

THE

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When biography is hagiography - with **STEPHEN MATCHETT**

Peter Costello - Mark Scott
EXCLUSIVE

The problem of debt - **ANNE HENDERSON** checks out the 1920s

CAROL BAXTER reviews Australian history on screen - pity about the sources

Robert Menzies - taxpayer funded myths and distortions

Paid Parental Leave - Catch 22 for young women

JOHN MCCONNELL reviews books on BA Santamaria & Kim Beazley sen

Vale Laurie Short & John Maynes

MEDIA WATCH targets Leigh Sales, Blanche D'Alpuget, Paul Sheehan, Fiona McGregor, Jill Singer & Stuart Littlemore

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with Gerard Henderson's

MEDIA WATCH

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THE ABC OF TRESPASS

Young men – or relatively young men – will invariably push the boundaries of what some regard as acceptable behaviour. Especially if they are comedians. The Chaser team have put their ABC TV show into hibernation but ABC managing director Mark Scott has said that the public broadcaster is looking forward to receiving proposals from The Chaser about possible new programs on the ABC.

The Chaser ran many pranks during its various ABC series. All were approved in advance by ABC management – in particular, the ABC's Legal Services department. One of the Chaser's recurring pranks involved one or more of the The Chaser "boys" gatecrashing a private function accompanied by a camera crew. The joke was to disrupt a function and/or to confront on camera an individual with a view of making fun of him or her, or on occasions, making a political point. From The Chaser's point of view, this was legitimate activity for a comedy team. From time to time, the Chaser's executive producer Julian Morrow and his colleagues became exasperated when ABC management vetoed or modified some of their proposed pranks. But what went to air on ABC TV was approved in advance – and only on rare occasions did the management express any regrets about the content of the program.

Over recent years quite a few businesses spent money engaging security services to ward off an intended trespass by The Chaser team on private property with the intent to disrupt a company function. Other organisations, without the financial resources of large businesses, had to engage in avoidance strategies to ensure that The Chaser's planned disruption – which had been approved in advance by ABC management – did not eventuate. Sometimes, this prevented such disruption; frequently The Chaser team had its way. All this took place while the ABC, using its taxpayer funding, substantially upgraded its own security to prevent unauthorised personnel entering its premises. The security was most extensive at the ABC headquarters in the Sydney suburb of Ultimo.

Recent events have demonstrated the ABC's unpleasant double standard on trespass. When he delivered the 2009 Andrew Olle Media Lecture in November, Morrow told how The Chaser had attempted to disrupt the 2006 lecture (which was delivered by the then Communications Ministers Helen Coonan) but had been thwarted by ABC management. The Andrew Olle Media Lecture, which is televised and broadcast on the public broadcaster, is a major ABC annual function. Then in December, ABC security prevented a prank by two (so far unidentified) individuals also intended to disrupt the launch on the ABC 3 children's channel by the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. They were escorted from the ABC's Ultimo building.

The lesson is quite clear. Over the years ABC management has specifically approved The Chaser's trespass on private property and resultant disruption (see the link on Issue 36 of *Gerard Henderson's Media Watch Dog* which is on The Sydney Institute website). However, ABC management has not allowed the Chaser to disrupt ABC events and has used security to thwart trespass on its property by those attempting to "do a Chaser" on the ABC. The message seems to be that the ABC only approves trespass on non-ABC property.

THE GROUCHO COMPLEX

Shelley Gare

"I don't care to belong to any club that would accept me as a member," - Groucho Marx

Studio executive: *"Women are very, very judgemental. As you know. They're harsh critics of other women."*

Male screenwriter: *"That's too bad. Maybe if they weren't, women would rule the world."*

- Dialogue from *One Fifth Avenue* by Candace Bushnell, 2009

Many years ago, I knew a wannabe mogul in need of funds. I also knew an executive, a friend visiting from Britain, in need of projects. With quite a bit of prodding, I finally persuaded the wannabe mogul to meet with the wannabe funder whereupon things moved very quickly and a substantial deal was done.

The wannabe didn't just become a mogul - well, a mini-mogul; the introduction set him up, and on his way to riches.

It was hardly surprising. The funder was weighed down with loot from entrepreneur and publisher Robert Maxwell, then still in fine form and a couple of years away from his mystery death-plunge into the Atlantic after the collapse of his dodgy empire.

Maxwell aside though, there was always something about the deal between those two colleagues/friends that sat in my consciousness afterwards like a tiny, irritating speck of grit.

I didn't understand why until several years later when I learned about investment bankers and I realised that the deal I had been so instrumental in bringing about usually netted the facilitator a fee or a percentage or at least inclusion in the new project. And I hadn't received anything; not even a delivery of expensive flowers.

Now, you could legitimately wonder two things at this point. Who *were* these creeps? And why had I been such an obliging Pollyanna? Or you could phrase those two questions another way. Why is it that men keep coming out on top? What is it about women that turns us into such dopey accomplices?

They're the two questions that playwrights, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, authors, poets, feminists and now neuroscientists

have been trying to answer ever since Adam and Eve stepped out of Eden and Eve noticed that Adam was getting more apples - and oranges, grapes and bananas too - than she was.

But we don't usually phrase these questions so unpalatably, so brutally. That in itself is a giveaway as to what the true answers might be.

Women's battle for equality of opportunity - the chance to live their lives as fully and with the automatic freedoms and licences, as well as responsibilities that men do - has been undermined from the beginning by a failure or unwillingness to understand and accept some core realities.

Instead, myths have been perpetrated to cover up the many uncomfortable truths about men, women, and how women relate to men.

It's only now, as we are well into the twenty-first century and the statistics are still not delivering what the enlightened of both sexes had hoped, that some of those truths are finally bubbling and lurching to the surface like bodies buried in a swamp. But it's not easy. Nor pleasant.

How for instance to equate the fact that we now have a female governor-general, female deputy Prime Minister, female federal opposition leader, female governor in NSW, and female premiers in both NSW and Queensland with the fact that Australian women's earnings as a proportion of men's, have now dropped to a 20 year low - 82.5 per cent - and the ratio has been dropping for the past five years. Or that Australian girls do better than boys at school, but that early advantage quickly disappears later.

Nobel prize-winner Elizabeth Blackburn, now 61, told *The Australian*, that prospects for women in the life sciences had improved greatly since her time, "but only up until the end of the Ph D, graduate training and postdoctoral research period."

How do we reconcile that young women say they've never been freer, but they walk around every day in punishing, painful, hobbling stilettos that no woman would have dreamed of wearing - except maybe for an evening out - even ten years ago.

A recent post on *The New York Times* website showed one man's response to a volley about the injustices done to women. He replied: "The revolution is over. You lost."

Nobody now disputes the idea that while there have been myriad improvements to women's lives, improvements for which every woman must be grateful, there are still major obstacles that loom as forbiddingly as serried rows of armed storm-troopers.

And there are still things women don't want to acknowledge about themselves. The story of women -

where we are, what we're like, how we got here, where we're going - is all too often laced with litres of sugary hog-wash. There's fudging, obfuscation, euphemism, outright lies and far too many red herrings.

Two big myths are responsible for decades of wasted effort.

The first is, or was, that men will eventually be delighted to accept women as equals in the workplace. The second is that women belong to a loyal sisterhood as proud and strong as the brotherhood.

If it were true that men are sanguine about accepting women as equals at work then everything should have changed drastically when baby-boomer men started getting close to the top. After all, this was the first generation of men who had entered the workforce as beginners alongside women and then worked alongside those women all their careers. And yet, we all know that the next logical step didn't happen. Women, even the ones without babies, did not ascend in the same numbers as men.

A former advertising executive, an extremely successful woman who had eventually gone out on her own, protests, "It's just not in the male DNA!"

Early in 2008, the newly elected Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the vice-chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Glyn Davis, selected a steering committee of ten for the PM's 2020 ideas summit. Announcing the summit, Rudd had proclaimed that "we need to call forth the talent and energies of the nation". But just one of that committee turned out to be a woman - the glamorous, and at the time, very pregnant, actor Cate Blanchett.

What made it even more inexplicable was that Rudd and Davis have extremely successful, inventive, intelligent wives - Thérèse Rein with her recruitment business; Margaret Gardner AO who is vice-chancellor of RMIT university. And these men *still* hadn't noticed that nine of the ten committee members looked just like themselves.

DNA

This male blindness tends to make many women even more anxious to join the men's club because, as they've correctly deduced, from such slips, it's the only club in town when it comes to accessing power, influence and wealth. And it tends to make women secretly look down on the women's club. Although, God forbid, women should say any of this in public.

One woman who did is American journalist Helen Lawrenson who wrote from the 1930s through to the 1970s. In her lifetime, she interviewed the likes of Fidel Castro, was a managing editor at the original *Vanity Fair*, had a long-term affair with the publisher Condé Nast and a Harlem gangster nicknamed "Bumpy", and eventually settled down lovingly with an organiser for the maritime union organiser. No

shrinking violet she.

In 1959, she wrote an acute and witty essay called "How Women Feel About Other Women" for *Esquire* in which she commented on "the prickly conduct of feminine relationships" from which few women are immune: "As someone has said, even women who are strangers, when they pass on the street, look at each other like the Guelphs and the Ghibellines."

Over-egging it a little for the laughs, true, but Lawrenson's essay in its entirety is still one of the purest and funniest assessments I've read of the underlying, competitive tensions between women.

The sixties feminists hated it. They refused to admit even a tiny bit of truth in the humour of one of my favourite lines: "There are, I suppose, a few women whose success has been unresented by any other women, but offhand I can't think of any except Helen Keller and possibly Grandma Moses."

But perhaps the most lethal and unforgiveable sentence was this: "Furthermore I must confess that while I enjoy having my work praised by other women, I feel a surge of greater pleasure if it is praised by men."

Talk about throwing kerosene on the fire but it still makes me snicker because I have seen - 50 years after that line was written - the staunchest of the sisterhood stop in mid-conversation with each other and preen for attention like pussy-cats if an illustrious alpha male happens to join their group.

