

# THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE ANNUAL DINNER LECTURE

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- SPEAKER:** **GRAEME SAMUEL AO** (Chairman, Australian Competition and Consumer Commission)  
**DATE:** Tuesday 30 January 2007 \*\*Bookings from 16 January\*\* TIME: 5.30 for 6pm  
**VENUE:** Mallesons Conference Room, Level 60, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney
- SPEAKER:** **FRED HILMER AO** (President & Vice Chancellor, University of New South Wales; former CEO, John Fairfax; Author, *The Fairfax Experience: What the Management Texts Didn't Teach Me* [John Wiley])  
**TOPIC:** *The Fairfax Experience*  
**DATE:** Tuesday 6 February 2007 \*\*Bookings from 20 January only\*\* TIME: 5.30 for 6 pm  
**VENUE:** Minter Ellison Function Room, Level 19, 88 Phillip Street, Sydney
- SPEAKER:** **SALLY NEIGHBOUR** (Author, *In the Shadow of Swords* [HarperCollins], Reporter for *Four Corners* and Commentator for *The Australian*)  
**TOPIC:** *International Terrorism: From Afghanistan to Australia*  
**DATE:** Tuesday 20 February 2007 \*\*Bookings from 6 February\*\* TIME: 5.30 for 6 pm  
**VENUE:** Dixon Room, State Library of New South Wales, Macquarie Street, Sydney
- SPEAKERS:** **PETA SEATON MP** (Shadow Minister for Finance and Energy; contributor, *The Worldly Art of Politics: Responsible Government in NSW*) & **TROY BRAMSTON** (Author & Policy Adviser, Editor, *The Wran Era* [Federation Press])  
**TOPIC:** *Governing New South Wales: The Wran and Greiner Years*  
**DATE:** Wednesday 21 February 2007 \*\*Bookings from 7 February\*\* TIME: 5.30 for 6 pm  
**VENUE:** 41 Phillip Street, Sydney LIGHT REFRESHMENTS
- SPEAKERS:** **DR TANVEER AHMED** (Psychiatrist & journalist) & **NADA ROUDE** (founder, Australian Arabic Communities Council)  
**TOPIC:** *Social Protest and Islam*  
**DATE:** Tuesday 27 February 2007 \*\*Bookings from 13 February\*\* TIME: 5.30 FOR 6 pm  
**VENUE:** Museum of Sydney Theatre, Corner Bridge and Phillip Streets, Sydney
- SPEAKER:** **PATRICK MORGAN** (Academic and Author *Your Most Obedient Servant B.A. Santamaria Selected Letters: 1938-1996* [The Miegunyah Press])  
**TOPIC:** *Bob Santamaria: Talking to the World*  
**DATE:** Wednesday 28 February 2007 \*\*Bookings from 14 February\*\* TIME: 5.30 FOR 6pm  
**VENUE:** 41 Phillip Street, Sydney LIGHT REFRESHMENTS
- SPEAKERS:** **DAVID O'SULLIVAN** (Director General for Trade, European Commission) & **TIM HARCOURT** (Chief Economist, Australian Trade Commission)  
**TOPIC:** *The WTO Negotiations - Two Views*  
**DATE:** Monday 5 March \*\*Bookings from 18 February\*\* TIME: 5.30 for 6 pm  
**VENUE:** TBC
- SPEAKER:** **ROBERT McCALLUM Jr** (US Ambassador to Australia)  
**DATE:** Wednesday 7 March 2007 \*\*Bookings from 20 February only\*\* TIME: 5.30 for 6 pm  
**VENUE:** Clayton Utz Conference Room, Level 30, 1 O'Connell Street, Sydney
- SPEAKER:** **WAYNE SWAN MP** (Shadow Treasurer; Federal Member for Lilley)  
**DATE:** Tuesday 3 April 2007 \*\*Bookings from 20 March only\*\* TIME: 5.30 for 6 pm  
**VENUE:** Mallesons Conference Room, Level 60, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney
- SPEAKERS:** **DAVID MALOUF AO** (Writer and author) & **DR IHAB HASSAN** (Writer & teacher of Postmodernism)  
**TOPIC:** *Fundamentalism and Literature* (Note early start)  
**DATE:** Wednesday 11 April 2007 \*\*Bookings from 28 March\*\* TIME: 5 for 5.30 pm  
**VENUE:** Clayton Utz Conference Room, Level 30, 1 O'Connell Street, Sydney
- SPEAKER:** **JACKIE HUGGINS AM** (Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia; Deputy Director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Unit at the University of Queensland)  
**TOPIC:** *The 1967 Referendum...Four Decades Later* TIME: 5.30 for 6 pm  
**DATE:** Tuesday 22 May 2007 \*\*Bookings from 8 May only\*\*  
**VENUE:** to be advised

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THE

# Sydney Institute

QUARTERLY



with Gerard Henderson's

## MEDIA WATCH

*ISSUE 30,  
FEBRUARY 2007*

**ANNE HENDERSON**  
on Islam,  
multiculturalism  
and Australia

**STEPHEN MATCHETT**  
looks at the Moral  
Middle Class

**ALAN GOLD** on  
Wikipedia and  
democracy online

The ABC – comedy and  
complaints

“Scholarship” at  
Wollongong Uni

**ALICE GRUNDY**  
reviews Best Australian  
Essays 2006

**JOHN MCCONNELL**  
with Dennis Altman  
and David Potts

**MEDIA WATCH** tackles  
Jacinta Tynan, the  
“Careys”, Liz Jackson  
and Stephen Mayne

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# MEDIA WATCH?

In his address to The Sydney Institute on 16 October 2006, the ABC managing director and editor-in-chief, Mark Scott, consciously decided to refer to the ABC TV *Media Watch* program - which in 2006 was produced by Peter McEvoy and presented by Monica Attard. During his speech, Mr Scott praised such programs as *Insiders* and *Lateline* for presenting a plurality of views. However, there was no such compliment for *Media Watch*. Rather, Mark Scott declared that the program would be reformed in 2007. In the ABC managing director's words: "...Under our new editorial policies, we will be looking for further diversity of voices - ensuring the ABC is the town square where debate can flourish and different voices heard. I have encouraged the Director of Television to work with the *Media Watch* team to review their format and content next year to ensure there is more opportunity for debate and discussion around contentious and important issues".

Mr Scott's comment about *Media Watch* was unequivocal and it was delivered as a clear statement of intent. In short, the ABC managing director said that he had "encouraged" Kim Dalton (the ABC's Director of Television) to review the format and content of *Media Watch* in 2007 - to ensure that there will be more opportunity for debate and discussion concerning contentious issues than was the case in 2006 and previous years. Nothing could be clearer than this. What's more, Mark Scott's comments were supported by out-going ABC chairman Donald McDonald in an interview with Valerie Lawson, which was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 2-3 December 2006. Mr McDonald told Ms Lawson that there is "a view" that *Media Watch* "should have more of a range of opinions in it". That's also very clear.

In a talk on 16 November 2006, Kim Dalton spoke about ABC TV's forthcoming programming in 2007 and commented, in passing, "of course we will continue to have *Media Watch*". That's all. It is not clear that Mr Dalton's comment is consistent with the statements made by both Mark Scott and Donald McDonald that there should be more opportunity for debate and discussion on *Media Watch* leading to the presentation of a greater range of opinions on the program than is currently the case. This can only be brought about if there is more than one presenter each week or if the left-leaning Monica Attard presents the program on alternate weeks. Such a reform will be resisted by members of the *Media Watch* fan club. Already past presenters of the program have condemned the Scott position. Both Stuart Littlemore (*Crikey*, 18 October 2006) and David Marr (*The Age*, 26 October 2006) have said that there is no place for debate and discussion on *Media Watch*. It remains to be seen whether the Littlemore/Marr position will prevail.

If *Media Watch* returns in 2007 with Monica Attard as the sole presenter and with a similar format, then Mark Scott's promise to revamp the program's format and content will have failed. The fact remains that there is genuine debate on Rupert Murdoch's Fox News *News Watch* program. Yet, currently there is no fair and balanced discussion on the taxpayer funded ABC *Media Watch* program. None whatsoever.

**See page 7 for details of the ABC'S new Director of Editorial Policies and the new Executive Producer of Media Watch.**

# ABC COMEDY - NO LAUGHING MATTER

*Comedians invariably look on the funny side of life - except when misfortune involves them.*

## GLASS HOUSE CRACKED

So it was with the ABC's decision to junk *The Glass House* - which commenced on ABC TV in August 2001 and concluded at the end of November 2006. All up there were 218 episodes. As Kim Dalton, the ABC's Director of Television, has said this was a significant run for a comedy show (*The Age*, 2 November 2006). It sure was. Some of the best comedies ever have had very short runs. *Fawlty Towers*, for example, which totalled just twelve episodes - two series of six episodes each. The show has been frequently repeated. But the comedy team that put *Fawlty Towers* together understood that comedy quickly becomes tired and that, invariably, less is better.

This, however, was not the view of *The Glass House* presenters - Wil Anderson, Corinne Grant and Dave Hughes - who reacted to the demise of their show not with humour but with oh-so-serious disappointment bordering on anger. The decision to axe the show was announced on 31 October 2006. According to Kim Dalton, this had been decided in early September 2006. He justified the decision by reference to the need to freshen the ABC's comedy output, while remaining on budget:

**...the ABC has finite resources and we have to make choices. It is not possible to make new programs and continue with all our existing output, and so the decision was made some months ago that this would be the last year for *The Glass House*. We've been discussing it with the production team for some time now. The ABC is continually looking to strike a balance between existing, popular programs with a great following, and giving new performers and different ideas a chance to play to an Australian audience.**

*The Glass House* comedians, on this occasion at least, could find nothing to laugh about. Writing in the *Canberra Times* (4 November 2006), Karen Ingram reported that "the decision...has knocked the wind out of Anderson and his co-hosts". She reported Wil Anderson as declaring: "They [ABC management]

have not told us why, other than they said 'budgetary reasons'; although that's a bit weird because clearly we're the cheapest show of all time to make". Go on. Corinne Grant wrote an article in *The Age* (4 November 2006) in which she complained: "I am puzzled and incredibly sad that the show is ending. We were enjoying our best ratings ever...I honestly don't know why they've chosen to cancel us. Maybe it's money. Perhaps the ABC simply did not have enough cash to pay for our show as well as a new hole-punch for Kerry O'Brien". Good one. And Dave Hughes told the *Sydney Morning Herald* (4-5 November 2006) that, so great was the shock, that *The Glass House* comedians effectively went into denial: "We were hoping it wasn't so. They told us weeks ago but we were thinking surely they were going to change their minds; we just didn't want to believe it". Clearly no laughing matter, then.

In fact, *The Glass House* was tired - and it was not rating all that well. Writing in the *Herald-Sun* (8 November 2006), Robert Fidgeon examined the figures:

**And so, after five years, we say farewell to *The Glass House* and panellists Wil Anderson, Corinne Grant and Dave Hughes. In a weekend interview, Grant said she wasn't sure why the show had gone since it had recently enjoyed its best ratings figures. Sadly, in TV land, 834,000 viewers is not a good national figure and that's what *The Glass House* pulled last week. The week before it was 701,000. Though ABC TV will tolerate lower figures than the three commercial networks (don't ask me why), *The Glass House* would have to hit a consistent 850,000 to guarantee its survival.**

In the *Sydney Morning Herald* (2 November 2006), David Dale and Damien Murphy came to much the same conclusion:

***The Glass House's* ratings have become pretty unfunny. Eight nights ago 400,000 of the 1.1 million viewers who watched *Spicks and Specs* at 8.30 pm had fled the ABC by the time Anderson and Co had finished their schticks.**

In *The Weekend Australian* (4-5 November 2006), Michael Bodey wrote that ABC management came to the conclusion that *The Glass House's* format and writing team had become tired. He quoted an anonymous ABC producer as saying:

**Most of the [ABC] comedy shows of the last decade have been from people who were working for the past 15 years, the same writers and performers who have grown tired, including *The Glass House* team.**

The decision to axe *The Glass House* ignited the conspiracy theorists in our midst. Greens Senator Bob Brown, for example. Senator Brown accused the Howard Government of enforcing political censorship by having the program dropped. So much so that the Prime Minister felt it necessary to respond to the allegations. John Howard told a radio interviewer on 1 November 2006: "I have not axed the program; if it has been axed, then it has been axed by a decision of the ABC".

This was not good enough for members of *The Glass House* fan club - who flooded radio stations and internet sites alleging that the Howard Government was into censorship. Some critics of the decision asserted that it followed ABC managing director Mark Scott's address to The Sydney Institute on 16 October 2006 - during which he announced the revised ABC editorial values that will come into effect on 1 March 2007. This despite the fact that Scott pointed out during his speech that the revamped guidelines - which are designed to enhance a plurality of opinion on the public broadcaster - cover the areas of (i) news and current affairs, (ii) factual and topical, (iii) opinion and (iv) performance. Comedy was specifically *not* included in this list.

In any event, there is no clear reason why comedy programs on the public broadcaster should be exempt from presenting a plurality of views. This is currently the case with the irreverent Chaser team as was evident in its recent *The Chaser's War on Everything* series - which is happy to lambast conservatives and leftists, Christians and Muslims alike. But that's where diversity on ABC comedy begins and ends. There was no plurality of views on *The Glass House*. And there is no diversity on the comedy sketch of John Clarke and Bryan Dawe which airs at 7.56 pm each Thursday at the end of the ABC TV's premier current affairs program - the *7.30 Report*.

Perhaps unintentionally, Corinne Grant identified the problem in her recent article in *The Age* when she wrote:

**Yes, we attack the Government regularly on the show, not because they're Liberals, but because they're the Government. I would love to be more critical of the ALP but the problem is they've done such a good job of tearing themselves apart, there's nothing left for me to attack. There are beached whales in a better state. When the Libs stop making policies and when George Bush stops saying silly things, I'll stop making jokes about them. It would be irresponsible of a satirical current affairs show to not make fun of John Howard's eyebrows. In fact, it would be un-Australian.**

Grant just cannot see the problem. Sure, she and her colleagues on *The Glass House* laughed at both the Coalition government and the Labor opposition - but only from the left. In other words, they laughed at the Liberal and National parties - from the left. And then they laughed at the Labor Party - but, again, from the left. This is not an example of balance in humour but, rather, an evident lack of diversity.

#### 4 MINUTES WITH CLARKE AND DAWE

It's much the same with John Clarke and Bryan Dawe. They invariably laugh at the likes of John Howard and Kevin Rudd *from* the left. However, they seldom, if ever, laugh at anyone *on* the left - Greens Senator Bob Brown, for example. Writing in *The Age* on 24 October 2006, the leftist columnist Martin Flanagan defended the lack of balance in John Clarke's work (Clarke, not Dawe, writes the scripts which go to air on the *7.30 Report* each Thursday). According to Flanagan, "maybe he [Clarke] doesn't find Bob Brown funny". Well, maybe he doesn't. Yet many others do.

Senator Brown may not seem a suitable subject for satire among Flanagan's comrades among the inner-city leftist set who read *The Age* and regard *Age* cartoonist Michael Leunig as a (leftist) philosopher king or some such. However, to many Australians in the outer suburbs and regional centres, Bob Brown is much more a figure of fun than John Howard and Kevin Rudd combined. Martin Flanagan just does not understand this - probably on account of the fact that he spends too much time with fellow *Age* staffers and ABC admirers who regard Senator Brown as something of a secular saint.

#### A SUBURBAN ASSESSMENT

Bill James, who lives in suburban Bayswater in Melbourne, does understand the problem. On 16 November 2006 he wrote to *The Age Green Guide* following, an appearance by John Clarke on the ABC *Radio National Breakfast Program*. The occasion was the release of John Clarke's book *The 7.56 Report* (Text Publishing, 2006) which consists of transcripts from his Thursday *7.30 Report* performances. During Clarke's interview with presenter Fran Kelly, the program played an audio tape of two of the pretend interviews where Bryan Dawe talks with John Clarke in one of his many personas. The two pieces selected from *The 7.56 Report* collection were the audios of Dawe interviewing John Howard (a.k.a. John Clarke) and Kim Beazley (a.k.a. John Clarke). Let Bill James take up the story:

**Last Thursday Radio National's Fran Kelly preceded an interview with John Clarke with a track of Clarke ridiculing Kim Beazley for being John Howard. She then**

**announced that she would “balance” the first track and played a second Clarke track, which ridiculed Howard for being Howard.**

That the point. Clarke criticises John Howard for being John Howard. And he criticises Kim Beazley - and, more recently, Kevin Rudd - for being too like John Howard. In the *7.56 Report* publication, Clarke can be found mocking the following, in order of appearance: Richard Alston, John Howard (12 times), Mark Latham (seven times), Alexander Downer (four times), Philip Ruddock (four times), Bob McMullan, Robert Hill (three times), Peter Costello (seven times), John Anderson, Brendan Nelson (twice), Kim Beazley (seven times), Malcolm Turnbull, Amanda Vanstone, Tony Abbott, Barnaby Joyce, Bob Hawke, Nick Minchin (three times) and Kevin Andrews (twice). There were also send-ups of a Christian (of course) religious leader, a businessman and more besides.

That was it. John Clarke does not choose to laugh at such Green leaders as Bob Brown and Kerry Nettle, trade union leaders such as Greg Combet and Sharan Burrow, radical Muslim imams or pacifists. According to Clarke, apparently, this lot is just not suitable for ridicule. Unlike Coalition and Labor politicians and leaders of the Christian Church.

#### DAVID KOCH - SOME JOKE

It was much the same on the one hour long final issue of *The Glass House*, which went to air on 29 November 2006. There were laughs aplenty at John Howard, Janette Howard, George Bush, the “holy Health Minister” Tony Abbott and Philip Ruddock. The (then) Labor leader Kim Beazley was also frequently mocked along with the social conservatives in the Family First Party. There were also lotsa jokes at Christianity in general - and Benedict XVI and Jesus Christ in particular. But no one laughed at Islam and the only performer to mention Muhammad was Adam Spencer. He had a mild gag at the fact that many Muslims oppose any depiction of the Prophet. That’s all. What’s more, no one laughed at the Greens or, indeed, any leftist.

The most egregious occasion during *The Glass House’s* exit program occurred when Channel 7 presenter David Koch and actor Georgie Parker joined Wil Anderson, Corinne Grant and Dave Hughes on stage. It was not long before comedy turned into hectoring where all the panel agreed with the proposition that the Howard Government was bad for Australia and that the Beazley Opposition was not much better. There was a consensus on the panel that in Australia - as in the United States - governments are whipping up a fear of Islamism and terrorism for political reasons only. Wil Anderson commenced the segment with a lecture-to-camera:

**Let’s be clear. There are stupid Muslims who hate women and want to destroy the West. There are also stupid Christians who hate homosexuals and want to bomb abortion clinics. Stupid Jews who hate the Arab world and want to fix it with nuclear weapons and stupid Buddhists who get drunk on wine laced with toads and pass out naked on the street. Don’t be afraid of the faithful; be afraid of the idiots. [Much applause] And we’re back to the Howard Government [Much more applause]**

There followed a conversation where everyone on the panel agreed with everyone else on the panel and a fine ideological self-righteous time was had by all. David Koch alleged that in contemporary Australia Muslims have been made scapegoats. Georgie Parker said that ten years ago Australia was more tolerant than it is today. Corinne Grant claimed that Australia was “deeply, deeply racist” to Muslims. Wil Anderson declared that “politicians use fear” even if “they don’t believe” that the fear is justified. Georgie Parker agreed. Corinne Grant declared that the Howard Government needed fear because it did not have one “decent policy”.

Then David Koch weighed in with a familiar claim and an old joke. He depicted John Howard as a “bonsai” - a small Bush. Get it? The panellists and the audience rolled around laughing - and Koch laughed at his own joke. It was as if no one remembered that this joke is as old as George W. Bush’s administration. Corinne Grant weighed in with the view that John Howard is “very dangerous” and David Hughes suggested that the Prime Minister will never admit that he is wrong. Then it was over to David Koch for yet another lecture - in *The Glass House* style, of course:

**I reckon we have a generation of sort of under 30s, under 25s, who have a great set of values that go quite against what John Howard is on about. And for me, for me, I reckon that’s the really heartening thing. And it’s grass roots; it’s driven by a younger generation of Australians that have much better values than their parents. [Much applause, stamping of feet, hooting and so on] No, no, I really believe that. I really believe that. [Much more applause, stamping of feet, hooting etcetera]**

At the end of the Koch sermon, Anderson said that “the most sensible things that have ever been said on the show we saved for the last episode”. How about that? This speaks volumes for *The Glass House’s* contribution to Australian intellectual life over its 218 episodes. Then Koch and Parker proceeded to announce the winner of the “Outstanding Eksaliance

[sic] in the Field of Politics” award. And the nominees were Health Minister Tony Abbott, George W. Bush, Attorney General Philip Ruddock and Kim Beazley. No surprise there. Parker mocked the “holy Health Minister” and declared that the Attorney General didn’t seem to know anything about the law”. Kim Beazley won. No surprise there, either. Once again, Beazley was mocked for being one of “the John Howards”. Soon after Grant did an imitation of the Prime Minister which would not raise a laugh on a primary school playground. Except, of course, if the infants concerned were members of *The Glass House* fan club.

## A JOKE TOO FAR

It seems that the self-indulgence went to David Koch’s head. Shortly after his performance on *The Glass House*, Koch told the following “joke” on the Channel 7 *Sunrise* program to members of what he terms the “Sunrise Family”. The joke - which is about as old as Methuselah (whom the Bible tells us lived to age 969) reads as follows, as told by David Koch HIMSELF in live-to-air mode:

**John Howard is on a skiing trip - Christmas holidays, Aspen, the whole thing. He’s coming down the slopes and there in the snow written - obviously someone has relieved themselves in the snow - and written “John Howard is a dork”. Well, John stops in front of it and looks at it absolutely fuming and says to the secret service guys who are sort of shadowing him while hes on his holiday in Aspen: “Look into this. I want to know who did it, under what circumstances”. They say, “Yes sir” and he went off skiing. That night the forensic guys have taken a sample of the thing in the snow. They go to him: “Well, Mr Prime Minister, we’ve got good news and bad news. We’ve tested the urine samples and we’ve come to a conclusion. What do you want - good or bad news?” And he said: “Well, what’s the good news?” And they said: “Well, it’s Kim Beazley’s urine”. And he said: “What’s the bad news?” And they said, “Well, it was in Janette’s handwriting”.**

Pretty funny, eh? No doubt Mr Koch’s “joke” would have received a standing ovation had he tried it out on one of his many gigs on *The Glass House*. It’s just that the *Sunrise* Family did not like what it heard. So it was time for an apology. Big time. Spoke Mr Koch, in a rambling apologia which - somehow or other - came to involve Mrs Koch:

**If I offended anyone, I apologise. In some people’s view I may have crossed the line yesterday, which I think I agree with, but you never know until you do it. My wife**

**writes her name in the snow. They have this thing for skiers, female skiers. It’s like a funnel if you are caught way up on the slopes from anywhere. It’s a joke. That’s what we were talking about. We are not talking about the state of the nation or climate change or anything like that. It’s a joke. And it’s one minute out of two hours and 59 minutes of live television.**

A pretty weak excuse - don’t you think? But imagine what David Koch - and, say, *The Glass House* family - would have said if, say, a right-wing commentator had run a version of this joke about a Greens senator or an imam. Just imagine.

What the hosts along with Georgie Parker and David Koch ignored on *The Glass House*’s final gig was that the world did change following al Qaeda’s attack on the West on 11 September 2001 - and that Australia changed following the Bali bombing of October 2002. In his lecture-to-camera, Wil Anderson overlooked the fact that the leadership of the Christian Church, the Jewish community and the Buddhist do *not* advocate killing innocent civilians. The same can be said of Hindu leaders. However, Osama bin Laden and his followers do believe that innocent civilians should be killed in the name of radical Islamism. *The Glass House* team should also know this.

And David Koch should know that the Coalition government, supported by the Labor opposition, has constantly said that the national security legislation is aimed at a few radical Islamists who oppose Western democracy and is not intended to make scapegoats of all Australian Muslims.

If comedians are going to preach about the key issue of national security, they should expect that they - in turn - will be criticised. It’s much the same with the on-going debate on economic reform.

