was he picking up from the white noise around him? It made me think yet again: “What is this nation? Where are we as a nation? And god forbid we engage in any questioning of who we are as a nation.”

Les Murray’s ravings at the time? What, indeed. But what about those who supported him? The Poet spoke, yet again, about the depression which he experienced between the years 1987 and 1996:

One of the things that black dog does to you, it makes you feel completely hated. I thought I had two or three friends in the world and that I was a national pariah, it wasn’t so; it turned out not to be so.

So what do we now all make of The Poet’s essay in Peter Coleman’s 1996 edited collection Double Take? There Les Murray (i) claimed that he “was known in some Literature Board circles as their Token Fascist”, (ii) resolved “never to accept Australian government funding for my work in the future”, (iii) asserted that “publishers loath selling books because their profession is staffed historically by women from the gently bred classes who are above sordid commerce”, (iv) equated government patronage with “star-chamber tribunals” and (v) thundered that “any writer who takes funding while others are left in want is a scab”.

So what are we to make of Les Murray’s thoughts - circa the mid 1990s? Answer - forget the lot. The Poet, on his own admission, did not mean any (or much) of this. It was the black dog talking. Which is fair enough. But what about those who supported Les Murray’s ravings at the time? What, indeed.

• Pablo and The Guardian on the Yarra

Tracee Hutchinson is one of The Age’s bevy of leftist columnists who justify its new nickname as “The Guardian on the Yarra”. She performed up to standard on 1 July 2006 when writing about the Picasso: Love and War 1935-1945 exhibition at the State Library of Victoria.

The piece, which was essentially a (verbal) love-in for Pablo Picasso, never once mentioned that the Spanish-born artist was a long-time member of the French Communist Party which was an enthusiastic barracker for the Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. How strange. But Ms Hutchinson did find time to bag John Howard. How predictable. Then came the heart-felt conclusion about Picasso’s famous painting Guernica and all that:

While there is little doubt Guernica is one of the most prevailing, profound and unsettling artistic commentaries on war in modern history, it is perhaps not surprising that Picasso followed it with the Weeping Woman series. Consumed by grief and despair at the hopelessness the artist felt as a renegade Spaniard in Nazi-occupied Paris, he wept for the world and painted tears. Plus ça change.

What absolute tosh. Picasso was in Paris when Germany invaded France in 1940. Initially he fled to the south-west of the country but, soon after, freely returned to live in Paris under the Nazi occupation. As Julian Jackson points out in France: The Dark
Years 1940-1944, Picasso could have escaped to the United States in 1940 but he chose not to do so. He set up digs on the Left Bank, did not engage in any resistance and actually received German visitors at his studio. As David Pryce Jones documented in Paris and the Third Reich, leftist artists did okay in Paris during World War II. Picasso spent his time there painting and womanising. Contrary to Ms Hutchinson’s belief, Picasso did not oppose “war in modern history” – he actually supported the Soviet Union’s conquest of Eastern Europe. Plus ça change, plus ça change, plus The Guardian on the Yarra la meme chose. As the saying goes (or went).

• Mungo on Pack Rape

Mungo MacCallum was once influential. And his influence is on the rise, once again, per courtesy of his column in Morry Schwartz’s quarterly titled The Monthly. Mr MacCallum got the lead comment piece in the July 2006 issue – and he commenced by throwing the switch to hyperbole:

When Henry Kissinger, the architect of the Vietnam War, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the satirist Tom Lehrer announced that he was going into retirement: he could no longer compete with reality. I confess to feeling the same way when I heard that Keith Windschuttle had been appointed to the board of the ABC, joining his fellow cultural warriors Janet Albrechtsen and Ron Brunton as a willing participant in John Howard’s eternal campaign to pack-rape Aunty.

So there you have it. The Prime Minister, according to Mungo MacCallum, wants to “pack rape” the ABC. Such language not only diminishes the suffering of real victims of real pack rapes. It is also completely over the top. How do we know? Well, the ABC TV Media Watch program used to tell us so.

In November 2003 Media Watch (executive producer Peter McEvoy) railed against the use of the term “pack rape” by The Australian’s editor Michael Stutchbury to describe criticism of his columnist Janet Albrechtsen. Media Watch presenter David Marr editorialised in support of the view that the use of the term “pack rape” with respect to a media matter is offensive and inappropriate. However, in July 2006 Media Watch (executive producer Peter McEvoy, presenter Monica Attard) offered not one word of criticism in response to Mungo MacCallum’s use of the term “pack rape” concerning a media issue. It seems that some wielders of hyperbole are more influential than others.

• Tim Costello’s Day on (The Media, Of Course)

Some influential (people) have extraordinarily busy days. Take Tim (”call me Reverend”) Costello, the chief executive of World Vision Australia and how he handled the most recent crisis in East Timor. In one 24 hour news cycle only.

• It’s late in the day on Sunday 29 May 2006. Rev. Costello flies into East Timor – and does not like what he sees. So what does the Reverend do? Well, he goes on the media – of course. Some time later he talks to military authorities. After all, Non-Government Organisations (NGO) have to get their priorities right.

• It’s early morning on Monday 29 May. Tim Costello is interviewed on the ABC Radio National Breakfast program at 6.45 am. He tells presenter Fran Kelly that East Timorese are saying: “Where are the troops?” He complains that World Vision cannot get “a soldier or two” to protect its operations. And he maintains there are not enough Australian troops on the ground.

• It’s early afternoon on Monday 29 May. And The Reverend does another media interview. The complaint is much the same. Namely, that the Australian Defence Force in East Timor has not come to World Vision’s assistance and claims that a more mobile police force would have done a better job.

• It’s late afternoon on Monday 29 May and Tim Costello flies out of Dili bound for Darwin; immediately after a meeting with Brigadier Michael Slater.

• It’s evening on Monday 29 May. On arrival in Darwin, The Reverend heads directly to the ABC TV studio in Darwin for an interview with Tony Jones. Why not? Once again, he criticises the Australian Defence Force’s performance in East Timor and says it was a “real puzzle” why the ADF could not impose security and protect NGOs like World Vision.

• It’s early morning on Tuesday 30 May. Brigadier Slater, commander of the Australian force in East Timor, is interviewed by Fran Kelly on the ABC Radio National Breakfast program. He says that the security situation has improved since the ADF went into East Timor and that he has enough troops to do the security job that he was required to do. Asked about Tim Costello’s criticism, Brigadier Slater advises that the situation is such that the aid agencies can get on and do their work. He says that on the afternoon of Monday 29 May the ADF had sent a “number of trucks and troops to do a job for Mr Costello at his request” but, unfortunately, he was not able to organise his own staff in time to make use of the offer – so the support went to another NGO. Brigadier Slater also told Fran Kelly that the ADF had advised Tim Costello that it could support his operations “today between 11 o’clock and 1 pm” – i.e. Tuesday 31 May. From Australia, Tim Costello declined the offer by text, saying that he would “not be able to use the support today”.

Ah well, perhaps The Reverend had some other media appointments. Influential types have to get their priorities right.