BREAK

It has always struck me that men are really happy to be men. They *like* being men. When they meet, whatever the difference in status, it's as if they're exchanging invisible, affirming handshakes. It's why blokes always get in the front seat of cabs.

But do women like being women? Do we like and enjoy being women as much as men like being men?

The questions are worth pondering - by both sexes - but oddly, on the two occasions I've written those questions into stories on this subject, for magazines edited by women, they've been deleted.

Women censor each other. Or as the feminist historian Marilyn Lake once put it to me memorably, women police each other.

Groucho's line was a joke that sent up personal neuroticism and insecurity. But when we see the women's club the same way, and as something secondary to the men's club, we are saying something about the way we feel about the very essence of ourselves. When we refuse to acknowledge we're thinking like this, it admits something worse.

The international research agency Catalyst, which studies women in the workplace, came up with fascinating findings in 2006ⁱⁱ. It discovered there were

different stereotypes of successful leadership between countries. A team builder is supposed to be the ideal in some regions but in other regions, problem-solvers are wanted. In the US and England, they want inspirational leaders but delegating is more important in Nordic countries.

Here's the catch. It didn't matter what leadership quality was deemed most important by a particular country, the people of that country always said that that was the very quality women lacked. No characteristic or group of characteristics hold women back. It is the fact that women are women that holds them back.

Philosophically, psychologically – even if not legislatively – we are still where we were when American feminist and journalist Crystal Eastman fretted in 1920, “What is the problem with women's freedom?”

In a way, longing to enter the men's club is just another version of the Cinderella story: the notion that salvation and happiness for women always arrive in male-form.

There is far more to be written on this subject – and there will be. It is hard to write these arguments without a hundred qualifications and explanations.

It's also hard for women, 45 and over, who have struggled mightily, to listen to today's twenty-somethings insouciantly claiming they're not feminists and they've never seen the glass ceiling. (No, that's because a woman's head doesn't crash into it until she's a little older, a lot more experienced, and much scarier to male rivals.)

In the meantime, I can recommend one little drab truth that does come up every so often. It only gets acknowledged grudgingly because it is such a tiresome truth, such a beige, boring, unromantic piece of advice. But it is the best bit of advice any woman can pass on and it is this: from the moment a young girl starts receiving pocket-money or takes a holiday job, she should put at least ten per cent of it into a savings account. She should keep doing that until she dies.

It is money that will make a woman truly safe, and preserve her sanity. Most of all, it is having her own money which will earn her respect, without which there can be no equality.

ENDNOTES

¹*The Australian*, October 6, 2009. “Nobel first for Aussie woman” by Bernard Lane and Leigh Dayton.

²*The New York Times*, January 11, 2007. “The Feminine Critique” by Lisa Belkin. Based on Catalyst report, “Different Cultures, Similar Perceptions: Stereotyping of Western European Business Leaders”, published June, 2006.

Shelley Gare is a well known Sydney writer and former editor.



VALE FRANK DEVINE (1931-2009)

New Zealand born Frank Devine, of Catholic faith, moved to Australia in the 1950s and became one of his adopted nation's most successful journalists. He worked as a reporter at home and overseas, edited the *Reader's Digest*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *New York Post*, and for a brief time, *The Australian*. For the last two decades of his life, Frank was primarily a columnist – writing short monthly pieces for *The Australian* and wry but longer musings for *Quadrant* magazine. Unlike many men of a certain age, Frank Devine did not attempt to hide his age. Rather, he celebrated his mature years. Frank's reflections on his last decades can be found in his posthumously published book, *Older and Wiser* (Quadrant Books, 2009).

Frank Devine was a member and valued supporter of The Sydney Institute and he attended functions with his wife Jacqueline. His benevolent and good nature is well known. Less so, perhaps, Frank's empathy and generosity. During his retirement, Frank gave generously to assist asylum seekers in Australia's refugee and humanitarian intake to settle in their new country. Frank Devine was a great bloke. May he rest in peace.

VALE GENE HERBERT (1932-2009)

Born a Western Australian, Gene Herbert moved to Canberra and finally settled in Sydney. In Canberra, Gene (who was an economist) worked in the Australian Bureau of Census and Statistics. He took up a position with CSR in Sydney in 1962, where he stayed for the remainder of his full-time career. On appointment to CSR, he worked on the Committee of Economic Inquiry, commonly known as the Vernon Report. Gene Herbert, who was great with figures and invariably exhibited care and calm judgement, made an important contribution to CSR during its difficult times in the mid-1980s. On his retirement from CSR, Gene took a number of board seats and commenced research on his family's country. He was the author of *From Creaton to Camballup*, which was published in 2001.

Gene Herbert was an inaugural board member of The Sydney Institute and became Treasurer before resigning due to increasingly poor eyesight. Gene made a great contribution to the Institute in its formative first decade and his sound financial advice was much appreciated by fellow board members and staff. Gene will be missed – but not forgotten.

ABSTINENCE: THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION TO ADDICTION

Ross Fitzgerald

Let me put some of my cards on the table. I turn 65 on Christmas Day. And if I survive until Australia Day 2010 I will have had no alcohol or other drugs in the last 40 years. This means I've had 40 more years on the planet than I otherwise would have had.

Like a lot of teenagers who are prone to addiction, I got into trouble with alcohol at an early age – in fact from my first drink of alcohol at age fourteen I drank in a manner that was out of control.

Despite all the advances in medicine and in the so-called “helping professions”, few experts understand that a significant number of teenagers who drink alcohol, no matter what their level of education, ethnicity or gender, will end up becoming alcohol-dependent. And for those who become alcoholic, however young, the only safe solution is not to drink at all - otherwise the end result may eventually be severe physical and mental impairment or death. It is important to stress that alcoholism is a health problem, not a moral problem. Alcoholics are not bad people who need to be good, but people suffering from an illness who can recover - if they learn to totally avoid drinking alcohol, one day at a time.

In the twenty-first century, one disturbing trend is an exponential increase, among Australians aged 16 to 24, in out-of-control drinking, and especially of binge drinking in teenage girls. This problem is accentuated if, as so often happens, teenagers use other drugs including ecstasy, ice, cocaine, and especially marijuana, which is cultivated hydroponically and is therefore so much stronger than it used to be 20 or 30 years ago.

In spite of abstinence having saved the lives of countless people, not drinking alcohol at all is seen by many as being rather weird, especially if one is young. Yet these days, a number of 16, 17 and 18 year old drinkers have done so much physical, emotional and social damage to themselves and others that they are seeking help, including joining groups like Alcoholics Anonymous whose meetings they regularly attend in order to remain abstinent from

alcohol and other drugs. Unfortunately, in our society, there is still enormous social and peer-group pressure on those who wish to avoid alcohol. Not surprisingly, this pressure is extremely strong on the young, be it from friends, school or workmates, or from other members of sporting clubs and other organizations to which teenagers may belong.

In a society like ours, with such an entrenched drink culture and with such a politically powerful liquor industry, advertising and significant social and peer group pressure is often applied to those who need to remain abstinent in order to stay alive, let alone to live productive lives. This even applies in our prisons, where 80 per cent of inmates have significant problems with alcohol and other drugs. Of this group, there is a core of about 40 per cent who need to remain totally abstinent if they are not to become recidivists. Yet even within our prison population there is strong pressure, from psychologists and other professionals, to advocate so-called “harm minimisation” and to oppose the notion of total abstinence.

SO, WHAT'S THE HARM?

In common (and often professional) usage, the notion of “harm minimisation” conflates two separate, and very different, ideas. Only one of these do I support and that is the idea of preventing avoidable harms, for example by providing safe needle exchanges and supervised injecting rooms to prevent users contracting HIV, hepatitis and other preventable disease.

But the second notion of so-called harm minimisation I cannot support and that is the notion that alcoholics and addicts can (and should) be taught to somehow “moderate” or “control” their usage, as opposed to try and learn to abstain. And this is despite the fundamental fact that most other drug use in our society is illegal! How bizarre then to be informed by prison psychologists that, while in custody, prisoner X and Y is learning to moderate his or her drug use – as though this was somehow praiseworthy. In Australia there is still strong pressure exercised against those who don't drink alcohol. This includes deep suspicion about those who do abstain. As Sir Les Patterson puts it: “Never trust a man who doesn't drink/ Though he may not throw up on your kitchen sink/ I'd rather be half-hearted/ Than be a blue-nose, wowser bastard/ So NEVER trust a man who doesn't drink.”

Recently at a party in Redfern I overheard someone say “Watch her, she doesn't drink!” Indeed at social functions when I drink mineral water or fruit juice I am often asked, “What's the matter, don't you drink?” To which I sometimes reply, “What do you think I'm doing, eating a sandwich?” Of course I drink. I drink a lot. It's just that I don't drink alcohol. This is

because, as with about 7 to 8 per cent of the Australian population, one glass containing alcohol is one too many - and a hundred are not enough. The trick for people like me is therefore not to imbibe the first one, and to have nothing in our blood but blood.

Although not always the case, quite often a propensity to alcoholism and other drug addiction is genetically based. Speaking personally, my father was a rough, tough footballer who played Aussie Rules for Collingwood, but he never drank a teaspoon full of alcohol in his life. This was because his father was an alcoholic whose drinking blighted his marriage and destroyed the family business.

THE FIRST DRINK... AND THE LAST

My first drink of alcohol, at age 14, was at the same place that, up to now, I had my last drink - at Her Majesty's Hotel in Toorak Road in Melbourne, then run by Maisy, a well-known drag queen. For no other reason than that it seemed exotic, after having visited a local doctor, I fronted the bar in my Melbourne Boys High school uniform at about 11AM and ordered a brandy, lime and soda. The waiter, very kindly, suggested that I take off my school hat!