On Thursday 30 November 2006 the ACTU held its day of action throughout Australia to protest at the Howard government’s industrial relations legislation. The biggest event was staged at the Melbourne Cricket Ground - with guest appearances by Dave Hughes and Corinne Grant. That evening the ABC TV *Lateline* program reported that Grant had delivered “the message of the day” when she told the large crowd: “The only person who should be losing their job over these IR laws is John Howard.” This was the line of a political activist - it was not comedy and it was not intended to be funny.

## COMEDIANS IN SEARCH OF TENURE

It seems that Corinne Grant and Dave Hughes - along with Wil Anderson - believe that comedians who appear on the taxpayer funded public broadcaster should have some kind of tenure. John Clarke appears to be of a similar view. His *7.30 Report* gig

has been running in various formats, on various TV stations, for nearly two decades. It, too, has become tired and predictable. Yet the Clarke/Dawe weekly comedy performance continues in its high profile slot each week as part of Australia's leading evening current affairs program. So much so that it is fronted and wound-up by *7.30 Report* presenter, Kerry O'Brien. Someone should tell Kerry O'Brien and company that, after literally hundreds of repeats, John Clarke's continuing joke has become somewhat stale.

John Clarke remains a credible commentator on contemporary Australian politics and economics because, when in government, neither Labor nor the Coalition ever implemented any of his views. They are set out in the publication, *A Royal Commission Into The Australian Economy* (Allen & Unwin, 1991) - which John Clarke co-wrote with Ross Stevenson. Put simply, Clarke opposed virtually all the economic reforms of the past two decades - which commenced under the Labor government led by Bob Hawke and Paul Keating and have been continued under the Coalition led by John Howard and Peter Costello. If John Clarke's economic agenda had ever been implemented in government, then Australia would almost certainly have gone into recession somewhere between the Asian economic slowdown of 1997 and the United States' recession of 2000. However, in fact, Clarke's economic agenda was rejected by the Coalition and Labor alike. And, consequently, more funds are available to pay comedians than would otherwise be the case.

## ECONOMIC TROGLODYTES NOT FUNNY (APPARENTLY)

The fact that Australia has experienced 15 years of economic growth has made it possible for the public and private sector alike to provide the funding which keeps John Clarke's comedy show going. But do not expect to hear this paradox examined on the *7.30 Report* any time soon. John Clarke's sense of ridiculous does not extend to intellectual self-examination.

It's much the same with *The Glass House*. There's nothing wrong with laughing at politicians. Yet Wil Anderson and his team only find Coalition and Labor governments deserving of mockery - that is, the politicians who have been associated with Australia's economic successes over the past two decades. *The Glass House* just did not find the Greens funny - that is, there are no jokes to be made about those politicians who have consistently opposed economic reform in Australia. Funny that.



# THE ABC'S NEW TEAM

At his address to The Sydney Institute on 16 October 2006, newly appointed ABC managing director Mark Scott said that the ABC would be creating the position of Director of Editorial Policies which would report to him in his role as "Editor-in-Chief" of the ABC. The position was subsequently advertised. Mark Scott also said that he had encouraged the Director of Television, Kim Dalton, "to work with the *Media Watch* team to review their format and content" in 2007 "to ensure that there is more opportunity for debate and discussion around contentious and important issues". The existing executive producer of *Media Watch* having resigned, the position was subsequently advertised.

Mark Scott's announcement immediately ignited criticism from within the public broadcaster and within The Friends of the ABC set. *Four Corners* presenter Liz Jackson warned that Scott's reform proposals were "verging on Stalinism" (on the *702 Radio Journalists' Forum*, 19 October 2006) and ABC-friendly journalist Errol Simper wrote about "Thought Police" and referred to "echoes from the Cold War Soviet Union" (*The Australian*, 19 October 2006).

### • Paul Chadwick

On 20 December 2006 Mr Scott announced that Paul Chadwick had been appointed "as the ABC's first Director of Editorial Policies". Mr Chadwick, aged 47, was until July 2006 Victoria's Privacy Commissioner. His previous employment includes stints in the Victorian Office of the Communications Law Centre, as a journalist with the *Sun News Pictorial* and *The Age* and as a part-time lecturer in journalism at RMIT in Melbourne.

The selection committee for the Director of Editorial Policies position comprised (then) ABC Chairman Donald McDonald, Mark Scott, Director Corporate Strategy & Communications Murray Green and ABC Board member John Gallagher QC. It is understood that the selection committee's decision was approved by all ABC Board members.

Of course, the wisdom of this decision will be determined by how Paul Chadwick performs in the job. However, it is fair to say that Mr Chadwick comes from a background which is not dissimilar to the Friends of the ABC/Melbourne *Age* set. In other words, he is part of the ABC culture and, consequently, most unlikely to upset any ABC types. Two examples illustrate the point:

When announcing Paul Chadwick's appointment, the ABC released his 1999 *AN Smith Lecture in Journalism* in which he praised the ABC TV *Media Watch* program. Chadwick is also the author of the 1989 book *Media Mates: Carving up Australia's Media* which contains a preface by the leftist activist Veronica Brady - who used the occasion to rail against such media proprietors as Rupert Murdoch, while warning of "totalitarianism" and the emergence of "a new power elite". *Media Mates* was very critical of the Labor government of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating - from a left perspective. Chadwick's book concluded with a Chapter titled "What can be done?" - which included proposals that governments should provide grants, subsidised loans and tax concessions to encourage the creation of new entrants in the print media. It had been a long time since anyone had proposed the creation of newspapers which were government owned. But Chadwick did. He even suggested that the Federal government could create an ABC newspaper. In the author's words:

**An "ABC paper", an *Australian Citizen* or *Australian Daily*, need not duplicate existing resources nor require an inordinate amount of extra public investment.... To the extent that the ABC's independence has been prescribed, its editorial integrity is better protected than that of most commercial media. An ABC paper ought to be able to command at least the same confidence among consumers as the commercial media. The ABC's reputation for wide-ranging, high quality news and comment is already established among Australians.**

Clearly, Paul Chadwick is a (somewhat commercially naïve) friend of the ABC.

#### • Tim Palmer

On 31 December 2006 it was announced that Tim Palmer had been appointed as the new executive producer of *Media Watch*. The selection panel for this appointment comprised Kim Dalton (Director of Television), Michael Ward (Head of Policy, ABC TV) along with Monica Attard (*Media Watch* presenter) and Kirsten Garrett (formerly the ABC's Staff Elected Director).

Tim Palmer is the 2005 Gold Walkley winning journalist who has reported for the ABC from South East Asia and the Middle East. It was not long before Imre Salusinszky revealed in *The Australian* (2 January 2007) that Palmer fitted the traditional *Media Watch* mode. That is, he is a fashionable leftist who is wont to criticise both conservatives and social democrats - from the left.

Salusinszky recalled that, when based in Jakarta, Palmer had written to the leftist Margo Kingston's *Sydney Morning Herald* Webdiary and bagged conservative US President George W. Bush and New South Wales Labor Premier Bob Carr - from the left,

of course. On 13 October 2002, Margo Kingston had written a piece which implied that Westerners may somehow have been responsible for the decision of terrorists to let off bombs in Bali aimed at Western tourists. Kingston, in turn, was criticised by Bob Carr. Tim Palmer weighed into the debate - and his contribution was posted on *Webdiary* viz:

**What a performance by the Premier. Here's a line that a member of the Ubud royal family provided in an interview for the 7.30 Report the other day: "There is always some good and bad - for the victim it's really bad to Bali - but the challenge is how to transform that energy to be a good one in the future - that's the challenge - a good chance for Balinese people to be introspective. Of course we feel there must be something wrong - something we done not right for Bali - that's why it happen in Bali. Maybe we are too open - not aware of the influence of destructive entertainment - not aware of our environment - too busy concentrating on success of business, you know. Most have that comment and most commit themselves to pull back and sit down."**

I sincerely hope neither this Balinese gentleman nor any other Balinese who share his view ever stray across the path of our marauding Premier or he'll be torn to bits. I should add that after three years in the Middle East I am quite used to this sort of assassination for suggesting any violent act has a root cause (even though your obviously sensitive column barely fell into that category anyway). I frequently refer people (including my editors) to that man Fisk and his long analysis in *Pity the Nation* of those who want to force the word "terror" into every sentence while attempting to silence any other debate (cf Michael Danby, Colin Rubenstein). How long till Bob resorts to the G.W. Bush expression "if we [insert opposing political action], we let the terrorists win".

How very ABC. The new *Media Watch* executive producer (i) is on record as publicly bagging the views of conservatives and social democrats alike from a left-wing perspective, (ii) maintains - without any evidence - that such members of the Australian Jewish community as Federal Labor backbencher Michael Danby MP and Dr Colin Rubenstein are attempting to silence debate and (iii) just loves leftist journalist Robert Fisk.

When asked about the views he expressed about George W. Bush and Bob Carr in 2002, Tim Palmer told *The Australian*: "I can't remember saying anything like that". Interesting precedent. Will *Media Watch*, under its new management, accept memory loss and/or denial as an excuse? Stay tuned.

# ISLAM AND AUSTRALIA - THE NEXT PHASE

Anne Henderson

*"When it comes to adultery, it's 90 per cent the woman's responsibility. Why? Because a woman owns the weapon of seduction. It's she who takes off her clothes, shortens them, flirts, puts on make-up and powder and takes to the streets, God protect us, dallying. ... Then, it's a look, a smile, a conversation, a greeting, a talk, a date, a meeting, a crime, then Long Bay jail. Then you get a judge, who has no mercy, and he gives you 65 years."*

These words, part of Sydney Lakemba Mosque's Sheik Hilaly's sermon given in September 2006, may have been the last straw that broke the silence of moderate Muslims in Sydney. Forums on free-to-air national television and discussions in the wake of the sermon have suddenly revealed a great variety of Muslim Australians ready to take on the chauvinism and authoritarian dictates of Sydney's Sheik Hilaly and others like him.

After the Cronulla riots and revenge attacks of December 2005, the rape trials of young Muslims from Sydney's West after 2000 and a growing discussion and unease about home grown radical Muslims and their connection to terrorist groups, Australians may finally be taking the first positive steps towards dealing with the cultural divide between Muslim Australians and the secular society such Muslims have either chosen to adopt as their own or been born into. This is a new phase in Islamic Australian relations. Sadly, it is the anger and the shame being felt in Islamic communities that has brought this about. But, as Muslim community leader Silma Ithran put it on Nine's *Sunday* (12/11/06), ironically the outrage over the Sheik's chauvinistic comments may "be a benefit to all of us".

Taken as they appear, Hilaly's comments advise his listeners that it is overwhelmingly the woman's fault if rape occurs. And, by linking this to the prison sentences given in the most notorious of the Muslim gang rape trials, so violent and perverted as they were, ("65 years" as the Sheik put it - in fact 55 years and much reduced on appeal) he exonerates the perpetrators of rape and condemns the victims. Not

surprisingly, once his comments were made public by *The Australian*, there was community outrage from Muslim and non-Muslim groups alike.

Hilaly is a respected community leader from the sunni Lakemba Mosque. He has hundreds of followers and his teachings influence thousands of Muslim Australians. And, as a number of women on the *Sunday* forum "Islam in Australia" (12/11/06) confirmed, this view of the woman's role in rape and the seduction of men is a familiar one in Islamic communities.

Put simply by Silma Ithram, convert to Islam and school principal, chauvinistic teachings and attitudes are common among many Muslims and it's something that has been "out there for years". She spoke forcefully of regretting that Muslim women leaders, while they had heard such comments for years, had been "foolish enough to sit back" and raise no objection.

Clearly from the *Sunday* program there is evidence of a new and public resistance among some Muslim women, and men, against notions of Islam being forced on them by some community male leaders. Regretfully, these outspoken leaders are all too often the sole focus for Australian Muslims by the Australian media.

Hiktimal Hage-Ali (NSW Young Australian of the Year - 2006), Mona Hwalla and ANU researcher Shakira Hussein joined Silma Ithram in strongly condemning Hilaly's comments and the attitude it represented. On the same program, they were supported by a number of Muslim men in the group, such as Wassim Dabbousi, Tanveer Ahmad, Fadi Rahman and Ahmed Kilani. One even articulated his anger at the way community politics and the exposure of radical Islamic sects in Australia had disturbed his life as an Australian born and fully integrated citizen. He, and others like him, had to start all over to prove their worthiness as Australians. And he wasn't happy.

## SATAN'S SOLDIERS

Hilaly's sermon was never meant for a public hearing or viewing, certainly not one in English - one of the excuses given for the negative public reaction to it. But it doesn't take a genius to see the flaw in that argument. As Bronwyn Bishop MP told Ellen Fanning on *Sunday's* forum "Islam in Australia - The Way Forward", 19 November 2006, whoever the words were meant for they were "poison" to be taken back to hundreds of other Australians. Where is the message, continued Bishop, that rape is wrong, that the rapist is committing a serious crime?

Bishop's was a fair question, if rhetorical. Hilaly's sermon again and again pounded away at women as

if they were evil itself. They were not only compared to raw meat left on the street to tempt cats (men), but also described as agents of Satan:

**Satan sees women as half his soldiers. You're my messenger in necessity, Satan tells women you're my weapon to bring down any stubborn man. There are men that I fail with. But you're the best of my weapons. ... The woman was behind Satan playing a role when she disobeyed God and went out all dolled up and unveiled and made of herself palatable food that rakes and perverts would race for. She was the reason behind this sin taking place.**

Many Australians will agree that not so long ago prejudice in the West against women in rape cases was accepted - the old line "she asked for it" contaminated (some say still does) our Anglophile justice system, supported by social acceptance. Over three decades, however, there has been a strong reversal of sympathy towards the female victims, even if defence counsel continue to heavy victims in the courts with questioning designed to besmirch their reputations. But whatever the failings of the justice system, it is still a far cry from the sermons of church leaders preaching that even before the facts of a case are considered, the woman is responsible for her rape as man's temptress or Satan's agent.

Rape, not surprisingly, has become the fault line in Muslim-Western relations across the globe. In Scandanavia, the recent influx of immigrants from largely Muslim nations has seen the incidence of rape rise dramatically leading to sharp political and social divisions in these social democrat countries. Many a nationalistic blogger has pointed out that Scandanavian leftist tolerance has reaped a savage reward in the high incidence of rape perpetrated by young Muslim men against local women and girls.

Such arguments fall on fertile ground when matched with horror stories of the abuse of women - even children - in Muslim countries where girls and women are stoned to death for "adultery" after being raped and falling pregnant, or where girls from the age of nine are given to old men as "brides" and raped on their "wedding" nights. No wonder there is outrage among moderate Muslims at radical and sectarian Muslim leaders who are heard or published in their Western localities - such as Sheik Hilaly - giving comfort to Muslim detractors by repeating sectarian and marginal Muslim beliefs. But such beliefs undoubtedly exist among some Muslim groups - whether sanctioned by the Koran or not.

Against this, however, some on the left cannot accept that there are problems in the Islamic/Western divide and have mocked their own liberal principles,

selling out moderate Muslims along the way by bending over backwards to excuse the high incidence of Muslim rapes in Western cities. One leftist Oslo professor, Unni Wikan, explained to anxious Norwegians that the phenomenon was largely a result of the fact that Muslim rapists came from Muslim countries where "rape is scarcely punished" because it is generally believed that "it is the women who are responsible for rape".

Professor Wikan did not condemn Muslim rapists at all, and went on to make the extraordinary comment that "Norwegian women must take their share of the responsibility for these rapes" by being careful of how they dressed and taking care not to offend Muslim men. Twisting tolerance in an astonishing way she declared, "Norwegian women must realise that we live in a multicultural society and adapt themselves to it." Such sophistry simply plays into the hands of the bigots and leaves moderate Muslims looking as if they are all born rapists.

## THE CHALLENGE TO MULTICULTURALISM

In Sydney, with the rawness of the exposure of the radical and unreconstructed teachings such as those in Hilaly's sermon, finally, many of the fundamentals in Muslim/Australian tensions are being dissected and hopefully addressed. Stereotypes of immigrant groups have always existed. Irish, Italian, Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese and Turks have all had to run the gauntlet of racial prejudice as the last-off-the-boat group assimilating or integrating into Anglo Australian culture. The melting pot of immigrant societies has always been so. With advocates of multiculturalism in the past three decades, there has been an attempt to make this cultural transition less one of bias and bigotry and, for much of the time, multiculturalism has worked.

But the real challenge to multiculturalism has come very recently from a small group within Arabic Muslim immigrants who have settled in Australia since the late 1970s. Sheik Hilaly embodies that challenge. Unlike earlier Muslim settlers, many followers of Muslim clerics like Hilaly are deeply anti semitic and especially intolerant of the secular norms within Australian society. Part of the now notorious Hilaly sermon included the following assessment of most mainstream Australians as heading for hell:

**Those atheists, people of the book (Christians and Jews), where will they end up? In Surfers Paradise? On the Gold Coast? Where will they end up? In hell and not part-time, for eternity. They are the worst in God's creation.**

For the first time in its history, in the last three decades, Australia has allowed groups with a deep

contempt for values fundamental to the Australian way of life to settle here. Like a cuckoo in the nest, such fundamentalists believe their religion is the only righteous path and should in time triumph over the local "infidels" - Australians and their way of life. While moderate Australian Muslims reject such a view, they have been intimidated not to dissent and, until the outrage over Hilaly's sermon, have not found the courage to speak out in significant numbers.

When they do speak out, such as in the case of NSW Young Australian of the Year 2006, Hiktimal Hage-Ali, they are targeted immediately by fundamentalists, such as Hilaly's offshoots. Hiktimal Hage-Ali drank a glass of champagne to celebrate her NSW Young Australian of the Year Award on 5 December 2006 only to endure a hate campaign from Islamic fundamentalists targeting her on websites. "Bloody hell," she told *The Daily Telegraph*, "I had a glass of champagne in my hand - so what?" The hate campaign also berated her as a bad Muslim for her make-up, clothes and nail polish. News that Hiktimal Hage-Ali had been questioned by police in relation to a cocaine investigation raid was leaked to the media by a Hilaly supporter, after which Hilaly's right hand man, Keysar Trad, went public with a statement Hiktimal Hage-Ali should hand back her award. She did, and was later reported as being close to a nervous breakdown.

A small illustration of such intimidation was apparent on the *Sunday* program. As dissident voices disputed Hilaly's views, Abdul Darwiche attacked the speakers, saying they were not true Muslims. Dr James Rifi was once a supporter of Sheik Hilaly but is now a critic. Having released a letter calling on Hilaly to step down, he reported receiving threatening phone calls, emails and faxes and was forced to increase security around his home.

Nonetheless, there is now a growing number in the Muslim community ready to speak out against the excesses of fundamentalist Muslim teachings. For a while Hiktimal Hage-Ali was confident in her Australian milieu. She may have suffered a media campaign personally but the exposure of the hate campaign can only hurt her detractors. Unlike her accusers, Hiktimal does not profess to speak for all Muslims. Without the intimidation, she had found a way to balance her Muslim religion with the secular society she belongs to. She can separate her religion from her civic activities.

## SYDNEY'S LEBANESE PROBLEM

Most moderate Australian Muslims know the traditional religious meanings in the Koran have been hijacked by sectarian activists for political ends over some decades. This is a global phenomenon. As one

participant in the *Sunday* forum put it, traditional Islamic beliefs have been confused and conflicted by community politics for some time. Or, as ABC journalist Stephen Crittenden explained it, much of what passes for Islam in Australia through the media is in fact a "desert clan morality that is not Islam but has been transmitted through Islam". What's more, as Crittenden put it, the problem is that Islam is a puritanical religion while Australia is not a puritanical society.

Tanveer Ahmed, a Sydney psychiatrist and writer, has written that much of the dysfunctionality within the Sydney Muslim community has come from one group - what he describes as "a Lebanese problem" or immigrant Lebanese of Muslim background who are "a fairly specific segment of the Lebanese community and a result of the particular migration of poorer farmers and lower class Lebanese Muslims after the civil war in 1975. Their numbers and concentration are greatest in south-western Sydney" (*On Line Opinion*, Dec 2005). Tanveer Ahmed has pointed out that "other Arab Australians from Egypt, Jordan, Iran or Syria do not have the same problem. If you meet them, they will be quick to point [out] that their community's migration was from a more skilled base. They had smaller families, focused on their children's education and integrated more easily."

Many of Sydney's closely connected Lebanese Muslim families congregate around the Lakemba Mosque and follow the teachings of clerics such as Sheik Hilaly. Their uneducated backgrounds are most susceptible to clannish and sectarian beliefs, such as Hilaly's, which are at the margin to say the least. Rebecca Weisser, writing for *The Australian* (30/10/06), traced Hilaly's background to the fanatical Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood which Hilaly says he has since left.

However, Hilaly has not given up his admiration for one of his Brotherhood colleagues, Sayyid Qutb, whose teachings call women the soldiers of Satan, are wildly anti-Semitic and claim that Hitler was sent by Allah to rule over the Jews and punish them for their "unprecedented abominations". Black races are little better; according to Qutb, jazz was created by "Negroes to satisfy their love of noise and to whet their sexual desires". For Qutb, as Weisser points out, jihad is about "spreading Islam throughout the world, including the toppling of governments". Sheik Hilaly, obviously a fan, describes Qutb as a great leader, a symbol of Islam and a model for Muslims. Many of Hilaly's sermons repeat the teachings of Qutb.

There have been many warnings of the perverse influence of radical Muslim preachers such as Hilaly in Australia. This was one of the reasons behind Parliamentary Secretary Andrew Robb's argument in a speech to The Sydney Institute in April 2006 where

he declared that most or all sermons in Australia's mosques should be given in English and that there should be an institution set up to train Australian Imams. All this no doubt will eventually happen. Ironically, however, it has been the errors of the puritanical and fanatical themselves that seem to have finally moved their moderate fellow Muslims en masse to action. Rape gangs, terrorist laws and incarcerations of Muslim suspects, and now Hilaly's sermon, have taken moderate Muslims to breaking point. The cuckoo is perhaps, at last, to be shown the door.

## DEMOCRACY (READ MULTICULTURALISM) WORKS

There are undoubtedly serious problems of assimilation for young Muslim men mostly of Lebanese background in regard to the levels of crime among them as a group and their levels of unemployment. The Cronulla riots showed a tension between Lebanese youths and local Australians that had gone on far too long, unrecognised as a problem. Sydney's gang rapes brought ugly stories over a decade of racist sexual attacks on innocent local women, stories that took male brutality towards women to a cultural level never before experienced in Australia. The Skaf brothers were given sentences of 32 and 55 years. The media, meanwhile, has acted both responsibly and irresponsibly and the heightened tensions following the Islamic terrorist attacks on New York in 2001 have further complicated the absorption of all these multicultural conflicts.

Unlike his earlier best seller, *Among The Barbarians*, in 2005 Paul Sheehan's *Girls Like You* (Macmillan) offered an empirical and lucidly written account of the rape trials of the sons of Dr HMK, a doctor from Pakistan who perjured himself to cover for his sons. During the trials, the accused showed complete contempt for the Australian judicial system, openly mocking and castigating the judge and the Crown, lewdly taunting the victims, even female journalists, in court, at one point hurling a pear across the courtroom and, when all seemed to have gone badly for them, acting out an absurd pantomime to try and get the judge to believe one accused was psychiatrically deranged.

But, regardless of the criticisms that the judge was too tolerant and the sentences should have been longer, the Australian legal system worked. The accused were found guilty, and punished appropriately with significant jail sentences. What's more, the father of the accused (who since has died) was charged with perjury. The victims survived and saw justice done. One, Tegan Wagner, went on to become something of a public advocate for the victims of rape, emerging as a strong woman in her own right.

Meanwhile, Paul Sheehan's book has become a best seller and sent a strong message to the Lebanese Muslim community that there is no future in chauvinistic gangs running out of control in their community. If anything can be done to rid the community of the problem, it should be done. And the message from that book and other medium may have already had an impact. The incidence of Muslim gang rapes, as witnessed in the past decade in Sydney, has begun to wane.

The Howard Government would like to junk the word "multiculturalism" in favour of something expressing integration rather than co-existence. However, even as Sydney saw out the first anniversary of the Cronulla riots, it was evident that Australia is a society where cultural differences are handled in a most practical way. Multiculturalism does work.