That first drink of alcohol was like an injection of rocket fuel. Very soon, I was drinking as much as I could, usually on my own. Quite often, my idea of a good Saturday night was to go to the Brighton Cemetery, with a flagon of claret, and sit drinking in front of Adam Lindsay Gordon's obelisk which reads: "Life is only froth and bubble, Two things stand like stone, Kindness in another's trouble, Courage in your own." I now think it significant that, instead of being attracted to the grave of the gangster Squizzy Taylor or to the bent Victorian politician Sir Thomas Bent, I found myself in front of Gordon, the alcoholic poet, who killed himself on the beach near Park Street Brighton, where when young I often used to drink myself.

When I was 16, I stumbled home drunk from Middle Brighton beach at 2am. My father, fit, tall and erect, was waiting up for me. "What are you celebrating, son?" he said. I had no answer. I didn't know that I was drinking because I had to. Then Dad told me something I've never forgotten. "When I was your age, son, I lost two bicycles looking for my father."

It seems to me that my dad knew that he, like his father, was potentially an alcoholic and that's why he never drank at all. He believed, from experiencing his father's alcoholism at close hand, that if he started drinking, he'd be putting himself at great risk. He also understood that booze would also get me - his only living child - into terrible trouble. And it did. From the age of 15 to 25 alcohol caused me, and those close to me, enormous damage.

Finally, it dawned that, rather than other people, situations and things being to blame, alcohol was the

primary cause of my problems. So, after returning from America, and turning on one last catastrophic drinking session at Maisy's, in January 1970 I managed to put the cork in the bottle, and, so far, to keep it there. Since then I have been free of all other drugs as well. I'm pleased to say that I managed to stop drinking three years before my father died, which meant that he and I were able to get to know each other properly, without my drunkenness sullyng our relationship.

But despite being almost 40 years sober, I still need to be vigilant. I need to realise that what matters most in my life is that I don't pick up the first drink of alcohol, one day at a time.

AA AND ALL THAT

About 20 years ago, I was waiting for my friend, Jim Maclaine, then a psychologist at Sydney's Langton Clinic, when it was abstinence-oriented. Through the paper-thin walls, I overheard Jim talking to a new patient whose name, I recall, was Boris. Said Jim, "Boris, now that you've been admitted to this hospital as an alcoholic, for as long as you live you'll be spending a lot of your time with other alcoholics. The big question is whether they're going to be drunken ones or sober ones."

Jim continued: "If you cross South Dowling Street outside the Clinic, and get run over by a truck and break your hip, depending on your personality it may take three months, it may take six months, it may take a year or even two, but eventually you'll forget the dreadful pain of breaking your hip and be able to cross a road without a qualm." That forgetfulness, he explained, is a necessary and important part of human evolution. If we remembered all the dreadful pains of existence we'd never get out of bed. "That forgetfulness is enormously helpful - except for what you've got Boris, except for alcoholism. You need to remember organically what has happened to you. The best way that I know of achieving this," he said, "is to regularly attend meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous and listen to other alcoholics tell what they used to be like, what happened, and what they are like now."

Alcoholism and drug addiction among the young is much more prevalent than most people in Australia, and many in the media, realise. If someone, young or old, inquires 'Am I an alcoholic?' I suggest they ask themselves four questions. Most importantly: Is alcohol costing you more than money? Then: 1) Does your personality change for the worse after drinking? 2) Do your relatives, friends, lovers etc point out that you have a problem with alcohol? and 3) Sometimes after drinking, do you have hours, or even days, that you cannot remember? If you answer yes to at least three of these questions you are almost certainly an alcoholic or at the very least a severely impaired

problem drinker. And over the long term (i.e. over 2 to 3 years) the only safe option is to aim for total abstinence.

Yet, regrettably, these days as a therapeutic aim, abstinence is still often regarded with askance.

Thank God for groups like the Salvos who, in treating alcoholics and other addicts, still aim for complete abstinence rather than so-called “controlled” drinking or drug use. Indeed, in many centres across Australia, the Salvos’ Bridge Program still makes pivotal use of Alcoholics Anonymous, its meetings and its 12 suggested steps of recovery.

The first of AA’s 12 steps says: “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable.” No matter how long they have been sober, alcoholics in the Bridge Program and in AA always speak of their alcoholism in the present tense: “My name is ... and I am an alcoholic.” This is because alcoholics and other addicts are never really cured of their alcoholism, in that if they start drinking and using again they are bound, over the long term, to relapse into uncontrolled usage. In order to stay alive, and to live useful and meaningful lives, alcoholics and other addicts need to make a daily commitment to a life choice of stable abstinence.

Psychoanalyst Carl Jung, who was instrumental in the founding of AA, explained that the Latin word for alcohol is spiritus and that we use the same term “for the highest religious experience as well as the most depraving poison”. When dealing with alcoholism, said Jung, the most helpful formula is spiritus contra spiritum: spirit against spirit, or power against power. This is why AA suggests that newcomers to the program try to develop a belief in what it calls “a power greater than oneself”.

This notion can apply equally for theists and for non-theists, for agnostics and for atheists. All that is required is the realisation that, like cancer or diabetes, usually alcoholism cannot, over the long term, be vanquished by an isolated exertion of the individual’s will.

To most people it is obvious, given the damaging, life-threatening consequences of alcoholism and other drug addiction, and the proven inability of alcoholics and addicts to control their drinking or drug use, that the goal of treatment should be total abstinence. Yet in the past 30 years in Australia, and elsewhere in the West, an anti-abstinence orthodoxy has become entrenched in health department and corrective services practice and policy, with extremely unfortunate results.

What is particularly damaging is that alcoholics and other addicts and their families are given the false hope that controlled drinking is a viable option and

that abstinence is no longer necessary. Despite the continued advocacy by many state and federal health workers and government bureaucrats for alcoholics to be treated by controlled drinking programs, the evidence is very strong that after three years or more the aim of controlled use fails miserably for people with addictions. Indeed, over the long term, almost all alcoholics who aim for anything other than complete abstinence return to full-blown addiction.

CONTROLLED DRINKING U-TURN

May I draw your attention to the path-breaking work of Professor George Vaillant from Harvard University who has shown that there is compelling long-term evidence that for alcoholics and those addicted to other drugs, moderation and so-called controlled usage does not work. As Vaillant succinctly puts it in his long-term longitudinal study, *The Natural History of Alcoholism Revisited*: “Despite its prominence 20 years ago, training alcohol-dependent individuals to achieve stable return to controlled drinking is a mirage. Hopeful initial reports have not led to replication.”

Initially, in the 1980s, funded by the Rand Foundation, Vaillant supported the controlled use of alcohol and other drugs but, after seeing the results of his long-term follow-up studies, he has moved to advocating abstinence and the 12-step approach of Alcoholics Anonymous, which is by far the most successful agency in helping alcoholics and problem drinkers to stop drinking alcohol and to stop using other drugs as well. Yet because it is an unpaid lay movement of men and women who have managed to stay free of alcohol and wish to help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety, AA is often undervalued or not valued at all by medical practitioners and health professionals.

Despite overwhelming long-term evidence, in Australia the proponents of controlled usage remain in favour with most government bureaucrats and health professionals, while those who advocate a strategy of abstinence are marginalised or ignored. As Vaillant’s comprehensive studies of alcohol abusers clearly demonstrate, while five to six years of abstinence is adequate to predict a stable future, return to controlled drinking is a much less stable state. To put it another way, after abstinence has been maintained for five years, relapse is rare. In contrast, return to controlled drinking without eventual relapse is unlikely.

This is not to deny that even severely dependent individuals can occasionally achieve more moderate drinking; the crucial caveat is that this is a relatively unusual occurrence. Moreover, even staunch control drinking or drug usage advocates acknowledge that a successful outcome becomes less likely as the severity of dependence on alcohol and other drugs increases.

This is not to dispute that alcoholics and addicts are extremely resistant to adopting a goal of abstinence and often strongly deny the assertion that they cannot safely use alcohol or other drugs. Indeed, such resistance and denial are integral parts of their disorder. Theoreticians who advocate controlled usage do so precisely because it is difficult for alcohol-dependent and other drug-dependent people to consider abstinence. But there is no empirical evidence that controlled drinking or drug-usage strategies works for such people for any extended period – that is, three years or more.

Although, superficially, it may seem a useful strategy to health professionals and government bureaucrats, suggesting that alcoholics and addicts should somehow try to learn to control their drug usage is an enormous waste of human and financial resources that causes, if not death, then often irreparable damage. The truth is that an alcoholic's or an addict's best change of recovery lies in practising total abstinence.

It is pleasing to report that groups like the Salvation Army have maintained a commitment to total abstinence via the AA program as the prime therapeutic goal for alcoholics and other addicts. Fortunately in the last few years we are also beginning to see a return to the abstinence model by a small but increasing number of psychologists and medical practitioners, and to once again valuing AA as the most effective form of long-term therapy for persons addicted to alcohol.

Although it may be regarded by some as politically incorrect, I am pleased to report that the New South Wales government, under the leadership of then Health Minister, John Della Bosca, adopted and extended the provisions of the Inebriates Act of 1912, which for decades had not been widely used. Now, in New South Wales, at various facilities throughout the state, an increasing number of severely ill alcoholics can be subject to an order forcing them into effective long-term, life-saving treatment for up to twelve months.

As a side benefit, this long-term treatment regime means that, apart from those in the grip of addiction, the families of alcoholics and other addicts can be saved from immense despair and desperation and of physical and psychological injury. At the very least, the revamped Inebriates Act may save the lives of thousands of alcoholics and addicts and, in the process, allow enough time for AA and the Bridge Program to do their highly effective work.

Professor Ross Fitzgerald is a well-known Australian writer and broadcaster



WOMEN, CHILDREN - AND PROTECTION

Anne Henderson

Back in 2003, as the wait lists for visa applications from asylum seekers in Australian detention centres lengthened, the case of one young woman, aged 17, from Ghana passed unnoticed in the Australian media. She had flown to Australia late in 2002, on a tourist visa, but been detained on arrival in Sydney. The validity of her passport was queried and she was placed in Villawood detention centre.