Dire warnings after the riots of a racist quagmire Down Under have been shown to be raving hyperbole. In December 2006, the news from Cronulla was that a group of young Muslims from south-west Sydney had begun training as life-savers and that swimwear for girl/women lifesavers included a "burqini" or full-length swimming costume. Walid Haddad of Bankstown, watching his son at training, said: "I want him to be part of Australian life. I would have loved to do this myself."

The average Australian is a very pragmatic and, by world standards, accommodating human being. Moderate Muslims have been part of Australian life for the greater part of European settlement. They have contributed widely as Nahid Kabir documents in her book *Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History*. Recent tensions reflect not only global "East/West" tensions and the war on terrorism, but also the influx into Sydney of large numbers of a particular group, ie Lebanese Muslims, who have not integrated as well as earlier groups. The bad press resulting from crime and extremist anti-Western comments aggravates this for those who have settled well.

As Stephen Crittenden put it on the *Sunday* program, Australians simply do not want to see Australian cities turning into the Islamic troublespots of the northern suburbs of Paris, and this includes the majority of Australians who are also Muslim. So, with any luck, the next chapter in Muslim Australia relations should be a lot more positive - if only because of this.

**Postscript:** On Egyptian TV, (8/1/07) Sheik Hilaly poured scorn on Australia saying Muslims had paid to be Australian while the Anglos had come in chains. With that, and other caustic comments, he further separated himself from mainstream Australia.

Anne Henderson is editor of *The Sydney Papers*



# INSTANT NEWS IN A POST-MODERN WORLD

Alan Gold

**M**y chances of gaining an entry into *Encyclopaedia Britannica* are close to zero. After all, I haven't won the Nobel Prize, nor climbed Mount Everest, nor have I run a corrupt government in Africa. Unlike Ghandi or Mother Teresa or Hitler or Stalin, I've never done anything particularly good or sufficiently evil to catch the eye of the editors of that great reference tome, so my grandchildren won't find any account of my life history in the volume Gilt to Grandfather.

But fifteen minutes of fame for nonentities like me has taken on an entirely new perspective with the arrival of *Wikipedia*, the Internet's Everyman encyclopaedia. *Wikipedia* is the biggest reference book in the world, but you won't find it displayed on the shelves of the local library, nor in a second hand bookshop along with the 1956 edition of Great Books of the Western World. *Wikipedia* is only found in cyberspace on the Internet. It's the world's first totally consumer- and reader-originated reference work.

No expert sits in a basement at Oxford University carefully crafting extracts or teasing out some arcane fact on a topic of numbing obscurity. Instead, thousands and thousands of unknown and unnamed people submit articles which they post on the encyclopaedia website for instantaneous acceptance.

No submitted articles are rejected, provided they conform to a few basic rules. Anybody can post what they want about anything, which then becomes fair game for amendment and alteration by other equally anonymous people. The submissions aren't refereed by a panel of experts, but instead are thrown open into that nebulous web of inter-connectedness, the hundreds of millions of men, women and children who daily surf the internet; anybody can alter, amend, add, or subtract anything to the text. It's crazy, anarchic and nothing more than a house of cards, but somehow it works.

Indeed, there are now over four million articles published in *Wikipedia*, ranging across the entire spectrum of human knowledge. Students throughout

the world check facts in *Wikipedia* as the most accessed of all the reference books. Somehow, despite the anonymity, questionable professionalism and unknown credentials of the contributors, *Wikipedia* has grown in the space of a handful of years to become the best loved and most widely regarded of all reference sources.

## A WIKI ENTRY

And my biography is in there. Not put in by me, I hasten to add, but sent to *Wikipedia* by one of my children who merely wanted to boast that his dad was in an encyclopaedia. At first I was embarrassed by the hubris; then I was mortified to find out what he'd written about me. So I had to correct the entry for the sake of leaving posterity with an accurate portrait of me, removing references to my having been an astronaut, a chess master and the captain of Australia's World Cup Soccer team.

So just imagine the fun that computer-literate schoolkids could have with their teachers, or disgruntled employees with a malignant boss. Provided they stay within the rules, a kid given poor marks in a test can try to post his teacher as having recently been jailed for being an axe murderer; an employee can attempt to list his boss as a well-known sexual predator; an abandoned wife can think about posting her husband's malignant nature and previous sins for all the world to see. And all with the cyber-authority of the world's biggest reference work! No need for poison pen letters any more....she just has to send all his friends the internet address for the *Wikipedia* article about him, and overnight he'll become a pariah!

On my study shelves are dozens of reference books, as well as a complete edition of *Britannica*. These old friends, which have nourished me through the years of writing a dozen novels, have stood the test of time, and have never once let me down. Sometimes, I open them for a specific purpose when I need to know some esoteric fact; sometimes I need to know how to spell a word; or sometimes I just need to lose myself in the vast storehouse of knowledge they contain, and I wander through the timeless corridors of their pages, entering different peoples' lives or thrilling to learn the etymology of some unfamiliar word.

But there's one thing which these carefully, authoritatively, universally referenced works provide that *Wikipedia* will never give me, and that's a sense of certainty. While these books may contain errors or be written from a particular bias or perspective, they give me a feeling of assurance for two reasons; firstly they're written and printed on paper so they're permanent and unchanging; and secondly, they've been written by experts far more knowledgeable than I am in their subjects, and I defer to their knowledge.

Despite featuring personally in the encyclopaedia, that's one thing I can never say about *Wikipedia*.

## TAMPERING WITH CYBERSPACE

It's so much easier to tamper with cyberspace than it is with paper and ink. Recently in America, as a run-up to forthcoming elections, aides for opposition candidates falsified the *Wiki* entries of their opponents, thereby creating artificial scandals surrounding past histories. It was soon discovered and the disgrace settled upon the heads of the perpetrators, but it was indicative of the dangers of on-the-spot un-refereed cyberspace reference works.

As the world becomes increasingly instantaneous, with overnight experts pontificating about subjects they've recently studied in newspapers, there is growing concern in academic circles about the reliance which students are placing on the internet. The instant-expert syndrome is a function of mass communication; if there's a war or a catastrophe, we have been taught to demand immediate gratification of our desire to know, and so Fox and CNN and the BBC and other international news services are there to report 24/7. The benefits far outweigh the deficits; yet as Anne Henderson pointed out in *The Australian* (13 September 2006) celebrities with no qualification to do so are now weighing into the medium to add both their presence and their moral guardianship to the news.

When celebrities become instant experts such as the egregious Sean Penn sailing like Sir Francis Drake into devastated New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina to offer solace and comfort to the unhoused, or Angelina Jolie taking control of an African country to have her primordial baby, the instant can become the insufferable. Penn became self-parodying when, instead of bringing food relief to the starving residents of devastated New Orleans, he travelled with his retinue of photographer and assistants by canoe and ferried a couple of dazzled castaways to dry land. This is the same Penn who turned up in Iraq just before the American invasion, and spent time in Iran writing about the Islamic Republic. Truly an expert on all disasters!

As for Jolie, she and Brad Pitt took temporary control of a sovereign government in Africa, banning whomsoever they wanted to prohibit from entering the nation while they showed Namibian women how to give birth to babies.

## WIKI V BRITANNICA

That's not to say that all instant expertise is bad. Indeed, *Wikipedia* holds up well to intellectual and academic scrutiny. But it's the exception rather than the rule. In December 2005, the prestigious science magazine, *Nature*, published a comparison between

*Wikipedia* and *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The magazine sent 42 entries from both encyclopaedias to experts on a variety of subjects in a blind research analysis; none of the experts knew the sources of the entries and were asked to judge them on content and composition.

What stunned the editors of *Nature* was not just how few errors were in the unqualified *Wikipedia* entries, but how many there were in *Britannica*. The average science entry in *Wikipedia*, for instance, contained around four inaccuracies; *Britannica* contained about three.

*Britannica* disputed the conclusions in a heated and nasty public display of hubris, but *Nature* stuck to its intellectual guns and both disproved and rejected most of the criticisms of the *Britannica* editors. So does this mean that instant reference works, instant news reporting, instant commentary and analysis on current events are equally as valid as those which are the result of long and deep research?

Recent examples of appalling misrepresentations show how often the public's thirst for knowledge can be devastating if it's satisfied by a shallow appreciation for the truth. When the Israeli Army pursued Hamas terrorists into the Palestinian town of Jenin and a fire-fight ensued, the world's media and Amnesty International accepted the Arab version claiming a massacre had taken place in which Israeli tanks and armed forces had slaughtered 500 innocent residents. This was reported in media around the world, despite the Israeli government denying any such thing had happened. A UN commission several weeks later exonerated the Israeli government of any such slaughter, but the damage had been done by instant reporters giving instant coverage without the benefit of reflection or adequate fact gathering.

The value of 24 hour news and information is self-evident, but not so the problems which it causes. Instant analysis by reporters who just arrive on the scene and are expected to produce a considered report of all the facts must of necessity create glaring errors and misrepresentations of history and culture.

## CONSUMERS AS REPORTERS

But the problems don't start and end with a medium's reporting staff. Today, on the BBC and other internet websites, news editors are asking the consumers of news to become reporters of news. Web surfers with camera-equipped mobile phones are being importuned by fact-hungry media bosses to participate in the gathering of news. Here's what the BBC says on its website:

**Have you taken a picture or filmed some video that tells a story? If so, BBC News wants to hear from you. Get in touch with**

**us. If you capture an unfolding event on camera or mobile phone, either as a photograph or video, then please send it to BBC News.**

All very well and good in theory, but calling upon a viewing, listening or reading public to act as journalists is opening the media to all sorts of potential biases as well as debasing its standards. It could be argued, of course, that the established media is already full of bias, opinion and error, but at least we know and recognise the source of the issue. A commentator who writes from a particular perspective will be known to readers or viewers for a particular slant on issues; errors made by the media are often self-corrected when uncovered. But consumer-originated journalism is rarely subject to the same media introspection.

Just recently, CNN and other broadcast media put to air footage allegedly taken in Afghanistan of a suicide bomber planning to blow up an American army vehicle. Inside the bomber's car, a cameraman took footage of the *jihadist* driving towards a road, telling his story and glorifying the nature of the murderous act he was about to perpetrate. The cameraman got out of the car and continued the conversation by 2-way radio, filming the car disappearing into the distance. A ball of fire suddenly appears and thanks are given to God for the deaths which ensued.

The CNN anchorman warned his audience that his network hadn't managed to authenticate the material, and that the US Army had no record of such an incident. The entire incident could have been genuine or artificially staged as a recruiting drive for potential *jihadists* or as a medium to demoralise Western viewers.

When I was a journalist, such unauthenticated material would never have been used, even given a rider that it was not verified as part of a bona fide incident. It would have been background used by a reporter to give greater depth to his story.

So where then does footage from the suicide bomber in the car or the thief about to record his own robbery or the schoolboy about to video his own Columbine-type massacre, fit with the responsibility of the news media to gather its own information, reliant on the trustworthiness and professionalism of its reporters? We're not talking here about news tip-offs or background briefings which are grist for the journalistic mill, but about the construction of propaganda or publicity in the guise of news, using authoritative media to give it credence. Nor are we dealing with eye-witnesses passing on subjective material to a reporter who then verifies the information through official channels.

## THE MEDIA AS PLAYER

The problem today is the way in which news media are opening up themselves for use as instruments for constructed events. When it's entertainment, such as *Australia's Funniest Home Videos* or an episode of *The Chaser*, the parameters are pre-established, the viewer is pre-warned, and we can all giggle at humanity's follies; but when the ABC or the BBC or CNN accepts a sensational video image of an incident or event and plays it on the nightly news (with or without a newsreader's qualification as to its authenticity) giving it the same gravitas it would its own team of reporter and cameraman who might have taken and authenticated the footage, then the solid ground in which journalism has set its flagpole suddenly becomes dangerously insecure.

What is to stop some single-issue fanatic staging an event to promote his or her particular interest, and passing it off as actuality via an authoritative news medium hungry for footage? Why shouldn't some political or commercial group create an incident which they publicise by videotaping it, only to solve the problem they've created by their particular brand of advantage? And why shouldn't a terrorist organisation hijack the media by staging real or imaginary events to gain maximum coverage?

From the earliest days of the Khomeini revolution in Iran, instant anti-American demonstrations took place the moment a French or British or Canadian television crew appeared with tens of thousands of rent-a-crowd Tehranis shaking their fists at the gates of the beleaguered American Embassy; the crowds dispersed the moment the camera crews disappeared.

Regimes, despots, corporations and politicians have been trying to influence the media for a century or more. But the difference between what happened then and what's happening today is that all news and information was once filtered through the channels the media had built up over centuries to ensure as far as possible that only truth would be told to its consumers.

Today the internet is awash with blogs, fanzines, emags, forums, chat-rooms, and even encyclopaedia, presenting a multiplicity of alternative media which are neither filtered, refereed, nor edited. They provide an exciting and imaginative alternative universe to the often stodgy print, radio and broadcast news media. They enable citizen-journalism, interactivity and involvement and have opened up a new wave of communication. *MySpace* recently purchased for multi-millions of dollars by Rupert Murdoch, is an example of how ordinary people can become extraordinary in their own interconnected world.

But it becomes a different story when the standards which apply to the internet become confused with the standards which should apply to mainstream media. The alternative universe inhabited by bloggers and ezines is exciting and innovative, provided it remains on the internet where the philosophy of *caveat emptor* prevails. But when consumer-created news and information reaches the august pages of newspapers, radio and television channels, surely it's time to take a deep breath, and ask ourselves whether it's worthwhile overthrowing the best part of 200 years of experience and precedent in the editorial integrity of the media, in order to satisfy the demands of a news-hungry audience?

### HOW ABOUT SOME RULES?

We live in a post-modern world, where yesterday's absolutes have given way to today's multiple perspectives. Twenty-four hour news media are here to stay, as is the internet. So rather than ban such footage or new sources of instant information, surely it's better to create rules so that the public is aware that the information with which it's presented is known to be unqualified, unauthorised and uncensored. The line between fact and fiction, between news and entertainment, is already blurred by the proliferation of reality television shows. It would be breaching the ethical boundaries that news media rely upon for their authority if they are too often diluted by the use of spurious sources.

A qualification from an anchorman saying, "We haven't authenticated this material" simply isn't good enough, because what will be remembered is the visual image and not the warning. But cigarette companies have been forced to acknowledge the damage their product does by printing warning labels on their packaging, so why shouldn't news media conform to some sort of warning during the airing of such footage. A flashing caption throughout the video saying, "This material has not been authenticated" would be put things into sharper perspective, and people would then be able to make their own determinations.

Just as we've had to learn new ways of behaving as citizens in a free and liberal democracy as a result of the terrorist threat, so the media will have to learn new ways of incorporating consumer-generated information without anointing it with the imprimatur of veracity by calling it journalism.

*Alan Gold is a novelist and literary critic*



# DOCUMENTATION

## THE AGE, THE ABC AND WOLLONGONG UNIVERSITY

The lack of diversity at *The Age*, under the editorship of Andrew Jaspan, was evident again in the newspaper's coverage of the ABC's revamped *Editorial Values* document - which was released on Monday 16 October 2006 and will come into effect on 1 March 2007. The newly appointed ABC managing director Mark Scott addressed ABC staff during the day and delivered a speech that evening at The Sydney Institute. On Tuesday 17 October *The Age* ran an extract of Mr Scott's talk at The Sydney Institute which was titled "The Editorial Values of the ABC". By Wednesday 18 October it was time for commentary.

So how did *The Age* handle the commentary? Well, the only views covered on the Editorial and Letters Page, as well as on the Opinion Page, bagged Mark Scott's reform agenda - which has the approval of the ABC Board.

First up, Andrew Jaspan's editorial was critical of the Scott speech. Then the Letters Editor ran six letters on the same topic - all six were critical of Mark Scott. One letter by Judith Rodriguez (president of the Friends of the ABC's Victorian branch) was a serious critique of the Scott speech. The five other letters were either mocking or hyperbolic in tone - or both. It seems that *The Age's* Letters Editor prefers ridicule to considered argument.

Turn to the Opinion Page and there were two pieces - and both were critical of Mark Scott. The first was by Matthew Ricketson, *The Age's* media editor. He criticised the Scott proposals and depicted them as "further evidence of the culture wars that the Prime Minister seems determined to wage throughout the nation's cultural institutions".

The second opinion piece was by Sharon Beder, who was described as a Professor in the School of Social Sciences, Media and Communications at the University of Wollongong. She comprehensively bagged Mark Scott - accusing him of "caving in to ideologically motivated attacks on the ABC" and alleging that the "new guidelines are more likely to damage impartiality than enforce it".

Professor Beder's piece was essentially a leftist rant - of the kind heard in many a Humanities Department in many an Australian university. She did not quote even one word from Mark Scott's talk and criticised "too much emphasis on objectivity in news and current affairs". Really. While Sharon Beder did not bother to quote from anything which the ABC managing director had actually said, or from

anything in the *Editorial Policies 2007* document which he released, she saw great significance in the fact that Mark Scott had delivered his speech at The Sydney Institute. Really. Well, it's easier to posit conspiracy theories than to write a considered article which actually requires some genuine research. The fact is that Mr Scott's talk warranted serious analysis irrespective of the platform on which it was delivered.

It so happened that every comment which Professor Beder made about The Sydney Institute was factually incorrect. The follow-up correspondence between Gerard Henderson and Sharon Beder is reproduced below. It provides a case study of the sloppy standards which apparently pass for scholarship in humanities departments at some Australian universities.



**Gerard Henderson to Sharon Beder  
- 2 November 2006**

Dear Sharon

I refer to your article in *The Age* on 18 October 2006 titled "Caving in to ideological critics" - the end of which carried the following note: "Sharon Beder is a professor in the school of social sciences, media and communication at the University of Wollongong."

In my view, if you intend to contribute to the public debate as a person who holds a senior academic position at an institution which is substantially funded by taxpayers - then you have an obligation to do as much research as possible and to fact-check your material before publication.

In your *Age* article you wrote, inter alia:

**It is notable that the new ABC policy was announced at a meeting of the Sydney Institute, a corporate-funded right-wing think tank, which has been one of the ABC's strongest critics on the grounds of bias. Here is a case where bias really is in the eyes of the beholder. The Sydney Institute is a breakaway group from the Institute of Public Affairs, headed by Gerard Henderson, a former New South Wales director of the IPA and chief of staff for John Howard.**

Nearly everything you wrote in this short paragraph is wrong. This is both lazy and incompetent because - if you had done any research or if you had contacted me before writing - there was no need for such errors. In my follow-up letter which was published in *The Age* on 19 October 2006, I had limited space to cover all your factual howlers - but I did correct most. The full correction is as follows:

- The Sydney Institute is a forum for debate and discussion. It is not, strictly speaking, a think tank -

and it is certainly not right-wing. You know better than most because you addressed The Sydney Institute in August 2001 and your talk was published in *The Sydney Papers*. Others on the left have addressed the Institute - including Tariq Ali, Bob Brown, Helen Caldicott, Peter Garrett and many more. If The Sydney Institute was a right-wing think tank - as you asserted in *The Age* - then you would not have been invited to address it and nor would the likes of Tariq Ali.

- The Sydney Institute has not "been one of the ABC's strongest critics". Certainly I have. But The Sydney Institute does not take positions. For the record, a number of supporters of the ABC have addressed The Sydney Institute on the ABC - including ABC chairman Donald McDonald. Not long ago Geraldine Doogue used the Institute's platform to attack my public criticism of the ABC's coverage of the First Gulf War - her talk was published in *The Sydney Papers*. You see, the Institute really is a forum for debate and discussion.

- The Sydney Institute is not, as you alleged in *The Age*, "a breakaway group from the Institute of Public Affairs". I understand that you took this so-called "information" from the web. Just because some source has placed material on the web does not mean that the information is accurate. As a University of Wollongong academic, you should be aware of this.

The facts - if you are interested - are as follows. The Sydney Institute was formed in 1989. It took over from the Institute of Public Affairs (NSW) which was closed down. There was *never* any constitutional or financial link between the Institute of Public Affairs (NSW) and the Melbourne based Institute of Public Affairs Limited (which was often simply termed the "IPA"). None at all. Consequently neither The Sydney Institute nor the Institute of Public Affairs (NSW) broke away from the IPA Limited - because neither organisation was ever part of the IPA Limited. A university professor, you should be able to understand this.

Contrary to your claim in *The Age*, I am not "a former New South Wales director of the IPA" - if by this you imply that there was a Victorian director of the IPA Limited, a New South Wales director of the IPA (NSW) and so on. This was never the case - because there never was a federated organisation.

The only fact that you got correct in the above cited paragraph was where you commented that I was a former "chief of staff for John Howard". Well done. But this is scarcely news - I mention this in my entry in *Who's Who in Australia* and in my CV which is on The Sydney Institute's website - among other places. You should know this.

It is also intellectually dishonest for you to label me with the "right-wing" label. If you have read my

syndicated column over the past two decades, you would know that I have consistently criticised the extreme right - in Australia and elsewhere. In particular, I was one of the leading critics of Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party.

Never to let facts spoil a good story, you wrote to *The Age* on 20 October 2006 - following my letter correcting the factual errors in your *Age* article which was published on 19 October 2006 - in the following terms:

**Gerard Henderson (Letters, 19/10) tries to distance himself from the IPA by claiming that “the Sydney Institute and its predecessor has never been part of the Melbourne-based Institute of Public Affairs”. What he doesn’t mention is that the predecessor of the Sydney Institute was the Sydney IPA.**

**Professor Sharon Beder,  
University of Wollongong**

Once again, you did not bother to do any research or to check with me before writing to *The Age* - using, once again, the designation of the University of Wollongong. The fact is that I did not try to distance myself from the IPA Limited - only to correct your error. In any event, had you done any research of any kind, you would be aware of the fact that I had a number of public disagreements with IPA Limited staff in the second half of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s - including John Stone and Des Moore. You go on to claim that “the predecessor of the Sydney Institute was the Sydney IPA”. No such entity as “the Sydney IPA” ever existed. Even a search of the web - which, I gather, is what you regard as research - would reveal this. I also note that in *The Age* on 19 October 2006, IPA staffer Alan Moran corrected two errors which you had made with respect to the IPA Limited. In short, your article in *The Age* was riddled with errors.

In my view professors who work at taxpayer subsidised universities - and who use their place of work to give authority to the views which they air in the public debate - have an obligation to at least check their so-called facts before contributing to the public debate. Generally, the University of Wollongong has a fine record for research. You have let your colleagues down on this occasion by your laziness born of prejudice.

Yours sincerely  
Gerard Henderson

cc: Professor Gerard R. Sutton  
Vice-Chancellor  
University of Wollongong  
Professor Andrew Wells  
Dean - Faculty of Arts  
University of Wollongong



**Sharon Beder to Gerard Henderson  
- 4 November 2006**

Dear Gerard

It seems to me that your criticisms of my article on bias and the ABC (“Caving in to Ideological Critics”, *The Age*, 18 October 2006) are insubstantial and are merely based on differing definitions of various terms - specifically “think tank”, “right-wing”, “breakaway group” - and the use of the term “Sydney IPA”. I will take these one at a time.

1. Think tank

I note that in earlier years you were happy enough for the Sydney Institute to be labelled a think tank and when the *Sydney Morning Herald* introduced your column in 1990 it stated: “Henderson is the executive director of the Sydney Institute, a privately-funded think-tank.” (“Gerard Henderson Joins *Herald*”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 January 1990, p. 1)

2. Right-wing

Left wing, right wing and centrist are clearly relative terms and common usage doesn’t require them to be definitive. Anything right of centre is plausibly right wing. I think you would have a hard job convincing Australian political commentators that you and the Sydney Institute occupy either a centrist or left wing position in political affairs. If you agree with this, much as you might dislike it, there’s really not much other than right wing left for you.

Just because you criticise the extreme right does not mean that you cannot be categorised as right wing by others. Your letter to *The Age* labelled me “leftist” even though I have sometimes criticised positions taken by people on the left.

I do not see how my invitation to speak at the Sydney Institute proves that it is not a right wing think tank. I see on the Sydney Institute website that you recently gave a speech to the Fabian Society. Would the Fabian Society be on solid ground if it tried to deny it’s leftward lean by reference to this speech of yours?

3. Breakaway

My understanding of break away is that a group of people, who do not agree with the policies/strategies/actions/statements of a group, form their own separate and independent group of similar nature. It does not mean that the new group was originally a part of the first group. You yourself refer in your email to the differences you had with the Melbourne IPA, as does Tom Dusevic in his 1990 *Australian Financial Review* article:

“A falling out with some of the Victorian branch’s senior research fellows led to the formation of the Sydney Institute last year by the IPA’s former NSW

director, Gerard Henderson.” (Tom Dusevic, ‘The Idea Factories’, *Australian Financial Review*, 25 May 1990, p. 1)

#### 4. Sydney IPA

You say that the Institute of Public Affairs (NSW) was never called the Sydney IPA and no such entity ever existed. However, even John Howard has referred to the Sydney-based Institution of Public Affairs as the IPA: “Mr Howard paid tribute to Dr Henderson’s contribution as his senior adviser yesterday, and wished him well in his new job. “Dr Henderson’s views on policy direction, his writing skills and his administration ability will be tremendous assets for IPA,” he said.” (Milton Cockburn, “Howard’s Adviser goes to Think-Tank”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 December 1986, p. 2)

John Hyde, emeritus fellow of the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA), is another of many who called the Institute of Public Affairs (NSW) the Sydney IPA. His book entitled *Dry*, which was published by the IPA states: “By 1985 the *Sydney IPA* had an annual budget of \$120,000 and the Melbourne IPA \$300,000... The *Sydney IPA* ceased activity in the late 1980s with much of its resources going to the Sydney Institute.” (my emphasis) (John Hyde, *Dry: In Defence of Economic Freedom, IPA Occasional papers*, 2002, pp. 112-3)

Yours sincerely  
Sharon Beder.

cc. Ray Cassin, *The Age*  
Media Watch, ABC



#### **Gerard Henderson to Sharon Beder - 9 November 2006**

Dear Sharon

On arrival at the office Monday morning, I read your email dated 4 November 2006 - in response to my email to you dated 2 November 2006.

Initially, I should say that I am genuinely surprised by the intellectual shoddiness of your reply. Especially from a professor at the University of Wollongong - which, generally, has a fine reputation for research.

As a professor at a taxpayer subsidised university, you are expected to support your published writings with genuine research. As you should be aware, researchers in the social sciences are expected to demonstrate that they have made, or have attempted to make, access to *primary sources* - wherever this entails written or electronic material or interviews. Where this is not possible, access to considered secondary sources will do.

Your article in *The Age* (which was published on 18 October 2006) was written without reference to original sources with respect to the assertions which

you made concerning both The Sydney Institute and myself. Also, you did not attempt to contact me - by either phone or email - before writing the piece. And you did not quote from any authoritative secondary sources.

It is much the same with your response. Here you cite as so-called evidence for your propositions the work of journalists and commentators. In some of the instances which you quote, the press reports which you cite were incorrect when initially published. However, at least journalists have to write quickly against tight deadlines. What is your excuse? In some other instances, what you claim as evidence in support of your views is nothing of the sort.

For the record:

- The article published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 9 January 1990 did describe The Sydney Institute as a think tank. But that was over 15 years ago. You are aware that the Institute is not a traditional think tank because you have spoken here and because as a former speaker you are on our mailing list to receive our publications and advice about our functions.

In any event, your response deliberately avoids the issue. In my email to you, I wrote that “strictly speaking” The Sydney Institute is “not a think tank”. My main point was that the Institute “is certainly not right wing”. My point was that if The Sydney Institute was a “right-wing think tank” - as you asserted in *The Age* - then people like you and Tariq Ali would not have spoken here. Since the Institute is a forum for debate and discussion, however, there should be no surprise that people like you have addressed the Institute.

In your note you wrote that I “would have a hard job convincing Australian political commentators” that I and The Sydney Institute “occupy either a centrist or left wing position in political affairs”. Once again, you have not done any research. Quite a few commentators have referred to the plurality of views heard at the Institute. If you doubt that not one commentator would regard me as centrist - why don’t you check with, say, Glenn Milne? Also, in the second half of the 1990s I was called left-wing - by Piers Akerman, no less. Why don’t you do some fact-checking?

Your comparison between the so-called “right-wing” Sydney Institute and the left-wing Fabian Society is just undergraduate point scoring. The Fabian Society has always regarded itself as on the left. The Sydney Institute has never regarded itself as right-wing. Moreover, unlike the Fabian Society, The Sydney Institute has never declared a position on anything.

- The article published by Tom Dusevic in the *Australian Financial Review* on 25 May 1990 - where

reference is made to “a falling out with some of the Victorian branch’s [IPA] senior research fellows” leading to “the formation of The Sydney Institute” - is misleading. The Sydney Institute would have been created irrespective of whether or not I agreed with the IPA’s senior research fellows in the mid 1980s. I would have advised you about this had you bothered to contact me. You seem to regard reference to a factually inaccurate article in a newspaper some 15 years ago as “evidence” resulting from “research”. It is neither.

Here your intellectual dishonesty takes a new twist. In your latest email you assert that a “group of people can break away” from an organisation in spite of the fact that the new group was never “originally a part of the first group”. Well done. This gives a whole new (academic) meaning to the term break way - in that, according to you, a person can break away from an organisation without ever having been part of it in the first instance. How about that?

- Contrary to your claim, neither John Howard nor the *Sydney Morning Herald’s* Milton Cockburn (in his *SMH* report of 20 December 1986) ever referred to such an entity as the “Sydney IPA”. This is pure invention on your part.

Once again, your intellectual laziness is on show - in that you cannot even copy accurately from media reports which, presumably, you have found on the web. In your email of 4 November 2006 you wrote viz:

**You say that the Institute of Public Affairs (NSW) was never called the Sydney IPA and no such entity existed. However, even John Howard has referred to the Sydney-based Institution [sic] of Public Affairs as the IPA.**

You support this with the following quote - taken from an article written in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 20 December 1986 by Milton Cockburn:

**Mr Howard paid tribute to Dr Henderson’s contribution as his senior adviser yesterday, and wished him well in his new job. “Dr Henderson’s views on policy direction, his writing skills and his administration ability will be tremendous assets for the IPA,” he said.**

As the record demonstrates, contrary to your claim, Mr Howard did *not* refer to “the Sydney-based Institution [sic] of Public Affairs” or even to the Sydney-based Institute of Public Affairs. In fact, the word “Sydney” was not used in this quote at all. Yet you present John Howard’s comment of two decades ago as “evidence” for your claim that there was such an identity as the Sydney IPA. You should be able to do better than this.

- I have not read John Hyde’s book *Dry* and he did not speak to me before it was published. If Mr Hyde referred to such an entity as the “Sydney IPA” - then he was incorrect. Once again, I would have told you this - had you bothered to contact me before writing for *The Age* under a bi-line of a University of Wollongong professor. As a university professor, you should understand that to quote from an erroneous statement does not make the statement true.

In fact in the second half of the 1980s, the Melbourne based IPA Limited opened an office in Sydney. It would not have done this if - as you assert - there was a branch of the IPA already in Sydney. To find this out you could have (i) asked me, (ii) consulted a phone book or (iii) read one of the IPA Limited’s publications at the time which listed its various offices. But, then, this would have necessitated some research by you - which seems to be quite beyond you.

In conclusion, I am genuinely surprised that you still regard the quoting of the work of journalists and commentators as involving “research” - when there are primary sources which you were too lazy to check. I trust that fee-paying students at the University of Wollongong are taught better research standards than this. If not, they should be entitled to a refund.

Yours sincerely  
Gerard Henderson

cc: - Professor Gerard R. Sutton  
- Professor Andrew Wells

PS: I note that you have forwarded a copy of your note to Ray Cassin at *The Age* and to the ABC TV *Media Watch* program. You seem to be unaware that *Media Watch* went into recess at the end of its program of Monday 30 October 2006 and will return sometime in 2007 with a new format and a new (yet to be appointed) executive producer. You would know this if you watched the final *Media Watch* program for 2006 or if you had bothered to check the TV guide in, say, the *Illawarra Mercury*. It’s called research.

PPS: As far as I am concerned, this correspondence is concluded.



Note: Professor Sharon Beder did not respond to Gerard Henderson’s email of 9 November 2006.

## DAVID MARR’S (FALSE) SERMON TO THE (TRUE) BELIEVERS

When David Marr believes that he has been misrepresented, he complains (see, for example, the Letters Page in this issue). However, the former presenter of the ABC TV *Media Watch* program seems to believe that those who allege that they have

been misrepresented on *Media Watch* should suffer in silence - as the following correspondence demonstrates.



**Gerard Henderson to David Marr**  
- 17 November 2006

Good afternoon David

I understand that you wowed all believers at the "Soundings" function at the Hunter's Hill Anglican Parish last Sunday. It must have been lotsa fun - and I understand that much hyperbole/exaggeration goes with such an occasion. Well done. Yet I believe that one correction is required. According to my sources, you made a comment along the following lines viz:

**Gerard Henderson exploits the ABC process (which logs and responds to complaints) by bombarding the ABC with complaints of a trivial nature - mostly about how he has been misrepresented. These complaints are so extensive that there almost has to be a "Gerard Henderson Complaints Handler".**

Well, I'm sure that got a laugh - and maybe more than one. However, I thought you might like to know that your statement - as reported to me - is totally and utterly untrue. The fact is that I have never lodged a complaint with the ABC. Not ever. Consequently, it follows that I have never lodged a complaint with the ABC about how I have been misrepresented on the public broadcaster. Never.

It is true that my recent disagreement with the ABC TV *Media Watch* program ended up in the ABC audience and complaints handling process. But this had nothing to do with me. The facts are as follows: [Here the letter to David Marr documented the facts along the lines set out in Gerard Henderson's letter to Donald McDonald - see below]. ...In any event, that's it. I have never lodged a complaint with the ABC and I never intend to do so - since I regard the existing complaints system as a farce. Now, I don't want to spoil your Sunday gags. Yet it seems to me that - when the laughter subsides - your comments with respect to me should have some relevance to the truth. Just some.

The fact is that I never complain to ABC management about comments made about any matter on the ABC. If I have criticisms of the ABC I write about them in my newspaper column, in other articles, or in *The Sydney Institute Quarterly*.

Best wishes. And keep keeping those believers entertained, especially on a Sunday.

Gerard Henderson

**David Marr to Gerard Henderson**  
- 17 November 2006

Sorry Gerard. I speak English. I've read your letters to *Media Watch*. They are complaints.

End of all correspondence on this.

David Marr

**Gerard Henderson to David Marr**  
- 20 November 2006

David

Like you, I speak English. And the fact is that - despite your public claims to the contrary - I have never complained to ABC management about the ABC. I have better ways of wasting time.

Since its inception in 1989, I have contacted *Media Watch* about what it said about me on one occasion only - i.e. one occasion in 17 years. My approach to *Media Watch* on this occasion was not a formal complaint. Indeed it was no different in kind to your approach to me concerning the reference to you in the most recent issue of *The Sydney Institute Quarterly* - except that *SIQ* offers a right of reply.

There would have been no formal complaint if Peter McEvoy had the courage to answer his correspondence - instead of seeking refuge in the ABC's bureaucratic complaints procedures. Unlike you, I am quite good at accepting criticism. However, like you, I do not appreciate being misrepresented or verballed.

Keep morale high. Here's hoping that you - and the Hunter's Hill believers who heard your recent sermon - enjoy the blessings of the Festive Season.

Gerard

PS: Like you, I will not be continuing the correspondence.



**AUNTY'S MONEY FOR JAM**

The ABC's *Annual Report* for the year ending 30 June 2006 was tabled by Senator Helen Coonan, the Minister for Communications, on 7 November 2006. The report was presented to the Minister by ABC Chairman Donald McDonald on behalf of the ABC Board. In the Board Directors' Statement, all Board members praised outgoing ABC managing director Russell Balding for reforming the ABC's complaints handling processes. *The Annual Report* revealed that Mr Balding was given a golden handshake on his retirement of over \$1 million - including his salary, annual leave entitlements and a termination payment. It is understood that the latter amount reflected the Board's appreciation for Russell Balding's service to the ABC - including his revamping of the ABC complaints handling procedures.

On reading the directors' statement, Gerard Henderson wrote to Donald McDonald advising the ABC Chairman as to how the revised ABC complaints procedures worked in fact. He drew Mr McDonald's attention to a case where the Head of ABC Audience and Consumer Affairs had found in favour of the ABC TV *Media Watch's* interpretation of a Victorian Court of Appeal decision - without actually reading the case and relying instead on *Media Watch's* own defence of itself.

Mr McDonald stepped down as ABC chairman on 31 December 2006 - without responding to or acknowledging this letter.

### GERARD HENDERSON TO DONALD MCDONALD - 17 NOVEMBER 2006

Many thanks for the invitation to your lunch with Ian Macfarlane last week. I very much enjoyed both your hospitality and the conversation. As previously mentioned, I believe your choice of Ian as the 2006 Boyer Lecturer was an inspired one. His lectures, when published, will make an important - and long lasting - contribution to an understanding of the economic reform which has taken place in Australia in recent decades. Most importantly, the 2006 Boyer Lectures are fair to both the Coalition and Labor.

On another matter, I was recently looking through the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's *Annual Report* for the year ended 30 June 2006. I note that the Board Directors' Statement made the following comment with respect to Russel Balding viz:

**Russell Balding successfully directed Executive management to meet the many significant challenges set by the Board during his term, including reform to the Corporation's complaints handling processes...**

In view of the statement, I thought that you and other Board members might like some first-hand information about how the ABC audience complaint handling procedures actually operate in practice - in the first instance at least. The facts are as follows:

- On 31 August 2006 I wrote to Peter McEvoy disputing some comments which Monica Attard had made about me on *Media Watch* on Monday 28 August 2006. Mr McEvoy did not reply but Ms Attard did phone me on 1 September 2006. At the end of this conversation, I was advised that Peter McEvoy would respond to me in writing. No such reply was ever received.
- On 6 September 2006 I wrote to Monica Attard disputing some additional comments made about me on *Media Watch* on Monday 4 September 2006. Ms Attard did not acknowledge, or reply to, this note.
- On 12 September 2006 I received an email from Kim Dalton, Director of Television, in which he wrote:

**The Executive Producer of *Media Watch* Peter McEvoy has determined that your email of 4 [sic] September 2006 is a complaint. In line with the ABC Editorial Policy your complaint has been referred to the Head of Audience and Consumer Affairs. She will investigate the issues you raise and provide a direct response.**

- As you will note, it was Peter McEvoy - not me - who put this matter into the ABC complaints procedure. This suited him because it meant that he did not have to reply to my correspondence to *Media Watch*. Also, in the event, Kirstin McLiesh (Head, Audience and Consumer Affairs) simply took Peter McEvoy's defence of *Media Watch*, topped and tailed it, and sent it back to me under her own name as the outcome of her so-called independent "investigation". It took me some three weeks to get a copy of what Mr McEvoy had sent Ms McLiesh - it was only then that the plagiarism became evident.
- Ms McLiesh wrote to me on 25 October 2006 advising that simply presenting Mr McEvoy's case to her - as the outcome of her investigation with respect to me - was all that she is "obliged to do...under the ABC Editorial Policies". And Peter McEvoy emailed me on 27 October 2006 advising me that "we are not embarrassed by the handling of your complaint in the least". This from the executive producer of the ABC TV *Media Watch* program which regularly condemns the plagiarism of others.

In her letter to me dated 25 October 2006, Ms McLiesh also advised that, if I was dissatisfied with her response, I could "pursue this matter with the review mechanisms available". I will not do so - since I remain unconvinced that the remaining review mechanisms would be any better than the one I experienced at first instance.

I have attached a copy of my email to Kirstin McLiesh dated 25 October 2006 in which I documented how Ms McLiesh had simply taken Mr McEvoy's self-serving defence of *Media Watch* and presented it to me - point by point and, in some instances, word for word - as the outcome of her very own "investigation" into this matter in her capacity as an ostensibly independent Head - Audience and Consumer Affairs. As previously documented, both Ms McLiesh and Mr McEvoy regard her response to me as totally adequate.

In conclusion, I acknowledge that - during his time as managing director - Mr Balding attempted to reform the ABC's complaints handling processes. However, as this letter documents, the outcome in practice can be manifestly inadequate.

In view of the fact that all Board members signed the Directors' Statement, I have forwarded a copy of this

letter to the current members of the Corporation's Board - along with Murray Green.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

Gerard Henderson

Attachment: Gerard Henderson's email to Kirstin McLiesh dated 25 October 2006.



**To: KIRSTEN MCLIESH**  
**Head - Audience & Consumer Affairs**  
**ABC**

**From: GERARD HENDERSON**

**Date: 25 OCTOBER 2006**

Dear Ms McLiesh

As you will recall, I wrote to you on 26 September 2006 advising that "I would like a copy of any correspondence which Peter McEvoy or Monica Attard forwarded to you in relation to your investigation with respect to me" concerning the *Media Watch* programs which aired on 28 August 2006 and 4 September 2006. As you will be aware, I finally received this material by email from Mr McEvoy on 18 October 2006 - i.e. over three weeks after it was initially requested. In other words, it took over three weeks for the ABC to forward to me a two page document.

When I received the material on 18 October I was somewhat busy - and I have only just had an opportunity to examine it in detail. The material confirms my opinion expressed earlier (my email to you dated 25 September 2006 refers) about the gross inadequacy of the ABC's audience and complaints handling procedures.

I am not surprised that the ABC was so tardy in providing a copy of the material which Peter McEvoy provided to you with respect to what the ABC deemed to be my complaint about the *Media Watch* program. A textual comparison of what you wrote to me on 22 September 2006 advising, in effect, that *Media Watch* was right and I was wrong is all but identical with the (undated) advice which Peter McEvoy provided to you advising that *Media Watch* was right and I was wrong. How about that?

- In his note to you, Peter McEvoy engaged in pedantry by arguing that when, on 4 September 2006, Monica Attard said that "those we criticised were furious" she was raising the plural to describe the singular. In other words, *Media Watch's* line was that I was not criticised on its 4 September program - only *The Australian*.

In your letter to me dated 22 September you run exactly the same argument.

- In his note to you, Peter McEvoy claimed that the reasons why the Victorian Court of Appeal found that Jack Thomas' statement to the Australian Federal Police in Pakistan was involuntary is set out in Paragraphs 94, 91, 85-87, 33, 80 and 92 - in that order.

In your letter to me dated 22 September 2006, you run exactly the same argument and you quote paragraphs 94, 91, 85-87, 33, 80 and 92 - in that order.

- A textual analysis of your letter of 22 September 2006 demonstrates that you even lifted words from Peter McEvoy's note to you and placed them in your letter to me. Some examples illustrate the point:

**Peter McEvoy to Kirstin McLiesh**

"The Court of Appeal held that Jack Thomas' admissions in his AFP interview on 8 March 2003 were involuntary"

"That treatment included threats of torture"

"In this context, it was held by the court, Thomas' will was overborne (par 80)."

"This made the confession involuntary"

**Kirstin McLiesh to Gerard Henderson**

"The Court of Appeal held that Jack Thomas' admissions in his AFP interview on 8 March 2003 were involuntary."

"That treatment included threats of torture"

"In his context, it was held by the Court, Thomas' will was overborne (par 80)."

"This made the confession involuntary."

Congratulations for your initiative in altering Peter McEvoy's small "c" court to your big "c" Court. Well done. In all other respects concerning the words quoted above, however, you have simply lifted Mr McEvoy's words and passed them off as your own. I wonder whether the *Media Watch* team - which so readily criticises the plagiarism of others - will take up this particular case. I doubt it.

One final point.

In his note to you Peter McEvoy wrote:

**Henderson says that the court's decision was that the confession was involuntary - this is correct.**

Mr McEvoy also went on to assert that "the Court's decision was that the confessions were tainted by threats of torture".

In your letter to me dated 22 September 2006, you wrote:

**As you say in your email, the Court's decision was that the confession was involuntary.**

You also went on to assert that "it is a fair and accurate summary of the Court's decision to say that the confessions were tainted by threats of torture".

Here you add the words "it is a fair and accurate summary" - and then pass off Mr McEvoy's words as your own.

Once again you simply repeat Mr McEvoy's line - word for word in places. As a result you repeat Mr McEvoy's error.

In my *Sydney Morning Herald* column of 22 August 2006 I wrote:

**In the Supreme Court at first instance, [Justice] Cummins found Thomas's interview with the AFP was conducted properly and fairly, that the answers of the accused were voluntary and that the absence of legal representation should not lead to the exclusion of the interview as evidence in his trial. It was this ruling that was overturned by the Court of Appeal, which quashed the conviction.**

This part of my column was criticised on *Media Watch* on 4 September 2006. Yet Peter McEvoy's note - which you have endorsed - effectively acknowledges that I was correct. In his note to you Peter McEvoy wrote that I was "correct" in maintaining that the Court of Appeal decided that Jack Thomas' "confession was involuntary". This was the ratio of the decision. Yet on *Media Watch* on 4 September 2006 Monica Attard told viewers that I, among others, misreported the facts. Now, it may be that Ms Attard and you do not know the difference between the ratio and the obiter of a legal decision. But Mr McEvoy does - because he has referred to this elsewhere.

### Conclusion

As previously mentioned, I regard the ABC's existing complaints procedures as a farce. Your handling of this matter demonstrates the point.

I was advised on 12 September 2006 that my email of 4 September to Monica Attard has been regarded by the ABC as a complaint and had been referred to you in your capacity as Head of Audience and Consumer Affairs. You had control of this matter for at least nine working days. But all you did was top and tail a note prepared by Peter McEvoy and send it back to me under your own name.

This is incompetent, unfair and lazy. The Head of Audience and Consumer Affairs is supposed to operate independently of ABC program matters. In his instance you simply forwarded Mr McEvoy's defence of *Media Watch* to me under your own name. What a farce.

Yours sincerely  
Gerard Henderson



# BOOK REVIEWS

**John McConnell**

## 51<sup>st</sup> STATE?

By Dennis Altman

Scribe Short Books pb2006

rrp \$22

ISBN 1 920769 98 6

Rupert Murdoch recently urged Australians not to allow doubts about one policy (Iraq) or one American administration (the George W Bush Presidency) "to fester into an irrational antipathy that sees America as a greater threat to world peace than al-Qaeda".

Some members of the left in Australia underplay threats posed by radical Islamists. And they speak as if Australia is losing its sovereignty to the United States. In his speech to the American Australian Association (14 November 2006), Rupert Murdoch stressed that the two countries possess common interests and share values and bonds. Radical Islamists are targeting and will continue to target both countries, Rupert Murdoch warned. Both countries need each other. While the Australian American Alliance remains important to both countries, he said, it is particularly important to Australia.

Rupert Murdoch urged Australians to "resist and reject facile, reflexive, unthinking anti-Americanism" evident today in much of Europe. From this perspective, a new book by a left-wing academic is both timely and interesting. Dennis Altman explores the theme of the Americanisation of Australia in *51st State?* He examines whether we are surrendering our political and cultural sovereignty to the United States.

The book's title owes its origins to a remark made by Don Watson. We should recognise the inevitable, Don Watson had said, and petition to join the United States. Now Don Watson's statement was not without irony. But his central message was clear enough. Dennis Altman argues that to believe, as many do on the left, that we are being swallowed by United States hegemony is misguided. Australian self-interest lies at the heart of the alliance, he believes. Most Australians understand this point. Hence, the lack of general outrage, he writes, at the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Dennis Altman argues that many left-wing critics are blurring convergence with causality. They observe simple similarities. They sense Americanisation. Attributing American influence to everything that individuals dislike about contemporary Australia, Altman notes, is the mirror image of emulating everything American. The language of cultural imperialism, Altman adds, posits a simple relationship between globalisation and Americanisation.

But it is more complex than that. American cultural influence extends around the world. Countries do not simply soak up such external cultural influences. Rather, they transform them. This is particularly so when they possess a distinctive culture, as Australia does.

We are constantly remaking our sense of what it is to be Australian, Dennis Altman observes. He discusses a mix of factors militating against 51st State status, including our comparatively long history as a democratic nation, our strong sense of Australian identity, significant differences in our political and economic systems and in our respective attitudes to religion, multiculturalism and the role of government.