None of this was unusual for the time; young Africans arriving in Australia could often be detained and their legitimacy as tourists doubted. In this young woman's case, her travel was indeed not for pleasure. Both her cousin in Sydney – an Australian citizen – and her Catholic grandmother in Ghana hoped that she would be able to stay in Australia, somehow. Had she not been detained, it is likely she would have overstayed her tourist visa and remained illegally in Australia, under cover, and her plight undiscovered.

However, with Australia's detention processing, the young woman's desperate need to leave Ghana emerged. Once before the Immigration Department investigators, it was revealed that she was fleeing a situation where her Muslim father had promised her to his friend in marriage, as a fourth wife; a marriage where the young woman would be forced to undergo female circumcision and convert to Islam. A circumstance her Catholic grandmother, who had raised the girl, could not accept and was prepared to risk all to prevent.

Most Australians would agree that this girl was facing a terrible infringement of her human rights and that her fate, if returned to Ghana, would be persecution of a heinous kind. Yet, technically, this young woman facing female genital mutilation did not fit the criteria for protection under Australia's obligations within the "Refugees Convention". Even her forcible conversion to Islam made little difference.

The young woman's case was refused, initially by Immigration and then in appeal to the Refugee Review Tribunal. One of the arguments used against

her was that Ghana had outlawed female circumcision and she would be able to seek protection from NGOs back in Ghana. This in spite of a miniscule number of cases ever charged under that Ghanaian law while FGM remained widespread, even acknowledged, and was being practised within parts of Ghana as if there was no law against it.

The last resort for the young woman, in her quest to get protection from Australia, was to appeal for Ministerial Intervention. This she did – with well organised help from a small group who had befriended her in Villawood Detention Centre and her cousin who obtained further documentary evidence from Ghana supporting her case. But there were no guarantees. The Minister, then the Hon Philip Ruddock, continued to receive advice against her case from inside the Immigration Department.

In cases of Ministerial Intervention, there is no requirement for the minister to accept departmental advice one way or the other. But the Immigration files are very important in helping a minister make a decision. A hardened view from Immigration can easily determine the final outcome. Often, Immigration will favour the status quo argument, if only because it is accepted that, over time, investigators must know best. But there is ample evidence that cases can be badly mismanaged, with misunderstandings arising from cultural differences, mistranslations and mistakes in bureaucratic filing, from incorrect data entry to lost documents.

After a gruelling five month wait in detention, the young woman from Ghana received a successful outcome to her application for Ministerial Intervention from Philip Ruddock, in the form of a permanent visa. She has since completed her high school education, become an Australian citizen and studied for a degree at an Australian university. She was one of the torchbearers in the lead up to Melbourne's Commonwealth Games in 2006, running part of the route by a Sydney beach on Australia Day. Her story adds to the volumes of Australia's successful settlement stories.

But, this story could have been very different. A momentary change of mood on the part of one person – the Minister – might have made for a very different outcome. As it stands today, protection for asylum seekers like this young woman is serendipity in the extreme.

LIBERALS SAY NO

This story and others like it, many tragically unsuccessful, have forced the proposed Migration Amendment (Complementary Protection) Bill 2009 introduced to the Parliament by the Rudd

Government. The legislation seeks to widen the scope for acceptance of asylum seekers under human rights protection laws. The Bill would introduce complementary protection arrangements to allow all claims that may engage Australia's non-refoulement obligations to be considered under a single protection visa application process, with access to the same decision-making framework as is currently available to applicants who make claims under the Refugees Convention. This means, in effect, that all cases such as female circumcision, honour killings or situations where the victims of rape face execution would be reasonable grounds for protection under the Migration Act. Strangely, this proposed legislation is being opposed by the Liberal-National Party Coalition Opposition.

In arguing against the Complementary Protection Bill, the Opposition reasons that Ministerial Intervention is sufficient to handle cases that do not come under the Refugees Convention, cases such as those facing honour killings and female genital mutilation if returned to their country of origin. Moreover, according to the Opposition, to widen the scope of the human rights protection criteria would "lead to a huge increase in vexatious claims" which would create "delays, which would be grossly unfair to those with legitimate claims".

The supposition in this argument seems to be that claims of FGM, honour killings or threatened execution as a victim of rape are more likely to be "vexatious", an extraordinary argument, given the number of legitimate cases there are to be found across the globe of women in danger from these very threats. And, if this is so, sadly the Opposition has regressed to a political party willing to sacrifice individual human rights, and lives, for management efficiency in Australia's processing of unlawful arrivals and its border deterrents.

More likely, however, the Coalition's real opposition to the Bill is that it fully understands how increasing the scope of the criteria for intake on humanitarian grounds will mean many more applicants for protection – applicants who will be legitimate but who will add to the burden of Australia's immigration decisions. And this, certainly, is the case. But it will also mean that women who genuinely claim protection in Australia from FGM, honour killings or the threat of being executed as a victim of rape will be able to gain protection visas routinely and not be left to the whim, however well informed or otherwise, of one person.

EAST MEETS WEST

For those who fear an influx of vexatious claims under the proposed Complementary Protection legislation, a perusal of Ida Lichter's *Muslim Women*

Reformers – Inspiring Voices Against Oppression (Prometheus Books) is recommended. Tracking the work of some extraordinary and courageous women activists, who have agitated to oppose the laws against women in radical Islamic states, Lichter presents a damning story of the catastrophe surrounding women's lack of basic human rights among many millions across the globe.

Some of these political reformers have also questioned the attitude of Western liberals who tacitly accept denials of freedom for women in Islamic states that they would never accept for women in the West. As the Bangladeshi activist Taslima Nasreen - doctor, writer, human rights activist, secularist and long-term exile - put it:

I have been attacked in Europe for criticising Islam. They tell me that not all traditions in the Islamic world are harmful to women. Imagine, I have been told that the position of women in Bagladesh is very good. They even consider harems not necessarily bad for women! If customs are bad for Western women, they are also bad for Eastern women. If education is good for Western women, surely it must also be good for Eastern ones.

Malalai Joya, living in Afghanistan, never sleeps in the same house for more than two nights in a row. She is protected by full-time armed UN guards and has been given several AK-47 assault rifles by the Afghan president for her protection. She receives frequent death threats and threats of suicide attacks against her family. Her house and orphanage have been bombed and she has survived four attempts on her life. She wears a burqa to hide her identity. She was among those with the highest number of votes in the 2005 Afghani parliamentary elections, standing against the male candidates and not for seats set aside for women only.

Malalai Joya, as an activist in Afghanistan, is revolutionary in her comments and stirs great emotions simply for supporting the sort of women's rights that are taken for granted in Australia. Her most challenging work has been teaching Afghan women to read and write, in a country where family laws explicitly sanction rape, forbid a wife from leaving her house without the permission of her husband and sanction marriage for girls from the time of their first period. The literacy rate among adult women in Afghanistan is just 12.6 per cent.

In Egypt, honour killings and FGM are rife. A 2002 study by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development reported that 47 per cent of all homicides with females were cases of "honour" killings. A great many of these are where a

raped woman is murdered to avenge the family name. When Egypt finally passed a law against FGM in 2008, the Muslim Brotherhood claimed that outlawing FGM was promoting vice and that supporters of the law were pandering to Western influence. As in Ghana, the passing of a law against it does not mean FGM will stop.

In Somalia, some 98 per cent of females undergo FGM. Somali activist Hawa Aden Mohamed underwent FGM at the age of eight. She argues that while Islam is often used to legitimise FGM, no relevant instruction is found for it in the Koran. Its widespread use is male interest only – a practice that its defenders claim ensures virginity and reduces sexual desire in women thereby controlling their sexuality. Hawa's sister died as a result of FGM.

The custom of FGM is also supported by older women in such communities, women who have adopted the status quo against overwhelming cultural pressure to conform. Young women are ostracised from communities and have no means of support if not circumcised; daughters are not saleable as brides if not circumcised, and so on.

In Nigeria, where 50 per cent of the population is Muslim, and despite a democratic constitution from 1999 guaranteeing freedom from gender discrimination, violations of women's rights are widespread. Domestic violence by husbands against their wives is rife and with it immunity for husbands. Women are regarded as part of a husband's belongings. There is no law against FGM and cultural and religious superstition ensures that the practice continues widely. One traditional belief is that if a male child's head touches the clitoris during childbirth, that child will die. What Hawa Aden Mohamed says of Somalia is true for many countries where FGM is practised: "We have to change the mentality of people, and the change has to come from the family."

CASE FOR ASYLUM

These stories describe in miniscule the life threatening ordeals women can be fleeing on arrival in Australia to seek asylum. Across the world are countries where females from the age of ten, and even much younger, are regarded as no better than chattels for men to enjoy. The countries they run from give them little, if any, protection. The practices they seek to escape are barbarous. The 2009 *CNN* Report "More Young Girls Face Rape in Afghanistan" recorded that, with the break down in security, violence against women was rampant and "rapes in that country have been growing tremendously, particularly child rapes within the ages of 9, 8, 7 and even [younger] than that".

Yet, at this moment, Australia is under no obligation to offer many of them any protection under the

Refugees Convention. Our Migration Act is obviously in need of adjustment to modern times. War and despotism are not the sole causes of human rights abuse – sometimes peace and a so-called civil society can be just as dangerous, if you are a woman.

As the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services Laurie Ferguson put it in his Second Reading speech on the Complementary Protection Bill:

Complementary protection will cover circumstances in which a person may currently be refused a protection visa because the reason for the persecution or harm on return is not one of the specifies reasons in the Refugees Convention – that is not on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.... The Rudd Labor Government is convinced that Australians would expect claims of this gravity; claims involving female genital mutilation, execution for victims of rape, so-called “honour killings”, to be dealt with through a process that affords natural justice and access to independent merits review.

The importance of the Complementary Protection legislation cannot be overstated. It has slowly penetrated Western consciousness over recent decades that it is women, especially young women and girls, who make up some of the most abused and exploited humans on earth. The Complementary Protection Bill, if passed, will ensure that the complex processes of the current legal situation no longer will allow the refolement of individual women who fall between the cracks of protection only afforded people who belong to a “particular social group”. Women and children in danger of being trafficked can also fall into categories not covered by the Convention – the Complementary Protection Bill will ensure such cases are protected uniformly.