Nor should we underestimate British influence in Australia, Altman notes. He refers to our Head of State who is an hereditary ruler of Britain, an Australia Day that commemorates the arrival of the British, the role of the Anglican Church, Oxfam, television shows such as *The Bill* and movies such as *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*.

Dennis Altman argues that the decisions to commit military forces to Vietnam and Iraq reflect assessments made by the Coalition governments of the day. He sees John Howard's agenda as owing relatively little to American influence. It is more the product of long-existing Liberal agenda. Altman is critical of Robert Manne's allegation of "dominionisation" under the Howard Government. It underplays John Howard's efforts to develop political and personal links with Asia. Similarly, Altman allows that the Howard Government may be guided primarily by local considerations in formulating its attitude to the Kyoto Protocol. If we Australians are timid and passive,

Dennis Altman suggests, the answer lies in ourselves. He notes wryly that key members of the left in this country allege right-wing appropriation of American ideas; meanwhile, they themselves gain inspiration from American opponents of the status quo such as Noam Chomsky and Barbara Ehrenreich. Australia's continuing commitment to the alliance represents an independent Australian calculation of national interest. It is a commitment that continues to receive the support of both major political parties and most Australians.

## THE MYTH OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION

By David Potts

Scribe Melbourne, pb 2006

rrp \$ 59.95

ISBN 1 920769 84 6

The author of a new book claims to provide a more complete and balanced assessment than most forerunners on the Great Depression in Australia. In

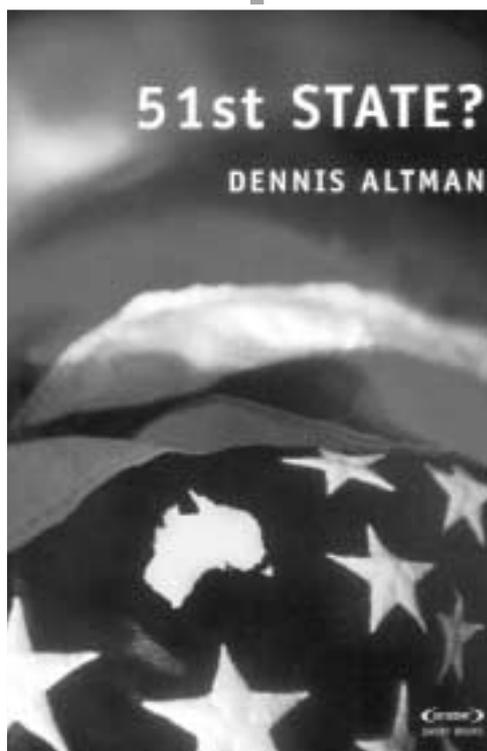
*The Myth of the Great Depression*, David Potts argues that the traditional images we associate with the 1930s Great Depression reflect the concentration of many historians on the suffering and hardship experienced by the poorest people in the poorest areas.

These images include mass unemployment, queuing for the dole (sustenance), families being evicted on to the streets, living in humpies, starving people scouring dustbins for food scraps, men tramping the countryside in search of work, sickness, suicides and widespread feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

Such experiences, David Potts argues, were confined to a beleaguered minority. They did not constitute universal

experience. His analysis draws on statistics, newspaper articles, biographies, plus some 1200 interviews.

The interviews were with people who lived through the Depression years. They were conducted from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s and undertaken with the assistance of David Pott's history students at the University of Melbourne and subsequently La Trobe University. He did extensive computer analysis of approximately 500 interviews.



Potts does not dispute that many people suffered during the Great Depression. But he is critical of the dominant historical interpretation. This approach constructs a Depression story around one pattern of events. It overlooks many positive experiences.

Essentially, David Potts believes that many history books record the Great Depression story incompletely. He accepts that unemployment leapt threefold - but not higher. That bankruptcy rates doubled. That farmers typically moved deeper into debt. That many people were hurt by the Depression. That many felt insecure.

David Potts records many of the respondents' answers throughout the pages of *The Myth of the Great Depression*. As with the information available from other sources, he subjects replies to careful scrutiny and cross checking. Some respondents, including some poor people, spoke about the Great Depression period with affection.

The evidence, Potts argues, points to much resilience and happiness during the Great Depression. Malnutrition declined. Health improved. Infant mortality fell. So did death rates among the general population. After rising in 1930, suicide rates declined. At least three quarters of the workforce were in employment at any one time. Those on full award wages maintained or even improved their standard of living.

In this way, David Potts constructs a broader perspective of the human experience during the 1930s Depression. Most historians of the 1930s Great Depression, he concludes, have gone beyond the evidence. They have exaggerated the worst Depression experiences.

I suspect that David Potts is not enthusiastic about being seen as another participant in Australia's "history wars". But his analysis leads him to reject the partial Depression picture presented by many (left-wing) historians just the same.

Consider his criticisms of fellow historians. Some historians have relied on unemployment estimates that are too high. They have exaggerated the extent of the economic decline. Some historians, he points out, chose to write about falling wages without reference to declining prices.

Many social histories, he says, have neglected the underground or black economy, a significant feature

of the Depression years. They have underplayed charitable assistance. And they have failed to highlight the circumstances that compelled many doctors, landlords, even banks to act charitably towards debtors in many instances. In addition, he accuses many historians of the Great Depression of having operated on a simplistic connection between material wealth and human happiness.

Why might this have happened? Potts sheets the explanation to their values system. Most historians of the Great Depression, Davis Potts notes, were left-wing. They were predisposed to adopt a critical analysis of capitalism. This is what they did.

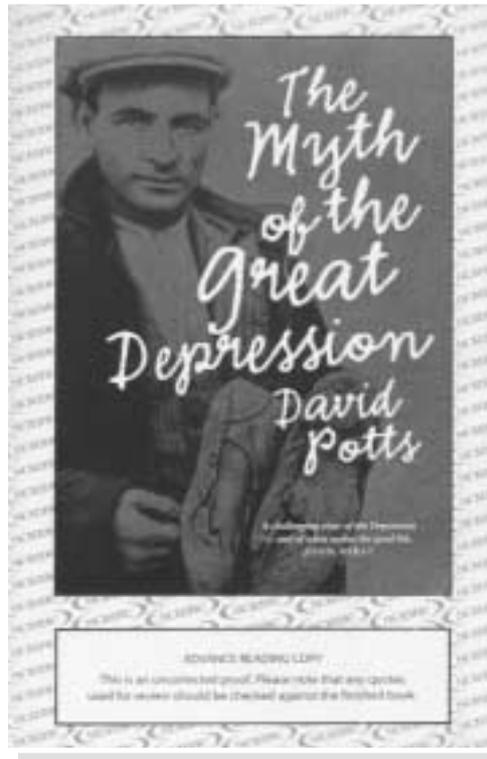
Lest it be thought that here is someone from the right of the political spectrum seeking to undermine the works of left-wing historians, it should be noted that David Potts' sympathies lie with the left. This is clear from the discussion in his book. His father was a

Communist Party member who worked for the party's paper and saw the Great Depression in conventional Marxist terms. Nevertheless, the evidence compels Potts to conclude that the dominant left-wing interpretation of the Great Depression has underplayed human attributes such as resilience, stoicism, achievement and happiness.

A hidden and distorting set of values, Potts concludes, have underpinned most histories of the 1930s Great Depression. All too often, Great Depression details have been untrue, exaggerated or over generalised. Meanwhile, a number of historians have chosen to reject cheerful accounts of experiences as romanticism and nostalgia.

David Potts also believes that the Australian democratic system made a distinctive contribution to the welfare of its citizens during the Depression years. *The Myth of the Great Depression* is persuasive and easy to read. David Potts' criticisms of the dominant interpretation of the Great Depression in Australia deserve a wide readership and careful reflection among historians. In addition, Chapter 10 includes a significant discussion of the dilemmas involved in undertaking oral history.

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



# WHERE HAVE ALL THE ARCHITECTURAL ESSAYISTS GONE?

Alice Grundy

THE BEST AUSTRALIAN ESSAYS 2006

Ed. Drusilla Modjeska

Black Inc

pb, 2006

RRP \$27.95

ISBN 1863952780

The essay is commonly the terrain for intrepid students and snobs but *The Best Australian Essays 2006* (Black Inc) starts to prove otherwise. In her introduction to the collection of some 30 essays, Drusilla Modjeska bemoans the state of the essay in contemporary Australia while simultaneously lauding the efforts of the contributors of the volume which she edited. With an opening which places Montaigne as the pinnacle of the personal essay and proceeds to lament the lack of lawyers, astronomers and architects who are engaging in this form, Modjeska seems to miss the bald facts of circumstance which separate contemporary professionals from a sixteenth century writer.

It is less that there is a dearth of possibilities for the publication of such material as Modjeska suggests, but that this form was never the place of such professionals and the modern world provides endless other opportunities for expression besides an aging form of rhetoric. On the other hand, Modjeska's compliments for Australian essays are, for the most part, confirmed by the range and quality of the contributions to this volume, despite some lesser entries like Anna Krien's "White Collar Dreaming". From Shakespeare to Biggles, education to justice, this collection is certainly broad ranging and provides a snapshot of some Australian concerns of 2006, albeit those of a particular circle.

Clive James supplies reliably entertaining prose in his essay "Sludge Fiction". First published in the

*Times Literary Supplement*, James writes of his experience as a youth beginning his now long and illustrious career as a man of letters with Biggles and his ilk. While I'm of the wrong generation and gender for Biggles, his description of the passage from trashy reading, gradually moving through to literature, is one which I can easily recognise as common experience. His case is strong when he argues for the use of such reading as the perfectly respectable starting point for the development of complex understandings of the world, particularly if it begins with "fantasising about the possibility of individual initiative and valour having some effect in a world which I already knew to be unjust". James has a particular knack with the essay, appearing alternately erudite and entertaining. Perhaps it is easier to remember the times of his youth with fond nostalgia from his position as one of the more famous writers of the present day, well established as an ex-pat and *auteur*. And this gives hope to the naysayers who deplore Harry Potter or The Baby Sitters' Club - we could well be raising the next generation of intellectual giants.

Speaking of youth, Margaret Simons writes honestly and with candour of her dilemma; which high school would be the best for her children and work best with her ideology on education. She writes, "I am afraid of the future, afraid of difference and afraid for my children, which is the greatest fear of all." The choice is between her local public and private schools, a choice not even considered by some of her comfortably middle class friends. The public school has a bad reputation and indeed when she visits the principal of Debney Park Secondary College there is an incident at the school and the police are called.

Her ultimate point is clear, that for its intake the school is academically competitive and for their efforts they deserve the faith of more affluent parents. Ending with as much honesty as she began, Simons writes, "my children say they don't want to go. Their reason is simple. None of their friends will be accompanying them." This is an essay which embraces its form, the author balances the personal and the public to produce an intellectual and intimate interpretation of a contemporary bourgeois conundrum.

One of the most pleasurable entries in this collection is taken from David Malouf's address to the World Shakespeare Congress 2006. I was concerned from its opening that Malouf would spend his pages rehashing the debate over Shakespeare's identity but instead he writes of the continuing interest in this author (and all this without one mention of Marxist or feminist

readings). Instead Malouf reconsiders the very Shakespearian elements which have sustained him as a favourite over hundreds of years and despite some murderously dull high school English classes. A useful analogy which Malouf draws is between 1930s cinema and Elizabethan Globe audiences saying:

**Numbers indicate that play-going in the 1590s was like cinema-going in the 1930s, cheap popular entertainment with no pretensions to being more; and Hollywood in the '30s, with its studio and star system, might be as good a model as we can light on for the theatre Shakespeare worked in.**

With an appreciable attention to detail and a pleasant reminder of some of Shakespeare's most impressive character constructions, Malouf's entry is one of the better contributions and, as with James, proves the place of Australian writers on the international stage. No pun intended.

There has been much in the media of late regarding drugs and in particular the rise of ice or methamphetamine but Anna Krien attempts to describe the flip side to the junkies on the street. As Krien writes, "we see the token 'junkies' rolled out for another round in the media when an estimated two thirds or more of users are elsewhere." Were she to mount an argument in "White Collar Dreaming" instead of simply hinting at the possible benefits of the legalisation of drugs, her essay would be of greater interest. Instead there is discussion of the use of heroin and ice by professionals in stable jobs but never a specific opinion on this situation and the reader is left with sentiments like "Yes, most of them admit, they self medicate. But doesn't everyone?" Surely there's a difference between tuning out, watching a film or taking a Panadol and injecting heroin. Perhaps the readers of *Yen*, a fashion magazine aimed at women under 30 which first published the essay, do not expect in-depth analysis. However, such an article without an explicit stance is deceptively banal.

From an absolute absence of ethics, I come to the last essay in the book and the most moralising. Raymond Gaita is one of Australia's most renowned philosophers, not an easy title to achieve. This is a result of his relatively popular books *The Philosopher's Dog* and *Romulus My Father*, which receive two mentions in this short essay alone. Gaita's central concern is with morality, justice and how his conceptions of each can be upheld in contemporary society, in a world which he finds worrying at best. In his closing, Gaita divides people into two groups. Firstly there is the man who

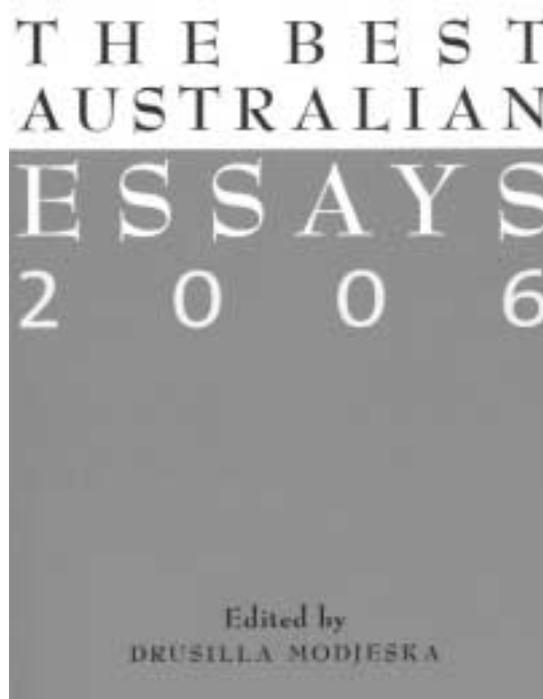
**values his life and the life of his loved ones above all else. For him anything that endangers his life or theirs will tip the scale in favour of choosing all available means to improve security.**

The second type of person "believes nothing matters more than to live justly". This seems to me a false dichotomy. A desire for security and concern for fellow citizens is perfectly consistent with an abiding belief in the importance of justice. I think the point which Gaita is hinting at is that a privileging of security or of justice will ultimately determine whether or not a society is moral but this simplification of the issue doesn't provide a convincing argument for the moral supremacy of "justice".

Despite some lacklustre arguments and the distinct favouring of certain journals,

including *The Monthly*, *Meanjin* and Black Inc's own *Reflected Light*; *La Trobe Essays*, *The Best Australian Essays 2006* is a worthwhile collection. While Australia may not have any Montaignes or emotive architects writing essays, the overall diversity and quality of this anthology speaks well of Australian intellectual life, whether in the diaspora of ex-pat Aussies around the world or those firmly rooted in Melbourne.

*Alice Grundy has recently completed a BA Honours in English, at the University of Sydney*



# REVIEW OF THE REVIEWERS

**Stephen Matchett**

It is ten years since Pauline Hanson's maiden speech in the House of Representatives briefly bewitched many Australians. Thankfully Ms Hanson, and the ideologues and opportunists who prostituted themselves to the cause of her nasty nostrums, have abandoned politics. However, a decade on it seems some survivors of her attacks still do not have a clue what happened.

Two new books demonstrate how much trouble the self appointed keepers of the national conscience are having in digging their way out of the rubble: Carmen Lawrence's *Fear and Politics* (Scribe) and Andrew West's *Inside the Lifestyles of the Rich and Tasteful* (Pluto Press). And the descriptions of what average Australians actually think in Judith Brett and Anthony Moran's *Ordinary People's Politics* (Pluto Press) demonstrate why members of the left leadership, king hit by Hansonism, have buckleys of building a new power base until they accept that people who do not agree with their agenda of the republic, refugees and reconciliation, plus mandatory Howard hating, are not automatically idiots. Brett and Hanson's book should be read by ideologues, of all persuasions, because it confirms what Ms Hanson, clue-less on most matters of policy and principle, instinctively understood - that most Australians do not need self appointed intellectual experts and moral arbiters to do their political thinking for them.

## MORAL MIDDLE CLASS

For all the damage she did, Hansonism was never a real threat to the Australian political system. What One Nation expressed was less a political philosophy than an assembly of ill informed slogans and the Australian electorate as a whole was a wake up to the thuggish spivery of the Hansonite beige shirts. There was never any way the urgers who clambered aboard Hanson's bizarre bandwagon were ever going to occupy the treasury benches, or get their grubby hands on the levers of economic power in the public service. However, there is no doubting that Ms Hanson wrought a revolution in public life in the way she eroded the opinion making authority of the moral middle class, in place since the Whitlam years in the early 1970s.

This was a profound change. It ended an ascendancy that had shaped Australian politics for decades and may well have stayed in place if Ms Hanson had not provided the circuit breaker. In a couple of years she diminished the ability of people on the public payroll - in the universities, churches and welfare organisations, in government policy agencies and white collar unions - to cloak their own ideas and interests in the guise of universal morality and lay down the law about the sort of society Australia should be.

The MMC had always shaped debate in Australian society, as Dr Brett demonstrates in her two important histories of conservatism in Australian public life Robert Menzies *Forgotten People* (Pan Macmillan, 1992) and *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*. (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

According to Dr Brett, Robert Menzies "bore the values and experiences of the Australian moral middle class with assurance and aplomb; their self-confident belief in their own virtue; their faith in their independence of judgement; their sense of civic service and obligation ...." These characteristics were as much tied to a conservative individual psychology as much as they were to occupations or even economic status. They were the result of a natural sense of self-reliance and often social conservatism, which were frequently extensions of religious belief. (*Australian Liberals*, 125)

The members of the original moral middle class were the sergeant majors of society. Immensely self disciplined they believed in hard work and reward for effort. They were suspicious of the rich but believed they had to be ever vigilant against organised labour, lest it challenge their own social standing. It was the moral middle class that filled the churches, funded the charities and set society's tone for decades. And it was the moral middle class that kept the conservatives in power in Canberra for most of the twentieth century.

And governments delivered for them - in spades - especially in the long boom from the end of World War II to the oil shock of the 1970s. Don Aitkin's book *What Was It All For?* (Allen and Unwin, 2005), charting the fate of his school year, the class of 1953, demonstrates how. As educational opportunities expanded in a richer Australia the MMC grew in numbers, authority and self-confidence. The intellectual emphasis on humanities and social sciences in the schools and universities ensured they were educated for the public-sector growth industries of education and administration. Instead of a sense of being caught between capital and labour that Menzies had appealed to, the new MMC listened to Gough Whitlam's assertions of the morally

transforming power of the state and came to see themselves as the country's natural elite.

Dismissive of the power of the purse, contemptuous of the old union obsession with arbitrated conditions of blue-collar employment, the MMC assumed their ideas on pretty much everything were the ones that mattered most. In effect, they believed their education, social sophistication and positions of responsibility in the public sector came to signify a state of grace.

By 1975 the MMC held the commanding intellectual heights of Australian life through their power in the schools and public service, which ensured they were able to promote their ideas and attitudes to the whole country. Which they duly did for nearly 30 years.

And while the sorts of people who had always made up the MMC stayed the same their values changed. David Burchell sets out what happened, albeit without explaining why, in his *Australian Literary Review* essay (6 September 2006).

**In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, sober professional men, often motivated by intensely felt religious beliefs of various kinds, built for themselves small private family universes of piety, devotion to public duty and attention to the life of the spirit and the heart. ... By the fourth generation they had mutated into outwardly bohemian free thinkers, albeit marked still by intense seriousness, a profound sense of differentness from the herd and severely avant-garde tastes.**

The old MMC focus on rectitude and responsibility towards the disadvantaged who lived locally was replaced with an emphasis on abstract ideology and on the need to transform society, rather than to work in communities. And in the process they found a way to assert their superiority over the rest of us by creating a catechism of their own.

Employment in the public sector was good, aspirational entrepreneurs were vulgar moneygrubbers. Opening up the Australian economy was bad because it privileged economics above "social justice" (an all purpose phrase often invoked when an interest group is not getting what it wants). Anybody who questioned the rights of refugees was a racist. So were those who dared suggest that reconciliation with indigenous Australians for past wrongs did not do anything to help address those suffering present ones. Individuals not especially interested in the republic were reactionaries. The American alliance dragged Australia down (further under Ronald Reagan and both George Bush and George W Bush than under Bill Clinton).

## THE WHITLAM BANDWAGON

Dr Brett explained the changes that came with, and continued after, Gough Whitlam's time as Labor leader, when members of the moral middle class abandoned the Liberal cause for his standard, thus ending any idea that the ALP was just class based or solely the servant of the unions;

**... the middle class people who came to support Labor because of its policies on Aborigines, or multiculturalism, or women, or the arts, or attitudes to Asia, or the environment belied these descriptions. They supported Labor because it accorded with their principled beliefs about policies that would advance the national interest. (*Australian Liberals*, 146)**

The MMC may have changed party allegiances but, at least in Dr Brett's description, since the 1970s they have continued to be convinced of their own superiority. Whatever motivates other Australians' political views, the moral middle class acts on "principled beliefs". Another sure sign of the MMC's state of grace is its sophistication, which distinguishes them from those less fortunate Australians who, regardless of their incomes, are impoverished by the way they look at the world.

Dr Brett defined the divide in a way which was refreshingly frank but stark in its snobbery. Australia is divided between the educated and the others. First there are the smarties:

**The key here is the way tertiary education, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, trains people in processes of abstract and critical thinking that are reflexive, abstract and problematising. ... All of this makes them confident with the new, and excited by the possibility of alternatives, able to reach out for new ideas inside open-ended systems of meaning.**

In contrast, other Australians:

**... learn their skills and knowledge in the university of life through hard knocks, practical experience and submission to authority. They learn a knowledge that is densely particular and situation-specific, tied to the local, known world, and of little use with the new and the different.**

Another divide is between the cosmopolitans and the locals:

**Cosmopolitans have the social skills and attitudes that enable them to move among people of different cultures with**

confidence and purpose, whereas locals, even when they travel, are more attuned to the familiar than the different. ... Cosmopolitans' and locals' different styles of knowing are associated with different projected moral communities. One aspect of globalisation is the development of human rights as a universal language which creates a universal human moral authority co-extensive with the cosmopolitans' potential field of knowledge. Locals still live inside much smaller moral communities - of family, friends and neighbours." (*Australian Liberals*, pp 210, 211)

You don't need postdoctoral training in rhetoric to recognise these generalisations as pompous and patronising. Which is one of the reasons why so many Australians rejected didactic MMC moralising about what they should think and listened to Pauline Hanson when she spoke to their concerns in language that resonated with them. In the seat of Oxley in 1996, ordinary Australians voted less for Pauline Hanson than against what the sneering smarties had been telling them to think for 20 years. They did it again in the federal election of 1998 and in state polls in Queensland and Western Australia.

And in the process they stunned the MMC's self-appointed spokes-people, who years after One Nation self-destructed are still stunned. In particular they are angry at the way they have lost their authority and furious at the way their ideas are now being ignored.

## REACTION TO ECONOMIC REFORM

A great deal of the anger is driven by the economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, ironically the same changes that infuriated the Hansonites. In *The Experience of Middle Australia: The Dark Side of Economic Reform* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), Michael Pusey reported how public sector managers feel their skills are no longer valued (64) and how the "morally debilitating effect of the market" (94) serves right-wingers intent on "the political disempowerment of the broad middle class" (167). Dr Brett presented a similar complaint, "many of the men and women forced out of the public sector by various downsizings felt justifiably bitter at the

rejection of the meaning of their life's work and the contribution they felt they had made to the common good." (*Australian Liberals*, 174).

Perhaps the most explicit examples of this argument are in some of the contributions to Marian Sawer and Barry Hindess' collection *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia*, (API Network, 2004), which assume that the interests of disadvantaged Australians and the welfare and education industries, favoured by the MMC are, as one. Marian Sawer ran a case for a fair go for the disadvantaged that just happened to serve the interests of the public sector unions where the MMC congregate. Thus she attacked public choice theorists who "repositioned equality seeking as the rent-seeking of special interests, rather than an authentic public value" (39).

Michael Pusey went further in presenting the case for the public sector:

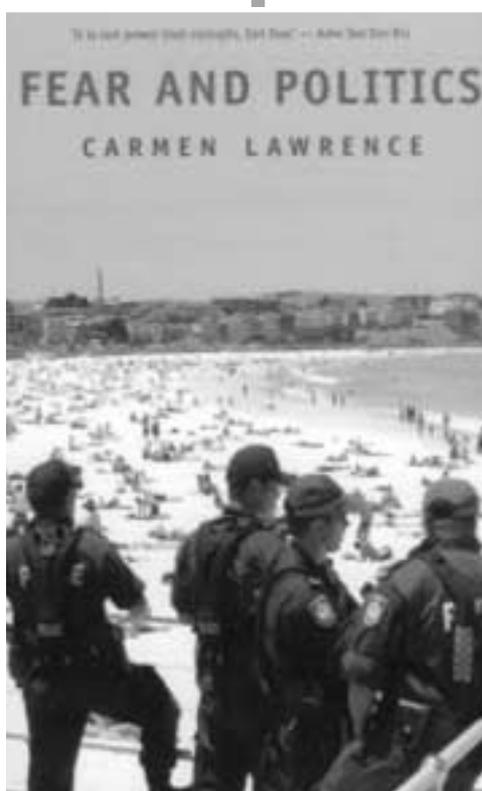
**Middle Australians do not subscribe to the ideological libertarian idea that public sector professionals - such as teachers, social workers, nurses, clerical and professional officers in our public services, and the like - comprise some "new class" of featherbedded parasites pushing their own agendas and living off other peoples' taxes. (Sawer and Hindess, 198)**

This sense of economic privilege, political power, and social prestige lost, was at the heart of the MMC response to Hansonism and economic reform

alike. The transformation of Australia which has empowered entrepreneurs from trades people to financial engineers, has relatively reduced the standing of public sector employees, especially academics and policy makers and commentators in the welfare industries, as the state withdraws from the commanding heights of the economy. And the MMC has not liked this end to their unchallenged intellectual authority one bit.

The late Donald Horne, for example, tried to claim the status of reformer for the reactionary defenders of the economic order of the 1960s, seeing them as the nation's last best hope, who should be respected as such. We needed, he wrote:

**... the bold and guileful enemies of things as they stand, who have their own ideas of**



how things should be run. Instead of indulging in claptrap about academics guzzling their cafe lattes as they idle their time away, we should recognise that if the people who run things, and their critics, rust up, Australia rusts up. We should ensure that our education systems make it possible for those who make it into this group to excel. (*Looking for Leadership: Australia in the Howard Years*, (Viking, 2001), 94).

Robert Manne made the same point:

Without an earnest, active citizenry of the educated middle-class, willing to agitate and educate, there might have been no federation. This active citizenry embodied an optimism about politics and a belief in the power of reason that it is almost impossible for an age as cynical as ours to understand" (*The Barren Years: John Howard and Australian Political Culture* (Text, 2001, 142)

The MMC leadership has also denounced reformers for changing Australia, that is when they have not blamed John Howard for everything. But generally they have done both, expressing outrage that the prime minister and most of the voters are not interested in the MMC's moral agendas.

In *Race: John Howard and the remaking of Australian* (Allen and Unwin, 2001) Andrew Markus attacked the Prime Minister for being governed by "prejudices and sensitivities in the community":

The embracing of these perspectives involved a wilful blindness to other truths: a blindness to the plight of refugees who sought shelter in Australia; to families denied the opportunity for reunion; to the risk to democracy posed by the willingness to allocate preferences and consider alliances with extremist forces and to the tragedies which marked the lives of Aboriginal people of past and present generations. (103-104)

## MMC'S IRRELEVANCE

But while the times have changed with Pauline Hanson long gone from politics, the MMC agenda hasn't. If anything, the anger of its leaders has deepened as the Prime Minister's two subsequent election wins since her departure made it quite clear how irrelevant the MMC has become.

As David McKnight points out in *Beyond Left and Right: New Politics and the Culture Wars* (Allen and Unwin, 2005), class no longer provides unifying ideas for the political left, which is now a coalition of

everybody from environmental activists to antediluvian economic reactionaries. And to get back into the political game the broad left, now largely led by MMC activists, has to adapt its ideas.

Of course it would also help if they stopped sneering at everybody who dares disagree with them. As Geoffrey Barker did in his commentary on the last election - Peter Brown and Julian Thomas (eds), *A Win and a Prayer*, (UNSW Press, 2004) - when he raged against people who did not pay enough attention to what he thought they should:

**For Australian voters - provincial, materialistic, obsessed with personal short-term utility rather than long-term national survival - the main issue was who was getting robbed and who was getting the spoils. (41)**

It must be tough knowing best when no one listens. But this is where the MMC has been for a decade and the less the electors listen the angrier are the ideologues. The smarter ones just blame the Prime Minister for tricking the voters into supporting his evil agenda, but a sense that the voters are not just easily gulled, they are also unpleasant people permeates MMC doctrine.

## ON BEING CARMEN

This is not explicit in Carmen Lawrence's new pamphlet *Fear and Politics*. Rather, she argues the reason why the Howard Government keeps winning elections is because everybody is frightened. From scientists to journalists and on to public servants, people are too terrified to protest and the result is we live in a state of fear:

**The government may claim to be bringing democracy to Iraq, but at home the spirit and the practice of genuine democracy is more threatened than at any time since Federation. (125).**

And she does make it clear that voters with a quid in their pockets are part of the conspiracy:

**... while many have prospered under the Howard government, many have not. What's more, the comfortable have been encouraged to disavow the needy, to turn their backs on those who may need their generosity, and to promote their own interests even at the expense of others. (102)**

This is the reverse of the belief in self-discipline and achievement that the original MMC held. Now anybody who has done well should be ashamed of their selfishness. With arguments like this from a former president of the Labor Party it is amazing that it holds any aspirational electorates at all.

Especially when the central premise of Dr Lawrence's pamphlet is that voters can be conned: "Politicians of all stripes have used fear as a technique for stampeding citizens into supporting them and their policies." (2) Nor is manipulating some of the voters all that hard. While the appalling prime minister is keen to con us, racist Australians are happy to go along with him.

In addition to the Cronulla riots last December, Dr Lawrence suggests that racism, "one of the most potent and persistent forms of prejudice still abroad in Australian society" drove the 2001 election; which was "dominated by the dehumanisation of asylum seekers, by fear and xenophobia" (39). That the destruction of the Twin Towers and the arrival of boatloads of illegal immigrants might have led the electorate to make a conscious choice to stick with the government in troubled times obviously had nothing to do with it:

**In deliberately portraying asylum seekers as a threat, the Howard government succeeded in gaining traction for the bizarre notion that desperate people in leaky boats were somehow a threat to our national security. It counted on being able to arouse our fear of being overwhelmed by strangers envious of our good fortune. Perhaps our own deep knowledge that we are alien invaders who have stolen the land we occupy allowed them to feed this anxiety. (40)**

But thankfully, an answer is at hand. Our response to the December 2005 Cronulla race riot must involve "recognising our common humanity" and "dismantling institutionalised racism and discrimination in the Australian state". (49)

It must be easy being Carmen. Complex questions of the size and shape of the immigration program are addressed with humanitarian homilies. And all of us who are immigrants, or their descendants, are invaders. Oh, and racism is endemic in Australia. No wonder the Labor left, home to many of the MMC, is so electorally irrelevant, at least among electors who do not respond well to being blamed for the world not being the way Dr Lawrence wants it.

Nor is Dr Lawrence's cause helped by the way she demonstrates she does not have a clue what to do about problems in the real world:

**We need a moral dimension to the public realm. We need an answering vision of justice and optimism. We need to learn to manage our fears and face the realities of our complex world. (125)**

In the real world what we need is a Labor Party that is an alternative government. What Dr Lawrence gives us are assertions that we are frightened and miserable, when most Australians manifestly are not. Rather than take the Howard Government on its manifest failings, in tax and welfare reform, and its refusal to tackle the inefficiencies inherent in our federal system, Dr Lawrence complains about the way the interest groups and issues she believes are most important do not dominate the debate. And she is outraged that the core MMC careers are not treated with the respect she obviously believes they are owed by right:

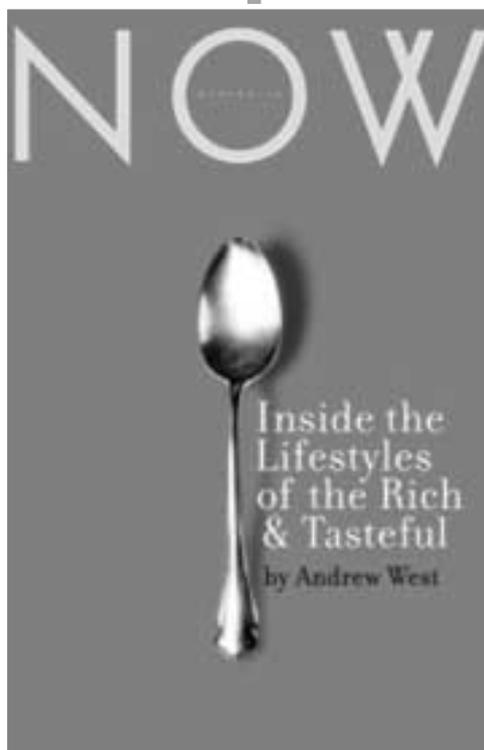
**Unions are definitely seen as enemies of the state, as are arts practitioners. Teachers in government schools can expect ritual denigration from their own ministers. (pp105-106)**

Yes, union officials are in a fight for their careers, not just against the government's workplace reforms but also against all those workers who are not interested in enlisting in the service of the ACTU. And arts practitioners are less considered as an enemy as ignored by Canberra. And no state government dares defy teacher unions (strikes play hell with working parents' child care arrangements), but the Commonwealth is taking them on over curriculum reform.

In focusing on her own and her friends' favourite fears Dr Lawrence demonstrates how out of touch the MMC is with politics in the real world. Proclaiming how unfair life is for self-identifying members of the moral middle class may make her feel better and please her pals, but the support of union officials, art workers and curriculum developers will not win the next election.

### ANDREW WEST'S DICHOTOMY

But never mind, because in Andrew West's world MMC sophisticates (at least the ones with money) may not have political power but they certainly have style on their side. Andrew West sees Australia, at least the opinion-making upper middle class, divided



between the culturists (good) and materialists (less bad than irretrievably vulgar). The culturists are readers who eat organic foods, are environmentally aware, listen to jazz and the classics. All in all, they are intellectually sophisticated and generally stylish citizens. But as for the materialists, my dears the people, the noise! They drive big cars, have air-conditioned houses and care about cash, or at least the conspicuous consumption it pays for.

For a short book of just 100 pages or so, Andrew West manages to get in a great deal of generalising, such as:

**... materialists cluster in the public relations and marketing firms and the government lobbying divisions of major corporations. Culturists on the other hand, seek a career that can offer them scope for personal development and creativity. (37)**

At times it all reads like a parody of a brief from a social issues think tank, one where pretension is preferred to policy. Thus this gem:

**As I slide into a friend's Renault and turn on Radio National to hear Alan Saunders discussing Bauhaus architecture, it occurs to me that the beauty of a place like the Queen Victoria Market is that it allows the labour lawyers and consultants of North Carlton to mix with the same sort of grizzled old Greek men they met on the Santorini waterfront during their tenth wedding anniversary trip, or the snowy-haired Chinese vendors they encountered in the Shanghai night markets when they travelled with their managing partner on that recent Ming Dynasty study tour. Could this be what anthropologist Ghassan Hage describes in *White Nation* as "cosmo-multiculturalism", in which only a particular class "through exposure to a certain sophisticated internationalism ... a global consciousness", can truly appreciate ethnic cuisine and traditions? (58)**

It takes skill of the David Brooks kind to combine social analysis and colour writing. Andrew West does not have much of it.

What he does have is an acute understanding of how his culturists are politically exposed. West's version of the MMC may have a quid in its collective pocket. And with its emphasis on community, and state support for the right sort of causes, an ideology of sorts. What they don't have is anybody to do their bidding in politics. Thus he writes of the way Labor has become a "petit materialist" party whose "members do not share the culturists high-minded values":

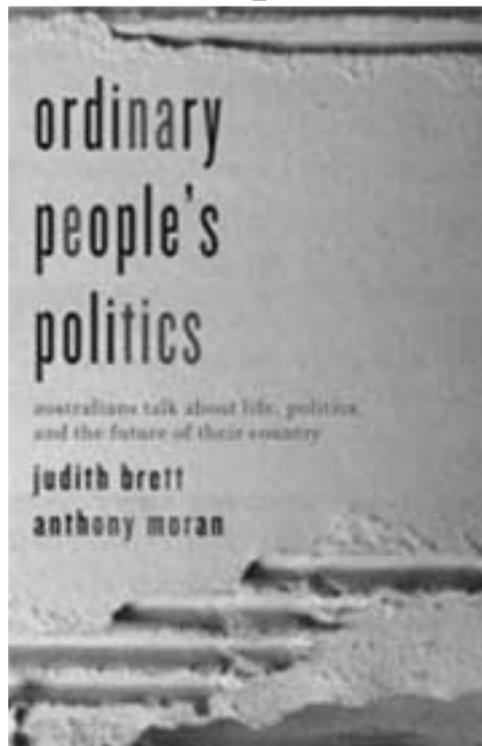
**What they really yearn for is a Labor leader who combines the erudition and elegance of Gough Whitlam with the competence of Bob Hawke. They thought they had it in Paul Keating who, in his post-prime ministerial years, has become something of a culturist icon. (98)**

The paradox of West's argument is that he writes about relatively powerful people, who are as politically impotent as Dr Lawrence and her pals. The most significant distinction between West's culturists and the ranting left wing of the MMC is that the former have managed to benefit from the gutting of the old public sector command economy and are not angry over a loss of relative income and power.

Where West is different from most analysts of the MMC is that he understands that while his preferred subjects may be stylish and educated they are also snobs who are out of touch with the rest of the country. He recognises the extent of the MMC failure to grasp that blaming the Prime Minister, and dismissing those who support him as fools and racists, does nothing to get them

back in the political game.

**... the culturist social agenda, and particularly policies such as the republic and state-supported multiculturalism, looks like an elitist preoccupation of the Keating era. The message that culturists have sent - especially when they mocked the nationalist and populist politician Pauline Hanson for not knowing the meaning of "xenophobia" or for her references to "Strayans" - was that the unlettered, or the uncouth, have no place in their vision of a sophisticated nation. (100)**



Of course West does not appear to enjoy the way the culturists are cactus, lamenting an Australia where “billionaires are lionised, ordinariness is exalted and debt-fuelled materialism runs rampant”. Still at least he understands that the smart and stylish have brought their political irrelevance on their own elegantly coiffed and bespoke suited selves.

### JUDITH BRETT'S ORDINARY PEOPLE

Those MMC opinion makers who want to get back into the political game, rather than moan about being marginalised, would do well to read Judith Brett and Anthony Moran's new book, *Ordinary People's Politics* (Pluto Press), which reports conversations with ordinary Australians across 40 years. When not pontificating about the social superiority of her pals, Brett is a fine historian (as well as a considerable comic writer, demonstrated by what appears a parody of an academic essay on the chook in Australian culture, (*Australian Financial Review*, 18 August 2006)). With Moran she has produced a collection that will terrify all elitists who worry that the ill-informed are not inclined to do what they are told by their political betters.

Their book demonstrates how ordinary people think things through, making up their own minds on politics, from information picked up from all over the place, and filtered through their own experience and beliefs. The bad news for left opinion leaders is that few of the people interviewed for the book agree with all of the MMC agenda. The good news for all of us is that while most of the people in the panel are not especially educated or articulate about politics they are largely free of prejudice and rancour and are committed to an Australia where everybody gets a go.

It is not an especially entertaining book; there is nothing all that engaging about people offering their opinions on subjects not particularly close to their hearts. Yet, while it is something of a struggle to read right through, it offers an insight into all sorts of people's thinking of a kind generally only available to political professionals with access to focus group transcripts.

From aspirational tradesmen to daughters of the declining gentry, from affluent political illiterates to poverty stricken policy obsessives, Brett and Moran present people with a remarkable range of values and interests. There are Howard battlers in the book, as well as small business people. There are people who have largely been defeated by life and one young man who looks like he is on the way out.

There is a bloke, described as a “conservative realist” who has done reasonably well for himself in life and who holds the values of self-discipline and moderation of the original MMC:

**Confronted with contemporary social problems, he would be tempted neither by the moral panics of the right nor the utopian dreaming of the left; rather he would steer a moderate middle course, with reason and general knowledge as his guide. (145)**

Another, from the MMC's modern faction, is Don, a doctor on the public payroll, who is outraged at the way his world was changed by economic reform. In his defence of the public sector this bloke many not be a hero to Brett and Moran, but they certainly understand his position:

**The critics of the advocates of this expanded state point to the self-interest of this new class' (sic) in championing the expansion of a state which so obviously benefited them. This is a simplistic reading of the motivation of a person like Don, who believed that in working for the state he was serving the people from whom he had come and among whom he lived. The changes of the 1980s and 1990s were thus not justified political changes; they destroyed bonds of experience which held together Don's imagined nation in time and space and attacked the deepest layers of self. (47)**

It is a text book statement of the concerns of the public sector MMC that assumes equivalence between its own interests and those of all Australians.

But there are also many examples in the book of people whom MMC ideologues would dismiss as racist or ignorant nationalists, the sort of characteristics associated with Hansonism. Except that they are decent people. Like the Vietnam vet who went back to meet the men he fought and the public service clerk who separated her patriotism from politics.

The significant achievement of Brett and Moran is book is the way they have identified a diversity of views among people whom the MMC leadership have assumed had nothing acceptable to say. And they demonstrate why any political force that seeks to instruct, rather than convince, ordinary people is doomed:

**... many Australians understand questions about class not as questions about socio-economic inequality at all, but as questions about prestige and deference, and that this brings it into head-on conflict with Australians' commitment to the equality of opportunity, and the belief that everyone should be treated on their merits. (309)**

Equally important, the book details how ordinary Australians see themselves as capable of making up

their own minds, “the politics of ordinary people are grounded in pragmatic individualism. They see people as responsible for their own lives as they feel themselves (sic) are. Time and again people answer questions about collectivities and groupings with answers about individuals” (326)

Politicians on both sides of the political fence from Robert Menzies to John Howard, Ben Chifley to Kevin Rudd, have always known this. But it seems a lesson MMC leaders like Dr Lawrence do not get.

## DR LAWRENCE ASSESSED

Nor do most of the commentators who embraced the arguments of Dr Lawrence’s book. Melanie La’Brooy argued that both sides of politics used fear as a political weapon, and that it worked on people without the wit to understand how the real issues were being ignored:

**Considering that a majority of Australians apparently agree that the bulk of our taxes ought to be spent on fighting the monsters under the bed rather than combating the very real evils of homelessness or child abuse, then I suppose its reasonable that we follow the political exhortations to Be Afraid. (*The Age*, 7 July)**

A rash of reviewers uncritically endorsed Dr Lawrence’s line that the politics of fear was all the work of John Howard. John Button supportively summarised her argument before concluding that she offered “a timely message in a gutsy and thoughtful book”. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 17/6/06) Alan Nichols suggested the book’s politics were predictable, before supporting all of her arguments that he mentioned (*The Melbourne Anglican*, August 2006). Martin Hirst supported this “considered treatise” (*Courier Mail*, 16/9/06) and Martin Crotty (*The Courier Mail*, 22/7/06) uncritically endorsed Dr Lawrence’s case.

It was left to David Burchell to dissent from the accepted wisdom in a long review essay that dealt with all three books (*Australian Literary Review*, 6/9/06). According to Burchell, in invoking fear for every action of the Australian government she disapproves of, Dr Lawrence creates a superior class of right thinking people:

**The problem with this sense of heightened awareness of the evil possibilities of human nature is that it so often becomes precisely that impulse it most abhors, paranoia. Other people become the problem ... And so Lawrence’s book is full of lonely, solitary heroes, standing out from the fearful mass.**

Which is not much use when they have little chance of ever being able to implement their political opinions. As Burchell concluded:

**The problem with Lawrence’s approach isn’t its holier-than-thouness, grating though that occasionally is. It’s the lack of even so much as a hint of a political strategy. ... Since people are inherently weak, constitutionally vulnerable to the weasel words of any dog whistler who happens by, the forces of moral light will always in the end be righteous, but pretty much powerless.**

## A THEORY TOO FAR

Andrew West’s approach did not appeal to all the reviewers. *The Weekend Australian* briefed the book (16/9/06) as did Bruce Elder in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (16/9/06) who dismissed it, writing West’s, “division of Australia’s urban upper middle class into two categories isn’t really very accurate or illuminating”.

But it appealed to people who watch the world and saw it portrayed by West. Like Meredith Irish (*The Courier Mail*, 9/9/06) who presented West’s argument in the context of her take on Brisbane life. And Sally Morrell (*Herald Sun*, 7/9/06) added to it in an astute essay that placed West’s argument in the context of parents debating whether it will be state or private schools for their kids.

Ed Wright’s review essay (*Australian Financial Review*, 3/11/06) was kind, (“West has a sharp eye for the comedy of manners which is leavened by a generosity of spirit”) but also critical (“the veracity of West is observations sometimes overpowers the book’s conceptual underpinnings”). Most important Wright understands that West’s culturists are less social radicals than self regarding and opinionated, core characteristics of the MMC, in either of its incarnations.

**The real prototypes for the culturists were not the bohemians but the 19th-century upper-middle class amateur scientists, explorers and authors who live in an era where professional work was not all-consuming, and who had time to pursue interests fuelled by their progressive enlightenment beliefs in the virtues of knowledge and education. They were liberals whose personal ethics more often than not involved moderation and restraint when it came to material consumption.**

David Burchell (*ALR*, 6/9/06) was less impressed, basically because he did not accept West’s division of wealthy Australians into materialists and culturists. Indeed, he doubted whether the latter actually exist as portrayed:

**In fact, West’s materialists aren’t real people so much as stage props. ... I’m not**

sure I've met anyone, rich or poor, highly educated or not, whose life was consumed by its material dimension. ... In any case the culture wars were never a neat struggle between a class of moralists and a class of self-advancing calculating machines. They have been a struggle between rival moralities, and rival conceptions of morality.

## ATTENTION DEFICIT

Brett and Moran's book did not receive anywhere near the attention it deserved. Inexplicably the *SMH* (7/10/06) and *Weekend Australian* (21/10/06) both briefed it. And where did the latter's Tony Maniaty get the idea that this book, which is based solely on interviews with Victorians, quoted Sydneysiders?

The substantive reviews were not much more illuminating. Michelle Grattan (*The Age*, 7/10/06) explained the book without analysing it. Margaret Simons (*Australian Policy Online*, 25/9/06) was surprised at what she discovered about people who do not attend writer's festivals: "The results resist stereotypes and illuminate much that seems inexplicable when one looks at the world merely from one's own perspective." And apart from being distressed by spelling errors and "the occasional lazy cliché" Simons pompously approved: "I would go so far as to say it is an indispensable book. Read it." Or Ms Simons will be round to ask why you haven't.