In opposing this Bill, the Shadow Immigration Minister, Sharman Stone, argues that “Australia should not and does not have an open-ended humanitarian migration program”. That’s true. However, one does wonder why legislation designed to allow more of the most desperate of the world to apply for protection should be opposed by the Opposition. Widening refugee protection to cover women and children in genuine fear of death, torture and deprivation of basic human rights adjusts a technical injustice, long overdue for reform.

Anne Henderson is Deputy Director of The Sydney Institute



THE GREAT DEPRESSION IN AUSTRALIA - FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TODAY

David Gruen & Colin Clark

I am grateful to the University of Queensland School of Economics, the UQ Economics Alumni Association, the Queensland branch of the Economic Society of Australia and Queensland Treasury for inviting me to deliver the nineteenth Colin Clark Memorial Lecture.*

My topic today is: What have we learnt? The Great Depression in Australia from the perspective of today. I am interested in particular in what lessons were learnt from the experience of the 1930s, and how these lessons have informed more recent economic policy decisions. By more recent economic policy decisions, I have in mind not only the policy responses to the current global financial crisis, but also the policy frameworks put in place in the modern era that have rendered the economy much more resilient to macroeconomic and financial shocks.

Along the way, I will do my best to enliven the narrative with reflections on Colin Clark’s life, on his perspectives on the Great Depression and the policy responses to it.

The intellectual figure that towered over the Great Depression and its aftermath was, of course, John Maynard Keynes. Colin Clark’s close links to Keynes are well known — as is the fact that Keynes quotes Clark in the *General Theory* (1936), and referred to him several years earlier as ‘a bit of a genius’ (Keynes 1931).

At the time of the stock market crash in October 1929, Colin Clark was a young man of 23 and just beginning his career as an economist after graduating in chemistry at Oxford the year before. There can be little doubt that his achievements in economics over his long and productive career —

including his pioneering work in co-founding (with Simon Kuznets) modern national income accounting — were greatly influenced by the upheavals and hardships he witnessed during the Great Depression.

Beyond Colin Clark’s professional achievements in economics and statistics, there is another aspect of his life that particularly resonates with me: his lifelong belief in the tangible improvements to people’s lives that could be made through better economic policy making. This was highlighted in his decision in 1938 to reject overtures from Keynes in Cambridge, as well as the University of Chicago, to pursue a career as an academic economist in favour of working as an applied economist in the public sector in Australia.

Although I never met Colin Clark, I do have a familial link to him — I have worked with his grandson and namesake for the past couple of years at the Treasury. And I am most grateful to grandson Colin for his help preparing this speech and for the insights he has given me into his grandfather.

Grandfather Clark’s sheer enthusiasm to “practice what he preached” is palpable in a letter he wrote to Keynes in 1938 about his decision to stay in Australia. As he put it, the chance to advise the Queensland Premier on “practically everything connected with economic matters” was “too remarkable an opportunity to be missed for putting economics into practice” (Markwell 2000).

In the 1930s, economists in Australia (and elsewhere) did not enjoy anything like the level of influence over public policy that they do today (Coleman et al 2006). So Colin Clark’s choice was important, and it reaffirms the career choices of thousands of economics graduates in Australia over past decades who also put economics into practice in their day-to-day work in a range of public sector organisations, at both the Commonwealth and State levels.

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

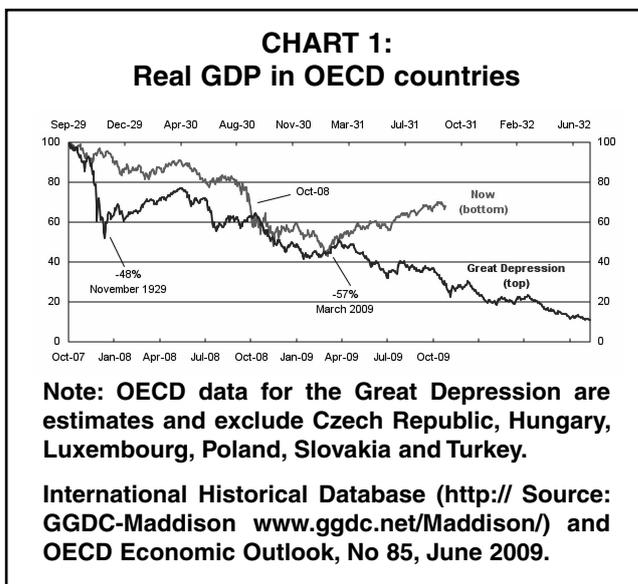
Before turning to the Australian experience, I will spend a few minutes on comparisons between the Great Depression and the current global recession for a broad set of countries.

For many countries (though with some notable exceptions like the UK and Germany), the 1920s was a decade of rapid growth and rising prosperity. Asset markets had been booming fuelled by easy credit. US stock prices more than tripled in the five years leading up to October 1929. There had been rapid financial innovation and increased leverage by both financial institutions and households. They were not called the roaring twenties for nothing. The similarities with the lead-up to the current global recession are clear enough.

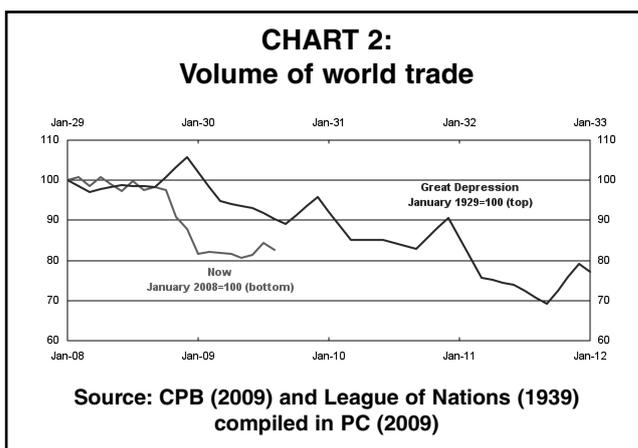
Although the two upswings were brought to an end by different means — by the Wall Street crash in October 1929, and by the credit crisis that began in August 2007— the ensuing events also had some striking similarities.

Looking at GDP first, we see that real GDP in OECD countries during the first year of the current recession fell by only slightly less than in the first year of the Great Depression (an estimated 4.1 per cent rather than 4.9 per cent) (Chart 1).¹

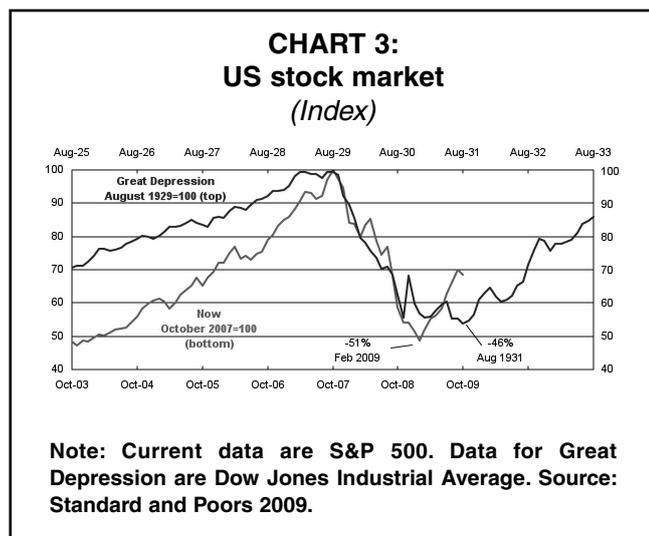
Of course, what turned a recession in the 1930s into the Great Depression was the continued collapse in economic output for the subsequent two years, before recovery took hold in 1933. By contrast, in the current global recession, we are now seeing signs of recovery in most OECD countries, and most forecasters expect this recovery to strengthen over the next year or so.



Turning to trade, large falls in world trade were a feature of both the Great Depression and the current global recession. While world trade volumes fell by 30 per cent over three years in the Great Depression, they fell much more sharply in the current recession — by almost one-fifth since early 2008 (Chart 2).



There are also broad similarities in the magnitude of the falls in the US stockmarket in the first 18 months of the two crises. There had been an extended period of strong growth in stock prices before both crises.² In October 1929, the Dow Jones industrial average fell sharply, by 48 per cent by early November 1929. Following a rally in early 1930, the market continued to fall steadily for a further two years to record a scarcely believable 90 per cent collapse from the peak (Chart 3).



During the current crisis, US stock price falls were more gradual over the first 12 months, reflecting different patterns of transmission in the two crises. The financial crisis which preceded the Great Depression began with a stock market crash and then spread to the banking system. In contrast, the current financial crisis began in the credit markets and then spread to the banking system and the stock market.

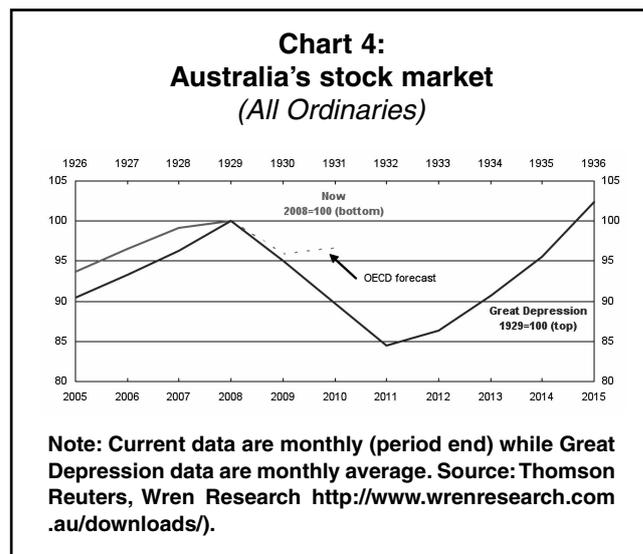
Sharp falls in the S&P 500 following the collapse of Lehman Brothers meant that a year and a half from the most recent stock market peak in the US, the total decline was comparable to that of the Great Depression. By contrast, however, in the six months since then, US share prices have recovered strongly.