David Burchell (*ALR*, 6/9/06) thought well of the book - "this is a new and refreshing style of writing and arguing for Australian academe" - but grudgingly. For a start, he was not overly impressed with the methodology of interviewing people and then writing up an analysis of the results:

**While it's genuinely pleasing to see academics in conversation with other kinds of ordinary people, rather than simply diagnosing them as clinical subjects, this is a somewhat impressionistic way of going about it.**

And while he suggested their methodology was different from the way academics interpret people's lives "from some Archimedean point among the stars", Burchell was still unimpressed with how the authors dealt with their evidence:

**People's political views are described as "contradictory" when they don't seem to map with the political philosophies outlined in undergraduate textbooks. And people's sense of their social position is found wanting according to the same textbooks' definition of social class. At other times families seem to be shoehorned into pre-**

**determined categories ("old-style working class", "old Melbourne middle class") as if to tick off a series of imaginary boxes.**

This is all fair enough, but Burchell underestimates what Brett and Moran have achieved. They demonstrated that ordinary Australians do not need anyone to do their political thinking for them. They set out what issues matter to them most and they provide anybody interested with lots of information on how to send them political messages. This is very bad news for those MMC spokespeople who cry conspiracy and moral corruption when Australians do not do what they are told. Because it confirms what smart politicians in both major parties have always known, that the best way to lose people's support is to call them names and dismiss their interests and aspirations.

*Stephen Matchett can be found at [stephen4@hotmail.com](mailto:stephen4@hotmail.com)*

# EXECUTING SADDAM

**STEPHEN MATCHETT looks at the range of responses to the execution of Saddam Hussein in the Australian press went from pragmatism to principle and then on to intellectual opportunism.**

The advocates of his murder did not muck around with the niceties of human rights. In *The Sunday Telegraph* (31/12/06) Greg Sheridan called his execution, "an act of justice ... a just end to the worst tyrant of the second half of the 20th century." In fact, as far as Sheridan is concerned, the only quibble with execution is making sure the right person is killed. "I object to capital punishment for Australia, or societies like ours, because there is always too much danger that the state will execute the wrong person. But in the case of Saddam, there is absolutely no chance that the competent authorities got the wrong person."

Others argued that while they did not approve of capital punishment, Saddam's fate was up to the Iraqis. Especially those who would feel better when he was dead. Like Mammad Aidani, who started by stating his opposition to capital punishment but then added, "... his execution brings a kind of closure to one of my most painful nightmares. ... Of course, my grieving has not ended with the execution of Saddam. Painful memories will linger, but it's a special moment for all of us who have suffered from his brutality. We can now try to move on with our lives". (*The Age*, 3/1/07).

Adelaide's *Sunday Mail* (31/12/06) editorialised that it did not support the death penalty, "but supports the rights of countries to enforce it if their properly

constituted laws prescribe it". Nor did the paper mind that the execution would not accomplish anything much. Civilians will continue to die in their thousands. Coalition forces will continue to bleed, US President George W Bush will blunder on without a clear and concise strategy. But Saddam's demise is an important full stop in Iraq's history. The world is a better place without him."

While reminding us of the paper's opposition to the death penalty at home, the *Daily Telegraph's* (2/1/07) leader writer let opponents of Saddam's execution have it with both barrels, suggesting the "hand-wringers" were missing the point, that Saddam's execution was not about the failures of the Bush Administration or prospects of peace in Iraq. Rather it was about the Iraqis getting on with running their own country.

And, *The Australian* (1/1/07) added, as Saddam was responsible for the mess Iraq is now in, he was the author of his own fate: "When it comes right down to it, it wasn't Saddam's four hooded executioners who put the noose around his neck. It was Saddam himself."

In contrast to all this pragmatism, some opponents of his execution argued from consistency, that if the death penalty is wrong in some cases it is wrong in every case and that the Iraqi government should not have murdered Saddam. "To extinguish the life of another human being, no matter how repugnant, never equals the score. The death penalty diminishes us all," the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorialised (2/1/07). Its stable mate, the *Sun Herald* agreed (7/1/07): "Regardless of the crime, every execution robs all of us of a bit of our humanity." Dennis Atkins (*The Courier Mail*, 30/12/06) made much the same point, adding that Saddam's death will only deepen the divisions in Iraq. But he could not resist having a go at John Howard:

**Here in Australia the Government chose to hide behind the festive season and say nothing. But when the sentence was first announced, Prime Minister John Howard mouthed his opposition to the death penalty but said it was a matter for the Iraqi Government. He sought to make a virtue out of the court process, ignoring its short comings. ... By refusing to condemn the sentence, Howard and others are turning a blind eye to the descent into further bloodshed and the inevitable spike in sectarian violence. All who cherish humanity should stand up against this death sentence. Opposition to the death penalty should not be divisible. The proud Iraqi people, who are slowly being beaten down by the grinding of history, do not deserve what's coming.**

Mirko Bagaric (*Herald Sun*, 2/1/07) added nothing to the case against capital punishment, other than a strange digression on how our brains find pleasure in

deciding to punish wrongdoers, but only when we think the sentence is not too onerous.

Cardinal George Pell's argument was equally impenetrable (*Sunday Telegraph*, 14/1/07). He explained what a bad man Saddam was and mentioned that Pope John II had removed the clause in the catechism that allowed states to execute criminals in "cases of extreme gravity", without explicitly stating what fate the dictator deserved:

**Those who believe in God the Creator accept that serious evil disturbs and distorts nature's proper order. Punishment is designed to redress this disorder and when the offender voluntarily accepts his punishment this enhances the return to equilibrium. Punishment should be medicinal, contributing to the personal reform of the offender. I should pray for Saddam's soul but cannot weep for him. I weep rather for his many victims.**

Hard to see how a noose is medicinal.

Then there were the opportunists, those commentators who used Saddam's execution to have a go at other issues. Like Burham Al-Chalabi, who wants the Americans out of Iraq (*The Sunday Age*, 31/12/06):

**The execution of Saddam Hussein is nothing but a smokescreen - a diversion in a series of diversions that will do nothing to address the price of the occupation of Iraq. If the Bush Administration truly wanted to curb the cycle of bloodshed, it would come clean and share with the Iraqi people, and the international community, the real goals of this disastrous neoconservative adventure. ... The US presents the Iraqi people with this phoney act of accountability, but no one has been held accountable for invading and occupying Iraq or the mass human rights abuses carried out in the process.**

Why bother with the ethics of executing one of the worse tyrants of the later twentieth century when Bush is there to blame?

Joseph Wakim (*The Age*, 15/1/07) adopted an even stranger approach, comparing Saddam to Frankenstein's monster. And of course his Frankenstein is the US, which was "perfectly willing to arm him to the teeth" during the Iran-Iraq war. The connection between this claim and Saddam's execution by other Iraqis is not entirely clear, but it made much more sense than Wakim's Howard hating:

**Closer to home, we should remember the national healing and emotion that surrounded 17 months of testimonies from Aboriginal Australians of the "stolen generation" culminating in the April 1997**

release of the *Bringing Them Home* report. Our Prime Minister applauds the Iraqi Government's decision to execute Saddam as 'heroic' for 'trying to embrace democracy'. But he places more emphasis on the ideology of democracy than on truth, justice and freedom.

It was a badly assembled argument, but a model of reasoned restraint compared to Jeff Sparrow's rant (*The Age*, 1/1/07). Iraq is a disaster of American making, the yanks will continue the war on terror, which has cost more than the debts of all the world's poor countries, until Osama bin Laden is killed. Everything is worse in Iraq than when Saddam ran the show and his execution served "his old American allies" by deflecting attention from the mess they have made.

Standard stuff, except for this:

**You can't participate in an illegal and immoral war that produces cadavers by the thousands without losing a little bit of your soul along the way. Of course we delight in public executions. We haven't had so much good footage since we filled our screens with the mangled corpses of Uday and Qusay.**

Perhaps this was just overblown rhetoric. Or perhaps Sparrow was sneering at everybody whose sensibilities are not as refined as his.

But if Sparrow's piece is foolish and vulgar it is a model of commonsense and dignity compared to Bob Ellis's take on the execution (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1/1/07). Most of what Ellis wrote is standard anti-Americanism of the sort that has been standard issue since the 1960s. US leaders are hypocrites, or war criminals, often both. And so forth and so on.

But there was more, with Ellis comparing the way Saddam died, to the way he thought President Bush would behave if he faced execution.

First Saddam:

**... no rage, no railing, no sermonising, no physical struggle. A courteous, mild exchange about the black scarf he must wear. An accompanied walk to the drop, with the posture of a professor approaching a lectern in another town.**

Then Ellis' described his imagined end on the gallows for Bush: "the physical struggle, hortatory tears and loud pleadings while his captors held him down".

That Ellis compares the two men at all says a great deal about his politics. That he thinks his fantasy about how a man would die merits recording in a newspaper says much more about the value he puts on his own eccentric conceits.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**Sir David Smith responds to Dale Budd's letter in *The Sydney Institute Quarterly*, Issue 29, August 2006.**

*I*n the August 2006 issue of *The Sydney Institute Quarterly*, Dale Budd has repeated his earlier assertion that he received a phone call from me at about 1.30 pm on 11 November 1975. He most certainly did not. It appears that, so long after the event, Dale Budd's memory is faulty.

As soon as Sir John Kerr had sworn in Malcolm Fraser as caretaker prime minister, the Governor-General asked me to telephone the Queen's private secretary and Mr. Fraser asked me to pass urgent instructions from him to Mr. Ewart Smith, Deputy Secretary, Attorney-General's Department and Mr. John Menadue, Secretary, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Mr. Fraser did not ask me to phone his private office - given the three urgent phone calls I had to make; he would have been back in his office at Parliament House before I could have made the call. I began to make my three phone calls at about 1.30 pm.

If Dale Budd received a phone call from Government House at about the same time, it could only have come from Mr. Fraser before he left for Parliament House. It is significant that the note which Mr. Budd made of this phone call lists the "PM" and several names, but my name is not on the note.

David Smith, Mawson, ACT



**David Marr responds to the reference to him in the Margaret Jones obituary which was published in *The Sydney Institute Quarterly*, Issue 29, August 2006.**

That Margaret Jones was never a woman to hold back is one of many reasons we all admired her so much. She spoke her mind. So it's puzzling to read in *The Sydney Institute Quarterly's* obituary, that she was upset by *Media Watch's* criticism of the Independent Complaints Review Panel - "primarily

because she and her colleagues had no right of reply. Quite correctly, this offended her sense of professionalism”.

This is puzzling, first, because she never said so to me. I can't imagine why she wouldn't have. We'd known each other for over 20 years. I liked her very much. We'd had blunt conversations in the past. We discussed this episode of *Media Watch*. She didn't like our verdict one bit but she didn't accuse me of unprofessionalism.

It's puzzling, second, because the facts are wrong.

At issue in that show was ICRP's handling of Richard Alston's famous dossier of complaints about AM's reporting of the invasion of Iraq. Naturally, we sought input from ICRP. Executive Producer Peter McEvoy sent a list of questions to the panel's chair Ted Thomas. He replied. We reported his answer in part on the show on 3 November 2003 and posted the complete correspondence on our website. It's still there at: [www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s981335.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s981335.htm).

*Media Watch* offers the same “right of reply” as the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Sixty Minutes*: corrections on air where reports are inaccurate; clarifications and minor slips fixed prominently on the website; and all correspondence published on the website. As a member of ICRP, nobody was in a better position to know this practice than Margaret Jones. Neither she nor the panel asked for a correction, clarification or reply after the show went to air. We received nothing from ICRP and we blocked nothing.

This is all a bit off, isn't it Gerard? I note that before using Margaret's obituary to take a swipe at my “professionalism”, you checked nothing with me. Professional?

David Marr, Sydney, NSW



Gerard Henderson comments:

*The Sydney Institute Quarterly* is pleased to provide David Marr with a right-of-reply. The section of the obituary to which Mr Marr objects reads as follows:

**Margaret Jones was on the ICRP when it examined Richard Alston's complaints against the ABC Radio AM program. She was upset by the harsh criticism made of the ICRP judgement 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.**

There is no inconsistency between what David Marr says Margaret Jones told him and what I recall Margaret Jones told me. Mr Marr acknowledges that Margaret Jones did not “like...one bit” what was said on *Media Watch* about the ICRP report. I did not write that she specifically accused *Media Watch's* (then) presenter David Marr of unprofessionalism but, rather, that *Media Watch's* handling of this matter “offended her sense of professionalism” (emphasis added). Mr Marr was a key member of the *Media Watch* team.

The fact is that there is no right-of-reply on *Media Watch* - before, after or during David Marr's time as presenter. The quoting of a small part of correspondence - or the publication of correspondence on a website (which can be accessed only by means of complicated links) - is not a right-of-reply in the accepted meaning of the term.

Mr Marr's assertion that *Media Watch* offers the same right-of-reply as the *Sydney Morning Herald* does not stand up. The *SMH* publishes corrections on Page 2 and has a Letters Page. Moreover, on occasions, the *SMH* will publish an article by a complainant on its Opinion Page. Such decisions are decided by one or more of the Editor, the Letters Editor and the Opinion Page Editor. In other words, there is a right-of-reply at the *SMH*. There is no right of reply on *Media Watch* and there is no tradition at the ABC whereby the managing director (acting as editor-in-chief) instructs *Media Watch* to publish corrections or provide a right-of-reply. Re which see Pages 14-15 of Issue 29 of the *SIQ*.

The obituary did not claim that Margaret Jones or any other member of the ICRP “asked” for a right-of-reply. What would have been the point? The fact is that there was (and remains) no provision for a right-of-reply on the *Media Watch* program. Margaret Jones understood this.

*The Sydney Institute Quarterly*, however, does provide a right-of-reply and David Marr is welcome to respond to this note.



# GERARD HENDERSON'S MEDIA WATCH

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*.

It being the New Year (or thereabouts) the theme is relationships as they affect and/or afflict the media. New relationships. Old relationships. Non-existent relationships which are born not of lust but of gossip.

## JACINTA TYNAN'S NEW AGE V OLD AGE

Let's commence with the gorgeous, pouting Jacinta Tynan - who is currently a presenter on Sky News and who has worked for the ABC TV news and current affairs and for the Seven Network. Oh yes, Ms Tynan is also the author of *Good Man Hunting* (Bantam, 2005) which carries the following dedication:

**To Mum**  
**For your unconditional love and for getting me through so many break-ups.**  
**To my ex-boyfriends**  
**For trying to love me. Sorry I wasn't the best recipient.**

As the author recounts, *GMH* is inspired by the story of Jacinta Tynan's life - along with that of three of her friends who appear under the pseudonyms of Grace, Hope and Destiny. According to JT, “names and identities have been changed to protect those who may have told it in a different way” - or, perhaps, those who would not have told their story at all.

Only JT stands fully revealed, so to speak. Why, the reader even learns of the author's painful entry into “the Brazilian club” at “The Beauty Room in Darlinghurst”. (See Chapter 39). JT reflects: “One of the great curses of the single woman is the Brazilian wax”. How philosophical can you get? Readers of *GMH* also learn that the author has passed her most recent AIDS test. (See Chapter 42). Well done. JT reflects: “The other regrettable major modern adjustment when on the single circuit is the AIDS test, for to have one before every new man, as we should, is excessive blood sapping for active single women”. Well, it's blood letting for good cause - according to *GMH*, that is.

And what precisely is the cause? Fortunately, it is all set out in Chapter 1. Put simply, JT is single for the very first time - except for the fact that she was single for a short time following the death of her inaugural boyfriend at the age of 19. He was knocked down by a car. Now, just 32 years old, JT is looking for marriage, which she terms the “Ultimate Outcome” and is “auditioning husbands”. By Chapter 69,

however, the author is 34 years old. Same book, different information; same goal, different auditions. Clearly, either Ms Tynan aged with the book - or she is somewhat ambiguous about her age.

Back to Chapter 1, where the author admits to “auditioning husbands”. It's been a lengthy process. Her first boy-friend lasted for three-and-a-half years (commencing when she was 15) before his tragic death. There followed successful auditions which lasted, in order, for “one year; then three; then nine months; three-and-a-half years; four years...and now single...and dating”. Turn to Chapter 13 and beyond and their occupations are listed - as cameraman, a film student, another cameraman, a reporter, a producer, an advertising executive. Or something like that. There is a head-count at Page 124 where the author tallies her encounters of the carnal kind as “low, below double figures”.

### • Boring for The One

At Page 35, Jacinta Tynan acknowledges that friends get bored of hearing about her marital, or rather pre-marital, “anguish”. But for readers of *GMH*, there are another 325 pages to go. More anguish.

Readers may get the feeling that JT's search for what she terms “The One” is too narrowly focused. The author was a boarder at an exclusive Catholic private school in Sydney's Eastern suburbs and declares in *GMH* that she “could never go out with someone who can't spell or misuses apostrophes”. Cameramen, film students, reporters, producers and advertising executives excepted - it seems. She also refers to her “surgeon father” and her “surgeon dad”. Phew, so he is not a carpenter, then - unlike, say, the step-father of the late Jesus of Nazareth.

Apart from a brief time working for the ABC in Melbourne, JT's story is focused on Sydney's fashionable Eastern Suburbs. She and Grace and Hope and Destiny catch-up at trendy watering holes - where the author is likely to deck out in a lingerie-esque Fleur Wood top along with Sass & Bide jeans and a Sambag clutch. You know, Zigolini's in Woollahra, Icebergs at Bondi Beach, an unnamed bar on Woolloomooloo Bay Wharf, Wil and Toby's Bar in Manly sipping a caprioska, Tatler (Darlinghurst), Hugo's (Bondi Beach), “a bottle of cab sav at The Paddington Inn”, Jackie's Bar (Bondi Beach), The Sheaf Hotel (Double Bay), Aqua Bar (Bondi) for a “skinny latte”, of course. Then there's Brown Sugar (North Bondi), The Light Brigade Hotel (Paddington), Lotus (Potts Point), Level Forty One (CBD), Est (CBD) and the Victoria Room (Darlinghurst). That sort of thing. Not a McDonald's in JT's life story, alas. Except for the report of Hope's comment that a man who eats at Maccas is “not even in your league” and “you are better off without him”. Hope and Jacinta went to boarding school together. No surprise there.

It's much the same with JT's other social activities. It's a corporate box at the Australian Open for tennis and a corporate marquee at the Melbourne Cup Racing Carnival. The author's life involves such New Age activities as tarot-card reading, Buddhist meditation courses, dabbling in astrology, visits to therapists and clairvoyants, seancing, yoga classes, even horoscoping and then listening to a life coach. What's more, she subscribes "to the philosophies of Shakti Gawain, Florence Scovel Shinn and a bit of Tony Robbins". Wow. It seems that JT renounced the Catholic faith for a pack of (tarot) cards.

Also JT writes dismissively of "Westies" - that is, those who live in Sydney's not so fashionable Western suburbs. She quotes Grace as excusing her ex because he's only dating "desperate Westies, unsavoury chicks". That's all. This lot don't seem to count in the *GMH* fashionable inner-city world. Also, she does not like right-wing types who supported the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime and she would never mate with a bloke "who doesn't watch the ABC". How inner-city can you get?

Just when the publicity following the launch of *Good Man Hunting* - over vodka and champagne at the fashionable Hemmesphere - had died down, the *Sydney Morning Herald* thought it a you-beaut idea to commission Jacinta Tynan to write "The Diary" column in its weekend edition of 5-6 August 2006. JT immediately returned to familiar ground of her somewhat repetitive *Good Man Hunting* tome. Men won't commit and, for women, time is "running out". As in the biological clock, and all that. She reported on her private conversations in Canberra with Senator Barnaby Joyce and John Howard, talking - of course - about commitment, the biological clock and so on. JT concluded her contribution to "The Diary" with the reflection: "You can't impose your timeline on anyone else...you also have to know when it's time to leave." Good advice - especially for the authors of excessively long books.

#### • Newsreader as Agony Aunt

So impressed was the *Sunday Telegraph* with all this that it invited Ms Tynan to become a weekly columnist - commencing on 3 September 2006. Here is how she's going:

• **3 September.** Jacinta Tynan commences her inaugural column with a WOW sentence: "I like men." There follows a categorisation of humankind into "Them" and "Us". "Them" are "commitment-phobic blokes". "Us" are thirty-something "female pressure cookers" who want to settle down with Mr Right. Now. JT proposes a truce in the gender wars and suggests that "we meet in the middle and fall in love with men all over again". She records that men "have a lot to offer" and relates how a "more recent love arrived with a power drill to fix my collapsed bed". He is certainly not a one of the "Them" type.

*Good Man Hunting* actually ended with the possibility of its author having found The One - as in a slightly older "boyfriend". So deep in this commitment that at Page 334 the author reflected that she's getting to the stage that she "couldn't give a toss whether I have a Brazilian or not". Seems like The One, surely. Yet there was no mention of him at the launch of *GMH* so it's possible that he should be added to the tally of exs on Page 124. No doubt we will all find out in the second edition.

• **18 September.** JT admits to "being single past...35" and advances the cause of "Late Love". She suggests that all of us (*Sunday Telegraph* readers included) reach their "sexual peaks" at 35. On reading these words, muesli is spilt at Sunday breakfast all over New South Wales. But JT warns "love too late and you miss motherhood".

• **17 September.** JT returns to the (familiar) search for "The One". Apparently it's good news on The One front. The column concludes with advice about how you will know when The One appears: "You get butterflies when their caller ID lights up your screen. You start calling them 'Babe' and you want to iron their shirts and imagine what your babies will look like. You may even dig out Rumi and read love poems. You may think you have found The One. I speak from experience." Exciting, eh? But bad news indeed for Eastern suburban dry-cleaners who seem destined to have fewer shirts to iron - for a while at least - while The One needs personal pressing, so to speak.

• **25 September.** Yet another news breaking story. JT writes that men have biological clocks too, or some kind of clock. So, blokes - get to it. Readers are urged: "Point the finger at those blokes at Hugo's till 3 am when they should be making good use of their sperm while they still can." Alas, she doesn't say what Hugo's is. Re which, see *Good Man Hunting*.

• **1 October.** It's baby talk again. JT declares: "There are two lots of women these days: those with babies and those without". That's all, folks. She reflects that the former "don't do caprioskas at Hemmesphere because they're spending time with the family unit". How insightful can you get? Provided, of course, that *Sunday Telegraph* readers know precisely what Hemmesphere is. Re which, see *GMH*.

• **8 October.** The topic is football - in its various codes. JT is into a "brave admission" - she has "never watched" a game of football in her entire life: "Not a grand final, a preliminary match nor a park footy kick-around: no Bledisloe Cup, Tri-Nations or State or Origin". Not the AFL either. You see, your columnist "can't muster enthusiasm for a band of blokes running about with a ball". So much so that JT declares her love for a "man who doesn't" love football: "Like the one who took me to the theatre during the State of Origin; for that he won my heart". More excitement in the Could-This-Be-The One? genre.

There is only one problem. In *Good Man Hunting*, Jacinta Tynan told readers about how she turned up at the Telstra Stadium in Sydney to watch the Bledisloe Cup when John Eales played his last Rugby Union game for Australia (see page 158). Some confusion, surely.

• **15 October.** The subject is, er, cleavage. Lotsa cleavage, apparently. You see, JT has been proffered "a tip" by a friend that she is showing too much. Your columnist goes on to ask what must be one of the key philosophical questions of our time. Namely, "are we too old for cleavage?". Love the use of the Royal plural, don't we? The answer turns out to be in the negative: "Friends offering cleavage counsel are only trying to help. I just don't know if I'm ready to listen." Good news indeed.

• **22 October.** Excitement rises among *Sunday Telegraph* readers as JT refers to "the man I've

started seeing". But she warns that "the initial euphoria and hormonal rush of falling in love always fizzles". We shall see.

- **29 October.** The focus, again, is on the relationship between horse racing and the quest for The One. Except that your columnist only witnesses galloping from the "David Jones marquee at Randwick...with Moet in crystal glasses". Or the Emirates marquee in Melbourne where "Moet and Chandon" is served. She insists that this (racing) metaphor not be lost on us: "A form guide lists age, weight, past performances, breeding history and earnings." Thanks.

- **5 November.** No word on how the search for The One is going. But JT opines that "commitment phobia is a furphy". Good. Here's hoping.

- **12 November.** JT advises that "the trick is to be careful not to fall in love with the idea of falling in love". Good point. But what, then, was the point of *Good Man Hunting*? - where the author acknowledged her "pathetic necessity to be wanted".

- **19 November.** JT suggests that insurance policies be sold to cover the costs of relationship bust-ups. After her "last break-up" she took herself off to "a retreat near Byron Bay...which cost \$1345 plus airfares". However, after one other break-up, she "survived on a banana smoothie a day for four weeks". Good reason for an (emotional) excess clause, if ever there was one. On a different matter, JT warns fellow break-upees: "Never, ever do a drive-by" of your ex's premises. But compare *Good Man Hunting* - where the author comments "stalking isn't such a bad thing" and confesses: "I am a stalker". JT also fesses-up that she "used to do the drive-by" past an ex's apartment. (see Chapter 37). More confusion.