AUSTRALIA

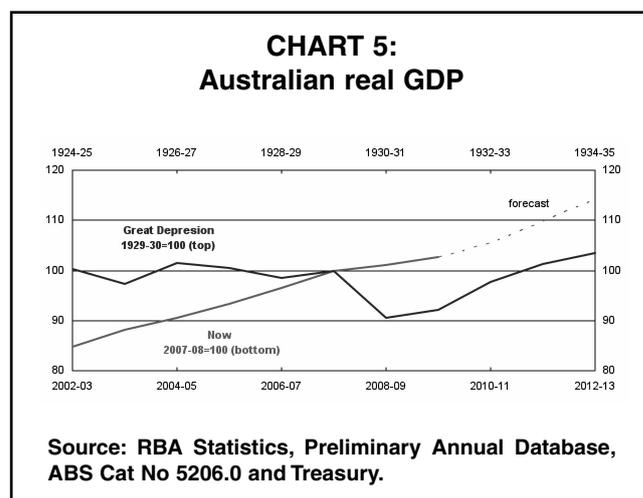
Unlike in the US, the lead up to the two episodes in Australia was quite different. In the current episode, Australia had experienced 17 years of uninterrupted growth, declining unemployment and, in the past five years, booming terms of trade. By contrast, the years leading up to the Great Depression were much less buoyant. Then, the Australian economy had experienced no real growth for five years and, as a consequence, unemployment was rising. Furthermore, as we will see, Australia was in the midst of a balance of payments crisis.

There were, however, some points of similarity. In common with the US, Australia's stockmarket experience was similar to that in the Great Depression, at least in its early phase.

Both crashes were preceded by periods of strong growth in stock prices. Furthermore, the falls during the current downturn are of a similar magnitude to those in the first 12/18 months of the Great Depression (Chart 4).

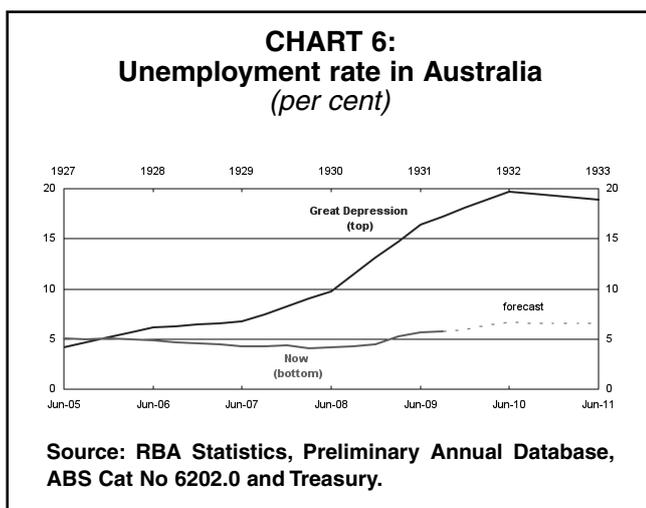


As most other indicators demonstrate, however, Australia's experience in the two episodes was starkly different. Following five years of essentially no growth, real GDP fell by almost 10 per cent in 1930/31 (Chart 5). This had a predictably devastating impact on living standards, with real private consumption expenditure falling by one fifth from 1929/30 to 1930/31 while real private dwelling investment and imports halved. Real non-dwelling public investment halved over two years and did not recover to pre-Depression levels for a further six years. Following the huge collapse in 1930-31, the economy recovered, and real GDP grew at an average annual rate of 3.7 per cent over the subsequent five years.



In contrast, during the current global recession, Australian real GDP has risen in each financial year, and is forecast to continue to do so.

Australia recorded one of the highest rates of unemployment in the world during the Great Depression (Schedvin 1970). Before its onset, unemployment in Australia was already at 7 per cent in 1929. It reached 10 per cent in 1930 and peaked at 19¾ per cent two years later (Chart 6). Unemployment then began to fall by around 2 percentage points a year, to reach 9 per cent by 1937.



The contrast with the current experience is stark indeed. While sluggish growth has seen the unemployment rate rise, the rise thus far has been only about 2 percentage points. The government’s recent Mid Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook forecasts a peak unemployment rate of 6¾ per cent in the June quarter 2010 which, if realised, would constitute a rise of just less than 3 percentage points from its low of 3.9 per cent in February 2008.

However, these simple numerical comparisons do not capture fully the extraordinary hardship experienced during the Great Depression. As well as the much lower standard of living (with average per capita income at the onset of the Great Depression around one fifth of its current level), the absence of a centralised federal unemployment assistance program at that time added immeasurably to the hardship of the unemployed.³

Other than relief from charities and an assortment of agencies and private organisations, the unemployed had to hope for employment projects and public works projects which were often reliant on state government loans from overseas — which, as we will see, had dried up as a source of funds by early 1929.

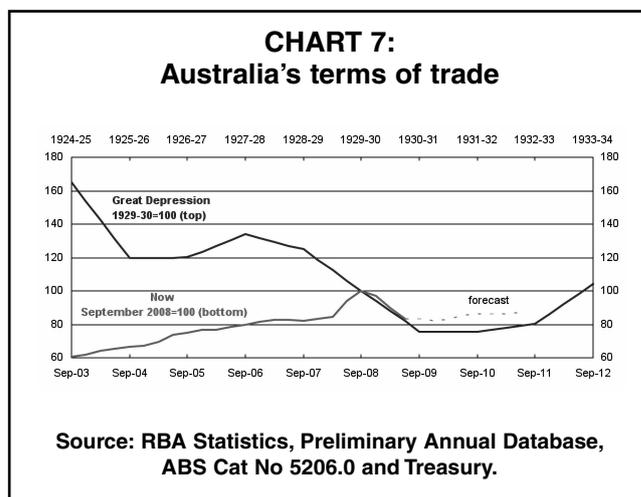
MAIN CAUSES OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION IN AUSTRALIA

Let me now turn to three of the main causes of Australia’s economic collapse during the Great Depression. These are: firstly, the extremely unfavourable global environment which, from Australia’s point of view, manifested itself particularly in a large and prolonged fall in the terms of trade; secondly, Australia’s adherence to the gold standard; and thirdly, Australia’s loss of access to the London capital market from early 1929.

THE TERMS OF TRADE

Australia suffered a large and sustained fall in its terms of trade in the mid 1920s, brought about by declines in the prices of Australia’s major agricultural exports, particularly wool (Chart 7). This terms of trade fall, combined with Australia’s adherence to the gold standard (discussed later), played a key role in generating Australia’s balance of payments crisis in the late 1920s.⁴

In contrast to the severe declines in the terms of trade in the years leading up to the Great Depression, Australia’s terms of trade rose by about two-thirds in the five years to September 2008, to be at six decade highs. The subsequent decline has so far been much less pronounced than at the time of the Great Depression — with the most recent (June 2009) level still more than 50 per cent above the average of the 1990s.



THE GOLD STANDARD

Australia’s exchange rate was determined by the gold standard in the lead up to the Great Depression.⁵ After being suspended during the First World War, the gold standard was reinstated in Australia following Britain’s return to gold in April 1925.

Central to the push to reinstate gold by central bankers in the major economies was a fundamental and long-standing mistrust of the capacity of a system of fiat money, not backed by gold, to deliver economic stability.

This mistrust had been reinforced by the economic devastation wrought by the hyperinflation in the Weimar Republic in 1921/23. Although there had been previous hyperinflations, this was the first in a major country at the core of the global economy, and the first to be closely observed and documented by economists.⁶

It is arguable that the decisions taken by the key central bankers to re-establish the gold standard following its abandonment during the First World War was the primary cause of the Great Depression (see, for example, Ahamed 2009). It certainly rendered it near impossible for central banks across the world to run expansionary monetary policy in response to the collapse.

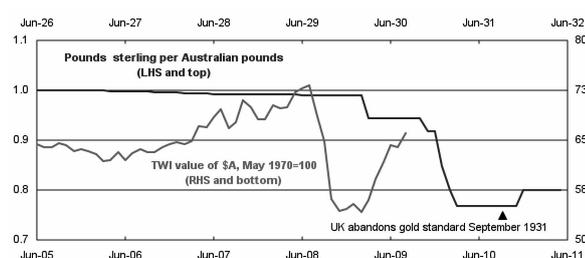
Given the massive terms of trade declines in the second half of the 1920s, the fixed exchange rate had a devastating effect on Australia. As the external position worsened during 1929, the exchange rate came under pressure. However, the private trading banks, and the Commonwealth Bank, attempted to resist devaluation and tried instead to maintain parity with sterling throughout 1930 — in part out of the fear of creating inflation (Butlin and Boyce 1985).

Meaningful devaluation of the Australian pound did not occur until early 1931. By March of that year, the Australian pound had depreciated by around 25 per cent against sterling (Chart 8).⁷

The decision of the trading banks to resist devaluation led to tight monetary conditions through 1930, which added to the problems of the depression (Butlin and Boyce 1985). Also, the policies of these banks, including the Commonwealth Bank, during 1931 and 1932 acted to delay the reduction in bank interest rates, thereby hampering recovery.

In addition, the low level of foreign exchange reserves in 1930 (a consequence of the failure to devalue earlier) prevented fiscal policy from taking a more active role, and actually forced government spending to be curtailed significantly (Fisher and Kent 1999), as we will discuss shortly.

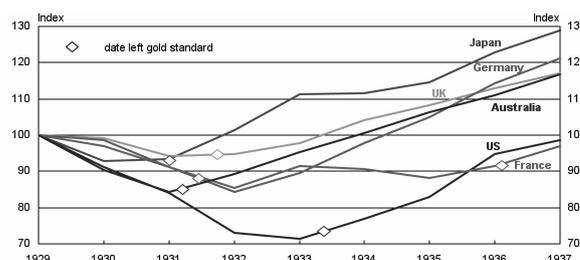
CHART 8: Australia's exchange rate against benchmark currencies



Note: Great Depression data are spliced from financial year data to 1928-28 and monthly data from March 1930 (due to data limitations only the major devaluations are shown here). Source: ABS Cat No 5206.0, RBA Statistics, Preliminary Annual Database and Copeland 1934 (quoted in Kindleberger 1986).