- **26 November.** JT makes a guest appearance at her alma mater's "school formal". It seems that she has been invited along to give wise counsel to the most recent generation of fashionable young Catholic women from Sydney's Eastern Suburbs. How about that? JT quotes from her own speech to the assembled students in their "dresses fit for the Oscars". Spoke JT: "Life's like driving at night. You never see further than your headlights". Which suggests that JT's life has been spent on country roads. Still, it's good advice - especially for boarding school types.

- **3 December.** Good news indeed. JT announces that "40 is actually the new 21" and reflects that "there are no children at today's 40ths" birthday parties attended by her friends. Such is (Eastern suburbs) life.

- **10 December.** JT finds that "men are from Melbourne" and announces: "Melbourne men read newspapers and novels and tarry in cafes discussing them." Moreover, "they don't expect to sleep with you on the first date". Oh, yeah. This you-beaut behaviour is all due to, wait for it, "the weather" in Melbourne. This "seems to explain" it all. How about that?

- **17 December.** JT warns about the perils of the office Christmas party: "For one night, it's workplace utopia, a Marxist state where demarcation breaks down by the bain-marie". Just like East Germany of old, it seems.

- **24 December.** The column suggests that JT has yet to find the "right person". Alas we are not advised

as to what has happened since 17 September and 22 October (see above). But "here's the upside: we have it all in front of us; whereas others have long since sown their seeds and are lying in the beds they've made, our futures are a blank canvas." Which implies that JT's search for The One is extant again. Which increases the likelihood that *Good News Hunting* will go to a second edition.

- **31 December.** JT has numerous New Year's Eve options. A yacht cruise on Sydney Harbour. A party with married couples with no water view (shucks). A rooftop soiree at Darling Harbour from where she can reserve a "possie" for the evening fireworks "before the hoards arrive". God help us - these hoards might even be "Westies" who read, say, *The Sunday Telegraph*. JT declares that at the end of each year: "I get sentimental for the friendships, loves and family that enriched my year. I mist up." But she highly recommends this approach: "It's far more meaningful than pashing a stranger for the sake of it". Right. Which suggests that Ms Tynan did not meet The One in 2006. Stand by for more of the same in 2007.

- **(Former) Head Girl Encounters  
(Current) Light Globe**

Jacinta Tynan, author of *Good Men Hunting* and *Sunday Telegraph's* tell-almost-all - columnist, was once Head Girl at Kincoppal-Rose Bay Convent in Sydney. (See her interview with Bunty Avieson, *Good Weekend*, 7 January 2006). Thank God for the Catholic nuns - in particular the Society of the Sacred Heart (Sacre Coeur) which was founded in Paris and set up in Sydney's Rose Bay circa 1882. To rephrase the Jesuits somewhat: "Give me a sassy, fashion conscious girl from the Eastern suburbs and we will turn her into a sassy fashion conscious youngish female from the Eastern suburbs". Let's drink (caprioska) to that and toast the Sacre Coeur set.

It seems that JT learnt many life-skills at Kincoppal. Except how to change a light bulb. The trauma is described at Page 149 of *Good Man Hunting*, where the author reflected:

**The only let-down is not having a man right now is that the light globe in my bedroom blew almost three months ago and I haven't been able to change it. I've hooked up a portable bedside lamp instead, and every night, as I flick it on and undress in the dim illumination, I am reminded of the missing factor.**

**Question:** What's the only way for a thirtysomething sassy sheila to get a light globe changed in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs?

**Answer:** Find The One.

## CAREY V CAREY

Despite *Good Man Hunting* and all that, sometimes you wonder whether the search for The One is really worth it. Especially when the goal is reached or, rather, seems to have been reached.

- **Dating Careys**

Take the case of the Australian-born and New York-based novelist Peter Carey and the Australian-born and New York-based director/writer Alison Summers, for example. They were once a married

item. And then it all fell apart. Spectacularly. The break-up became a matter of some notoriety when Ms Summers posted an entry on the revenge-is-mine *Dating Psychos* website - along the following lines:

First Name: Peter  
Last Name: Carey  
Sex: Male  
Age: 62  
Occupation: Writer  
City: New York  
State: NY

**This man targeted me to be his wife. He wanted access to my social and professional network. We were in the same business, and he was ruthlessly ambitious. He sabotaged jobs so I was economically dependent on him, then refused to allow me to take vacations with him unless I could fund them myself. I would have to ask him for money, but his rule was, you ask and you don't get. He would phone me from different cities where he sat at dinner parties held for him by my friends. He planted stories that I was crazy, money hungry, ruthless and unfaithful. By the end of the marriage, he was treating me like Cinderella was treated by her stepmother.**

Clearly Peter Carey went from The One to Not The One in but a few decades. It was much the same on the other side of the union. In his *True History of the Kelly Gang*, Peter Carey wrote in the acknowledgements section: "My greatest debt [is] to my wife, Alison Summers" and referred to her "clear literary intelligence and flawless dramatic instinct". That was in 2000. In late November 2006 the following tit-for-tat psycho profile appeared in *Dating Psychos* - and it's still there.

First Name: Alison  
Last Name: Carey  
Sex: Female  
Age: 58  
Occupation: Whinger  
City: New York  
State: NY

**This woman has been behaving in a pathetic, dishonest and damaging way because she feels so angry at her partner's rejection, no matter what justification he might have for his estrangement. She claims that he has wrecked her life, but she changed his life aggressively from the outset and sooner or later there was bound to be a reckoning. It's time she got on with her own life, justifying her claims of brilliance. If there's brilliance that's anything more than the moon's reflection of the sun we look forward to seeing it.**

On 28 November 2006 a certain Philippa posted a note on *Dating Psychos* - where she wrote that the author of the above quoted piece was "obviously Mr Carey". Sounds credible. Who, apart from Peter Carey, would regard HIMSELF as "the sun" which the moon reflects. Who indeed?

It seems that the Carey v Carey cat-fight ignited following the publication of Peter Carey's latest tome titled *Theft: A Love Story* which contains a character termed "The Plaintiff" (Mr Carey had apparently used such a term to describe Ms Summers during the negotiations leading up to the divorce settlement) who is also depicted as an "alimony whore". He maintains that the latter reference is not directed to her. She does not believe him.

Quite a saga, to be sure. But it's a lot of fun for everyone - apart from Carey/Summers and their children. How fascinating that two members of the Australian intelligentsia have actually taken comfort on the *Dating Psychos* website - instead of confronting one another in book form or on the stage or perhaps by means of an epic poem or two.

The Peter Carey profile has been removed from *Dating Psychos* - where it once could be compared with that of a 23 year old magician from Columbia, Maryland, United States of America, named Alexander - who is depicted by an aggrieved ex as a "liar, thief and world renowned junkie". Wrote the anonymous female correspondent: "If you're a girl thinkin [sic] about dating this guy, then you need to watch your back. My friend in Florida used to date him for like 5 years, and he used to beat her and force her to do terrible things." Good writing style, don't you think? Perhaps she might end up writing plays for Off-Broadway productions or some such.

And there is the anonymous bloke who wrote about a 26 year old Texas resident named Kelly: "She is a psycho bitch, liar, cheater. My friend dated her on and off for several years, to find her cheating in the bed that he bought for her! She will use you up for every cent you own, but then claim she has no money to spend". Fine style. Perhaps he might go on to win a Man Booker Prize. Or perhaps even two.

#### • Amnesia On The Home Front

Meanwhile the break-down of the Carey/Summers union has been a boon for literary detectives the world over. The facts, as now revealed in court documents, interviews and so on are as follows. According to reports, Peter Carey moved out of the marital home about 18 September 2001 - about a week after al Qaeda's attack on the US on 11 September 2001, or what the Americans term 9/11 (see Adam Harvey, *Daily Telegraph*, 18 November and Susan Wyndham, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1-2 April 2006). According to Suzanne Goldenberg (*The Guardian*, 9 May 2006) "it took five years" for the marriage "to formally end". Interviewed by Fran Bailey on ABC *Radio National Breakfast* on 5 April 2006, Peter Carey dismissed the view that the break-up of his marriage was in any sense related to the trauma resulting from al Qaeda's decision to fly planes into the Twin Towers - declaring "the marriage was over by 9/11, anyway".

What, then, are we to make of the following contributions to the literature of the 21st Century. To wit:

Alison Summers' article in *The Australian* on 15 September 2001 where she wrote about the effect of 9/11 on her family, which commenced as follows: "My husband Peter and I work from our home, a Greenwich Village brownstone" and in which she recorded her innermost thoughts when briefly trapped under the World Trade Center on 9/11: "I

wanted more than anything else to help Peter raise the boys". And then there was Ms Summers' article in *The Australian* on 7 September 2002 - where she published her diary for the period 11 September 2001 to 16 September 2001 without once mentioning any problems on the wedded front.

Then there was Peter Carey's open letter to the editor of *The Observer* - which was published on 23 September 2001 - where he wrote about trying to locate his wife in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attack on New York. He went on to reflect about life at the Careys, after Alison Summers returned safely to her Greenwich abode:

**Alison needs to stay home. She nests, tidies, spends several hours on small domestic tasks. Then, finally, she begins to write a powerful piece about her escape. She works all day, all night, she cannot stop. As for me, I have to be outside, among the people. It is all that gives me any peace. I want to stand in the deli by the radio. There I can be with neighbours. We touch, embrace, cry, are half wild with anger. Emotions are close to the surface.**

No mention there that Mrs Carey may have stayed inside, and Mr Carey might have spent a lot of time outside, because there was a certain tension in the Carey household. None at all. And no mention that the Carey/Summers union was effectively over on 9/11.

The alienated leftist (for evidence of Mr Carey's alienation from Australia see, for example, his novel *The Tax Inspector*) is reported as having described Australian intellectual life as a "flea circus". Unlike, er, the contributions made to *Dating Psychos* circus by American-based Australian intellectuals.

## THE-GOSSIP-OF-BYRON-SHIRE

And then there are relationships of old. Like the one that Australia's longest serving Prime Minister Robert Menzies (allegedly) had with Betty Fairfax (1907-1995) the first wife of Sir Warwick Fairfax (1901-1987). Writing in November 2006 issue of *The Monthly* from his semi-retirement abode near fashionable Byron Bay, Mungo MacCallum told the story this way:

**...when Sir Warwick Fairfax belatedly discovered that his first wife had conducted an affair with Menzies, the *Sydney Morning Herald* had a rather less passionate affair with Menzies' opponent, Arthur Calwell. But it didn't last; in the end, class told. And after all, it was Menzies who had given Fairfax those amazingly lucrative television licences. It would have been churlish to allow a little hanky panky - now, in any case, past - to spoil such a long and successful relationship.**

Now *The Monthly* is an authoritative magazine. Well, it would have to be - wouldn't it? What with Melbourne businessman Morry Schwartz as publisher, Sally Warhaft as editor and Chris Feik as associate editor. All three sit on *The Monthly's* editorial board - which is chaired by Professor Robert Manne (no less) who was recently voted as Australia's most influential intellectual by tens score of academics (no less).

So you would expect any comment carried in *The Monthly* - even by the Byron Shire's most influential gossip-maker - to carry some weight. But, alas, millionaire property developer Morry Schwartz apparently cannot find the spare cash to employ a fact-checker for his various publications (re which see *The Sydney Institute Quarterly* Issue 27). So, in *The Monthly, Quarterly Essay* and so on a contributor can pretty much say what he or she likes in what seems to be a fact-checking free environment. After all, what's a few howlers between (leftist) friends?

And so it came to pass that the *Crikey* newsletter decided to do what *The Monthly* seldom does - that is, check a few facts. *Crikey's* Misha Ketchell phoned *The Monthly's* Sally Warhaft and asked her whether she had checked the Menzies/Fairfax affair rumour before publishing MacCallum's claim as a fact. Ms Warhaft replied:

**I spoke to Mungo about this. When I first read it I said I felt very uneasy about it. He said he'd talked to a lot of people and it was common knowledge and he's published it before. I accepted Mungo's insistence that his sources were strong.**

So there you have it. Warhaft only bothered to check the matter with MacCallum and he told her the evidence was "common knowledge" and that his "sources were strong". Well, as the saying goes, he would - wouldn't he? In response to Ketchell's query as to what she would do if the claim was demonstrated to be false, *The Monthly's* editor replied that she would examine the evidence and publish a correction - but only online - if she concluded that such a correction was warranted. Apparently *The Monthly* will not publish corrections in print. Nor does it publish a Letters-to-the-Editor page in the magazine. So Australia's leading intellectual presides over a magazine which is neither interested in correcting errors in print nor willing to engage in correspondence with its readers in print. How about that?

The fact is that there is no evidence that the late Robert Menzies ever had an affair with the late Betty Fairfax. Not a skerrick. As the late A.W. Martin once said, the only evidence of any relationship between Mr Menzies (as he then was) and Mrs Fairfax (as she then was) is that contained in Footnote 67 on Page 302 of A.W. Martin *Robert Menzies: A Life Volume 1 1894-1943* - which reads as follows:

**Few documents survive to attest this happy relationship: one is a letter Menzies sent to Mrs Warwick (Betty) Fairfax on the eve of his departure from London in 1938: "On this occasion I have had very little leisure, although I had an amusing week in Paris and a very interesting, although not very amusing, one in Berlin, so I am quite looking forward to inviting myself out for a drink after my return to Australia, so that I can give you a reasonably veracious account of them". (Menzies to Mrs Warwick Fairfax, 6 August 1938, Menzies Family Papers).**

That's it. Full stop. All that is known of the friendship between Menzies and Fairfax is that he wrote to her in 1938 indicating that he planned to drop around to the house which she shared with her husband

Warwick Fairfax for a drink. This would be an unusual way in which to conduct an affair. Likewise, it would be unusual for Menzies to have retained such a letter in his private papers if he and Betty Fairfax had conducted an affair - as distinct from having enjoyed a friendship.

In the event, *Crikey* contacted many of the living historians of the period. Mungo MacCallum's gossip was dismissed out of hand by:

- Judith Brett - author of *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*.
- Vic Carroll - former editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sun Herald*.
- Bridget Griffen-Foley - author of two books on the Packer family along with *Party Games: Australian Politicians and the Media from War to the Dismissal*.
- Gerard Henderson - author of *Menzies' Child: The Liberal Party of Australia*.
- Brian Johns - former Canberra Press Gallery journalist and former ABC managing director.
- David Marr - *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist and biographer of Sir Garfield Barwick.
- Gavin Souter - author of the Fairfax histories *Company of Heralds* and *Heralds and Angels*.

Journalist Gideon Haigh also entered the debate by stating that he had interviewed Allan Martin (for *The Eye* in 1999) and that Martin had dismissed the Menzies/Fairfax affair rumour. Martin also told Haigh that former Canberra Press Gallery journalist Ian Fitchett had debunked the rumour in a personal conversation with him.

And how did the Gossip-of-Byron-Shire respond to such evidence? Mungo MacCallum first-up declared that "the affair was beyond gossip in Canberra in the late 1960s". So much so that "the story was told by politicians, staffers, journalists and Commonwealth car drivers". Credible sources, eh? The only problem was that all MacCallum's sources were unnamed - except for two journalists (Ian Fitchett and Alan Reid) who are dead. Convenient, eh? (see *Crikey* 4 November 2006). Two days later MacCallum wrote: "He [Gerard Henderson] says there is no direct evidence and of course he is right" (see *Crikey*, 6 November 2006). But Mungo MacCallum said that he still believed in the rumour and Sally Warhaft has declined to make a correction. Why let evidence stand in the way of the Gossip-of-Byron-Shire's belief in the credibility of unnamed and deceased Commonwealth Car drivers?

The rumour does not make any political sense. Why would Warwick Fairfax wait until the 1961 Federal election to oppose Menzies for a deed which had allegedly occurred some two decades previously? By 1961 Warwick Fairfax was married to his third wife. In any event, *Media Watch* is of the view that it's all John Howard's fault. Here's why. Remember Jenny Garrett's (Mungo MacCallum's partner) depiction of life with the Gossip-of-Byron-Shire - as told to the *Good Weekend* (12 February 2005)? It went like this:

**He [Mungo] distresses me when he can't see beyond the depression of the immediate. After the [2004] election was lost, he was very depressed. We both literally cried. He's a very passionate man. He yells at the situation, he yells at the stupidity of the Australian populace, he**

**yells at his journalist colleagues, who he feels have let him down terribly. When he's depressed, he drinks to the point where I think it's endangering his health - at least a bottle of wine a day. We blame John Howard for a lot of things, and yes, John Howard drove him to drink.**

Which presents the scenario that MM wrote about the Menzies/Fairfax scenario when he was under the weather. And who is it who sends those alcohol-fuelled clouds over the Byron Shire? Blame John Howard, of course.

## ROBERT V MANNE

While on the topic of Australia's most influential intellectual, let's take a look at how he went on the "Friday Forum" night debate on the ABC TV *Lateline* program on 6 October 2006. There are some errors in the *Lateline* transcript so the quotes below have been taken from the video tape. Professor Manne, your time starts now:

### • Robert on John Howard and RM

Manne comments that "history will find a lot wrong with the conservatives in Australia and indeed with his [John Howard's] prime ministership". It is put to Robert Manne that he "voted for John Howard in 1996 and told everyone about it" and since then RM "has done little except criticise John Howard". Challenging this assertion, Robert Manne asks: "What do you know about what I thought in 1996?"

Interlude. Easy really. It seems that Manne has forgotten that in 1996 he urged the readers of his newspaper column to vote for John Howard. In his column in *The Age* on 31 August 1998 Manne looked back with regret and now urged his readers to vote Labor: "At the last election I voted for the Howard Coalition. This time I will not." It seems that Australia's most influential intellectual has difficulty remembering both how he voted along with his past columns.

### • Yes/No Manne

Robert Manne is asked to name "a figure on the Australian left who has stood up on the terrorism issue, including the need for counter-terrorist legislation". He replies "Robert Manne" and refers to a "recent" article which he has written on the topic. But Manne then goes on to state: "I don't write about counter-terrorist legislation because it's not my field and I'm not a lawyer and I don't pretend to be."

Interlude. So what's the position of Australia's most influential intellectual here? Has he argued the need for counter-terrorist legislation (as he told *Lateline* viewers) or does he refrain from commenting on counter-terrorist legislation (as he told *Lateline* viewers)? Who knows? For the record, it turns out that Manne was referring to an article he wrote in the August 2006 issue of *The Monthly* - which made, in fact, no reference whatsoever to the need for counter-terrorist legislation but focused instead on Islam and Islamophobia. It seems that Australia's most influential intellectual also has trouble remembering his recent writings in addition to his past voting intentions and previous columns.

## HETEROSEXUAL GRANDAD'S HOMOPHOBIA

Another commentator with a short memory is Sydney Radio 2UE breakfast presenter Mike Carlton. The perennial leftie wrote to *Crikey* on 7 October 2006 to describe any suggestion that he is "homophobic" is "just plain silly". Mr Carlton chose to defend himself against the claim that his depiction of talk-back radio presenter Alan Jones as "Gloria Parrott" in his Friday morning comedy slot is homophobic. Not so, alleged Carlton. He maintained that "Alan Jones's almost Athenian to fostering the careers of young male sports stars and singers is a fair subject for satire". But is it?

The young males in question are twentysomethings - that is, they are over the age of consent. In other words, Alan Jones is just as entitled to foster the careers of young males as, say, Mike Carlton is entitled to foster the careers of twentysomething or thirtysomething young females. Unless he is really homophobic, of course.

It turned out that, just over a week after his holier-than-thou missive to *Crikey*, Mike Carlton married his long time partner Morag Ramsay. It was a gorgeous affair. The bride wore white and her old man was decked-out in a kilt. The husband looked the part in a black tux. Prior to the big day, the forthcoming nuptials had been mentioned ad nauseam with self-indulgent excitement on Mike Carlton's 2UE breakfast program. This would be understandable if Carlton were a young thing. The fact is that the grandfather radio star will never be on the best side of 60 again. Which means that Ms Ramsay is young enough to be Mr Carlton's daughter.

No problem there. Except for the fact that your man Mike has an obvious interest in over-the-age-of-consent young women - while he condemns Alan Jones' alleged interest in over-the-age-of-consent young men. This seems pretty homophobic, to *Media Watch* at least. But don't tell Mike. Like many a journalist, he likes laughing at others but hurts like hell when anyone laughs at, or even criticises, him. Indeed, Carlton described any reminder of his double standard in this instance as the work of a "poisonous little toad". Funny that.

Oh yes, about homophobia. On 22 July 2003 Mike Carlton emailed Gerard Henderson supporting his criticism of a prominent public figure who, it so happens, is gay. Rather than focusing on the issues themselves, Carlton wrote "I do think [name deleted] should make clear his stance on sodomy. Best wishes. MC". Sounds pretty homophobic. What do you think?

## STEPHEN AND LIZ - ON STEPHEN AND LIZ

It's great to see that relationships live on in the media world. But, in journalism land, no one is so much in love as those who love themselves.

Take the 2006 Walkley Awards for excellence in journalism which were handed down in Melbourne on Thursday 30 November 2006. Most focus has been on the stunning performance which tired and emotional News Limited columnist Glenn Milne put in when throwing presenter Stephen Mayne off the stage. It was a real four-and-a-half-stars effort. But not quite up to the five stars maximum. The problem was that Milne went on to the stage to talk about somebody else - i.e. Mayne. Whereas some presenters got up on the stage to talk about the subject they know best - i.e. THEMSELVES. They

were the real stars of the night. Come on up Stephen Mayne and Liz Jackson.

• **The Mayne Story**

In presenting the awards for business journalism, Stephen Mayne managed to talk about (i) his vote as a candidate in the recent Victorian State election (it was 1.32 per cent) and the fact that this was his 32nd straight election defeat. He also mentioned that he had won a Walkley Award in 1999 (gee wiz) and that his own paper had refused to report this at the time (shame). There was (yet) more. Stephen Mayne said that he had been defeated in his attempt to win a place on the Telstra board and quoted what a Telstra executive had said to him about what the Prime Minister had said to him. There followed the on-stage interruption per courtesy of Mr Milne - well, at least it broke the Mayne ego stream of consciousness.

When order was restored, Stephen Mayne then spoke about what Eddie McGuire had said about the *Crikey* newsletter when Mayne was proprietor. He then told the audience where he (Mayne) was seated that very night. Big deal. SM even managed to speak about HIMSELF when backgrounding the nature of the photographic essay award. Quite an achievement, surely. Then, before announcing the winner, Stephen Mayne spoke about himself again:

**Well, I've got to say, it's been a pretty rough day in the office. I got sacked by my own political party, hurt my leg, may even have to hit...for a Work Cover claim. Any way, the winner is....".**

Thanks for that.

• **Jackson's Kitchen's Cabinet**

And then there was the speech by Liz Jackson, following the announcement that her *Four Corners* team had won the 2006 Gold Walkley for its program on East Timor titled *Stoking the Fires*. She went on. And on. And on. Despite a couple of attempts at wind-ups, Ms Jackson's speech ran for a full six minutes. No kidding. She even told the assembled audience how, during the course of filming in East Timor she had thrown-up from a car during a trip on a high, winding road. Go on. She thanked every one - at length of course - and spoke in praise of long-form investigative journalism like *Four Corners*. Then, the highlight of the evening occurred with Ms Jackson's final cheerio:

**I finally have to say, and I know I'm getting the wind-up. On a personal level, if you'll indulge me, I'd like to thank my partner Martin Butler - who has been my kitchen cabinet for many years in terms of the all the programs I've made and has always been my impeccable at-home producer. [He] doesn't get paid for it but I'd like to acknowledge him for the first time. So thank you all very much indeed.**

For the record, Liz Jackson was indulged. Heaps. And she has acknowledged Martin Butler previously - see her interview published in the *Good Weekend* on 21 June 2003. So considerable time would have been saved if she had handed out photocopies of this material to guests as they entered the venue. Anyrate, Liz Jackson deserves a special Walkley. For self-indulgence in a public place.