Cross-country research has established a striking and revealing correlation: the sooner a country left the gold standard the sooner it recovered from the Great Depression (Eichengreen et al 1985, Bernanke et al 1990). Australia fits this pattern well; indeed, it is one of the countries that helped to establish it (Chart 9).

CHART 9: Real GDP and dates of exit from gold standard



Notes: While Germany went off gold in July and August 1931, it kept the value of the mark steady through the Nazi era, but controlled the flow of foreign exchange. Temin (1989) notes that the German chancellor followed the dictates of the gold standard in 1931 by maintaining high interest rates and deflating the economy. Australian data are not directly comparable to Australian GDP data employed elsewhere in the paper. Source: GGDC-Maddison International Historical Database (<http://www.ggdc.net/Maddison/>), Bernanke et al 1990.

In contrast, during the current crisis, Australia's floating exchange rate has played its expected role as a shock absorber for the Australian economy, first by depreciating rapidly (by around 25 per cent in the four months to November 2008), and then, after a period of months, recovering almost as rapidly.

GLOBAL CAPITAL MARKETS AND AUSTRALIA'S BALANCE OF PAYMENTS

Australian governments borrowed heavily from the London capital market during the 1920s to fund a string of large infrastructure investments.⁸ As a result, Australia's foreign debt increased rapidly. The Commonwealth and state governments ran overdrafts with London banks and paid them off by floating bond issues when either the sums became big enough to warrant it, or the banks providing the overdrafts became restless (Kindleberger 1986).

Borrowing by Australian governments was sufficiently strong that it accounted for 43 per cent of all British overseas investments in government securities over the period 1925-28 (Schedvin 1970). Rising British concerns about poor investment returns, combined with Australia's rapidly rising public debt levels and a severe balance of payments crisis, meant that this situation could not persist. In February 1929 an Australian loan was subscribed to only 16 per cent and had to be taken up by the

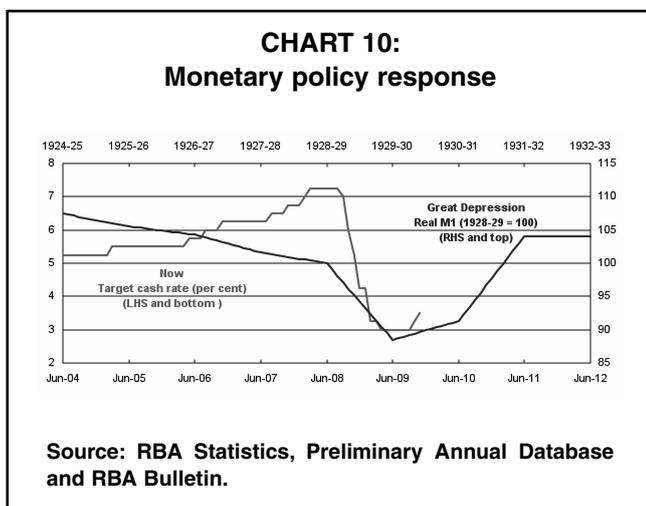
underwriters. In April the London market refused to issue a loan and virtually ceased to be a source of funds for Australian long-term borrowing.

London banks then pressed Australian governments for payments on overdrafts. Gradually and reluctantly, the Australian banks were required to restrict advances, which put pressure on the local economy (Kindleberger 1986). The resulting cessation of borrowing was an important factor that constrained a more expansionary fiscal policy response to the Great Depression by the Commonwealth and state governments.

The contrast with today is again stark. Following the failure of Lehman Brothers in September 2008, and the actions of a series of governments in guaranteeing bank borrowings, borrowers lacking government guarantees were virtually shut out of world capital markets. With Australian banks' heavy reliance on offshore wholesale borrowing to fund their domestic operations, any incapacity to borrow in these markets would have had severe consequences for the domestic economy. But the strength of the Australian government's balance sheet meant that it could, for a fee, offer a guarantee to the banks for their wholesale borrowings without risking the Government's AAA credit rating — which ensured continued access to global capital markets, in contrast to the situation 80 years earlier.

MONETARY AND FISCAL POLICY

A comparison of monetary policy responses to the Great Depression and the current downturn is made more complex by profound changes in the operating procedure of monetary policy over the intervening years. Chart 10 shows the level of real M1 (M1 adjusted for changes in consumer prices) for the period surrounding the Great Depression, and the official cash rate for the current era.⁹



After declining steadily before the onset of the Great Depression, real M1 dropped by 12 per cent between

1928-29 and 1929-30. This behaviour of real M1 supports other evidence that monetary policy was tragically tight as Australia succumbed to the Great Depression (Fisher and Kent 1999, Schedvin 1970).

Again, the contrast with the response of monetary policy to the current downturn could not be starker. Monetary policy was eased aggressively in late 2008 and early 2009, at a time when the exchange rate was depreciating rapidly. That this monetary policy response was possible without generating adverse market reactions (or unanchoring inflation expectations) is a testament to the credibility of the modern monetary policy framework, put in place in the aftermath of the early 1990s recession.

Australia's fiscal policy response to the Great Depression also exacerbated the downturn. While alternative policy responses were canvassed, Australia adopted a policy of controlled deflation.¹⁰

In mid 1931, the "Premiers' Plan" was agreed which focussed on financing the interest repayments to the British banks by large (20 per cent) cuts in government spending and an increase in federal and state taxation.¹¹

The adoption of deflationary policies reflected the recommendation of Sir Otto Niemeyer. Niemeyer, having transferred from HM Treasury to the Bank of England in 1927, came to Australia in 1930. His arrival was a 1930s version of an International Monetary Fund "mission" to a developing country in financial crisis, but rather than bringing financial resources, he brought stern advice (Coleman et al 2006). The Premiers must balance their budgets immediately — in other words, a strongly contractionary policy at a time when national income had fallen dramatically, unemployment was high and rising, and budgets were in substantial deficit because of a major drop in revenue.¹²

In a celebrated accident of history, Keynes had come second to Niemeyer in the 1906 British Civil Service exams and, as a result, Niemeyer took the Treasury job Keynes would otherwise have had, while Keynes entered the India Office. We can only speculate what the implications would have been for Australia's economic fortunes in the Great Depression had Keynes beaten Niemeyer, and entered the Treasury.

Initially the Premiers' Plan was hailed as a success, but this verdict has not stood the test of time. Viewed from a modern perspective, with recognition of the importance of supporting aggregate demand when private sector spending is in retreat, Australia's policy responses to the Great Depression appear counter-productive, and certainly not supportive of recovery.

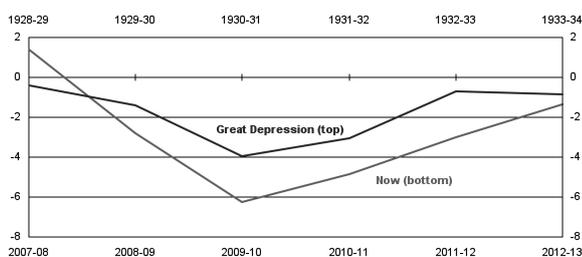
Reflecting on these events many years later, Colin Clark was of the view that the Plan was based on mindlessly following public opinion in opting for balanced budgets, regardless of the state of the economy.¹³

Of course, as we have seen, a combination of external circumstances and the rapid growth in public debt through the 1920s meant that choices were limited. The Commonwealth Government and the Commonwealth Bank resisted proposals for loans to the state governments for public works and job creation on the grounds that they had to conserve their sterling foreign exchange reserves (Clark 1958). Colin Clark notes of the Commonwealth Government (1958 p. 226):

One can understand their predicament; but it is hard to condone their scale of values. Almost any alternative measure would have been preferable to leaving hundreds of thousands of men unemployed for ten years.

During the Great Depression the aggregate government budget balance (for the Commonwealth and state governments) declined from a deficit of 0.5 per cent of GDP in 1928-29 to a peak deficit of 4.0 per cent of GDP in 1930-31 before falling to under 1 per cent two years later (Chart 11). This rise in the budget deficit over these years was a consequence of the collapse in the economy, rather than a result of deliberate expansionary policy.¹⁴

CHART 11:
Aggregate Government budget balance
(per cent of GDP)



Note: Aggregate Government includes Australian Government and state-territory governments. Australian Government data for the current period are underlying cash balance from the 2009-10 MYEFO. Data from 2009 10 are estimates. State territory data are equivalent to receipts (from operating activities and sales of non-financial assets) minus payments (for operating activities, purchases of non-financial assets and net acquisition of assets under finance leases). 2007 08 state territory data are from ABS Government Finance Statistics. 2008 09 to 2012 13 are from States' 2009 10 Budgets with the exception of the ACT which are from its 2009-10 Budget update. 2008-09 data for QLD, Victoria, NSW, WA, Tasmania and the NT are based on 2008-09 final budget outcomes.

Source: Barnard 1987 (Table GF 1-7) and Treasury.

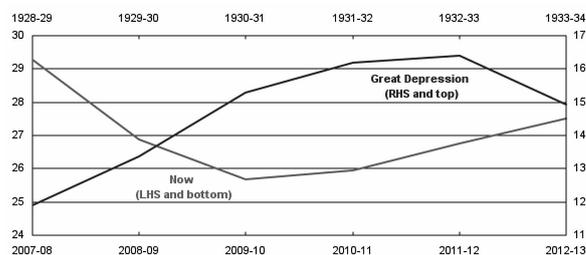
Indeed, real aggregate government expenditure fell by 9 per cent from 1928-29 to 1931-32 — and by 19 per

cent in nominal terms (Barnard 1987). Within the expenditure categories, charges for debt increased in the 1930s, in part because of the impact of devaluation on debt denominated in pounds sterling.¹⁵

During the current downturn, the Australian Government budget balance (underlying cash) went from a surplus of 1.7 per cent of GDP in 2007-08 to a deficit 2.3 per cent in 2008-09 and an expected 4.7 per cent of GDP in 2009-10, before declining. The swing from surplus in 2007/08 to deficit in 2008/09 was driven by both the largest collapse in Australian Government revenue since the Great Depression, and the discretionary fiscal stimulus packages.¹⁶

In the 1930s, the tax base was broadened with increases of existing tax rates and the imposition of new taxes to offset the falls in customs revenue due to reduced imports. Tax receipts as a share of GDP rose by over four percentage points between 1928-29 and 1932-33 (Chart 12). In contrast, during the current downturn, the tax take is estimated to fall by about 3½ per cent of GDP due to a combination of automatic stabilisers and tax cuts.

CHART 12:
Aggregate Government tax receipts
(per cent of GDP)

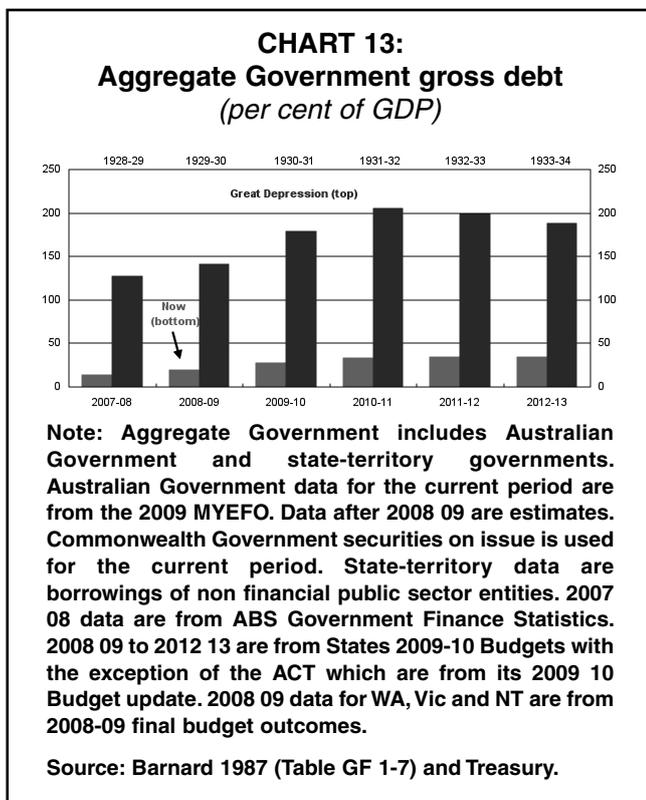


Note: Aggregate Government includes Australian Government and state-territory governments. Australian Government data for the current period are from the 2009 10 MYEFO. Data after 2008 09 are estimates. State territory data for 2007 08 are from ABS Government Finance Statistics. 2008 09 to 2012 13 are from States' 2009 10 Budgets with the exception of the ACT which are from its 2009-10 Budget update. 2008 09 data for WA, Vic and NT are from 2008 09 final budget outcomes.

Source: Barnard 1987 (Table GF 1 7) and Treasury.

As I have already noted, Australia lost access to the London capital market in 1929 because of high levels of government debt which severely constrained fiscal policy responses to the crisis. Total government gross debt was already well over 100 per cent of GDP before the onset of the Great Depression (Chart 13). With fixed interest loans denominated in pounds sterling these levels increased to a peak of 205 per cent of GDP in 1931-32.

During the current downturn, gross debt for all levels of government has also risen, and is estimated to peak at around 35 per cent of GDP over the next few years.¹⁷



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

At the time of the Great Depression, Australia's macroeconomic policy frameworks were tragically ill equipped to cope with anything other than small, inconsequential macroeconomic or financial market shocks. Faced with a shock the size of the Great Depression, they were simply overwhelmed.

The lessons learnt from that disastrous experience have informed the macroeconomic policy frameworks of today.

An intellectual revolution in our understanding of the behaviour of the macroeconomy has made possible a complete redesign of both the institutional arrangements in which the macroeconomy operates, and the policy responses to macroeconomic or financial market shocks.

A key element of this intellectual revolution, associated with Keynes' General Theory, is recognition of the importance of supporting aggregate demand in the economy at times when private sector demand is in retreat.

An important corollary to this recognition, however, is that to be in a position to provide such support at such times requires a credible medium-term framework for macroeconomic policy. Such a framework enables policy actions designed to support aggregate demand

in the short term to be explained in the context of the medium-term framework.

In the case of monetary/exchange rate policy, the redesign of the framework has been a profound one. The gold standard no longer sits at the core of the system. The gold standard was clearly successful in ruling out any possibility of sustained high inflation or hyperinflation, but it was woefully inadequate when the economy was faced instead with a severe contractionary shock.

By contrast, the key elements of the modern monetary policy framework are, of course, a floating exchange rate and an independent central bank committed to medium-term price stability. Once credibility for this framework has been established, it provides a clear, medium-term anchor for inflation. Importantly, however, it also provides the capacity for monetary policy to respond flexibly — and if need be rapidly and aggressively — to short-term macroeconomic shocks. This flexibility has been particularly important in the face of shocks to Australia's terms of trade.

The rapid easing of Australian monetary policy in late 2008 and early 2009 is an impressive example of this flexibility in action. That this monetary policy response did not generate adverse market reactions or unanchor inflation expectations, despite it occurring at a time when the exchange rate was depreciating rapidly, is a testament to the credibility of the modern monetary policy framework.

For fiscal policy, Australian governments borrowed so heavily in the 1920s that Australia was cut out of the London capital market when the economic outlook deteriorated in 1929. The contrast with recent times is stark. From the mid 1980s onwards, federal governments of both political persuasions have demonstrated the resolve needed to bring deficit budgets back into surplus after the economy has recovered from recession, and have committed themselves to increasingly well-articulated medium-term frameworks for fiscal policy. The discretionary fiscal policy actions in late 2008 and early 2009, which provided substantial and rapid support to aggregate demand at a crucial time, were undertaken in the context of a medium-term fiscal framework that included an explicit, articulated strategy to return the budget to surplus once the economy returned to above-trend growth.¹⁸

All these elements together (along with an improving external environment, strongly supported by expansionary monetary and fiscal policies in the rest of the world) have made possible a radically different outcome to the current global recession than would have been possible with the macroeconomic policy frameworks in place at the time of the Great Depression.

These outcomes would surely be gratifying to those economists, including Colin Clark, who worked over

the intervening decades to develop the economic and statistical tools to better our understanding of the macroeconomy and help prevent the devastation of another Great Depression.

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ENDNOTES

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1 In drawing comparisons between the 1920s/30s and now, it should be remembered that there are unavoidable differences between data collected then and now. There have been profound changes in collection methodology, including definitions of unemployment, and in accounting practices, and modern measures of most types of economic activity are much more detailed than was possible 80 years ago.

2 US stock prices (the Dow Jones Industrial Average) increased by 240 per cent in the five years leading up to the stock price peak before the Great Depression compared to a more modest 75 per cent rise (in the S&P 500) during the most recent episode. A number of other parallels between the two episodes have been noted, particularly in the US, including rapid financial innovation facilitated in part by new technologies; an extended period of loose monetary policy followed by relatively rapid tightening; relaxation of credit standards; increased leverage of financial institutions and households; increased fraud and other forms of criminal behaviour; and pervasive expectations of continued asset price appreciation combined with a widespread failure to comprehend and price risks appropriately (Eslake 2009).

3 Commonwealth unemployment and sickness benefits were introduced in 1945 in the form of flat-rate payments financed from general revenue and subject to an income test. During the Great Depression, state governments had a support payment called 'the susso', short for sustenance payments. These varied by State but provided bare minimum support, with strict controls on what could be purchased with the coupons provided.

4 Australia's exports were much less diversified at that time than they are today, both in terms of the commodity mix and the limited number of destinations to which the exports were sent. Agriculture accounted for 90 per cent of exports, with wool accounting for more than 40 per cent on its own. Around two-thirds of exports were sold to the UK and a few major European countries.

5 Under the gold standard, Australia's exchange rate moved within a narrow range, determined by gold points. Gold points were the level of the exchange rate at which it became more profitable to import or export gold instead of buying or selling bills of exchange at bank rates.

6 For more on this, see Ahamed (2009). The transition back to gold after the First World War was fraught with difficulties. Churchill's decision to set the gold price in Britain at its pre-war level forced substantial consumer price deflation, and prompted Keynes to voice his disagreement in *The Economic Consequences of Mr Churchill* (1925). Keynes continued to argue against the Gold Standard until it was abandoned in 1931.

7 Although there had been small divergences from strict parity (of around 1 per cent) from as early as 1928, devaluation of the Australian currency (which was then euphemistically known as "developing a premium" on sterling) is recorded as beginning in December 1929, but these devaluations were small and relatively inconsequential. In December 1931 the Commonwealth government fixed the exchange rate at one pound five shillings Australian per one pound sterling — a depreciation of 25 per cent — where it stayed for three and a half decades until the introduction of decimal currency in 1966.

8 While New York was developing as a source of funds for Australian governments in the late-1920s the majority of borrowing was still done in London. Australia enjoyed trustee

- status in London due to the Colonial Stock Act of 1900, which gave it a privileged position relative to domestic (UK) borrowers. Australian governments generally were able to receive low-interest rates without much preliminary scrutiny (Schedvin 1970).
- 9 At the time of the Great Depression, M1 comprised currency held by the public plus current deposits at trading banks (Pope 1987).
 - 10 The other suggested alternatives were moderate fiscal expansion, and repudiation of the overseas debt obligations (known as “the Lang Plan” after NSW Premier, Jack Lang).
 - 11 The Commonwealth government first accepted the deflationary approach in a 1930 conference which involved the state premiers and Prime Minister Scullin. It was there that the Commonwealth government and all state governments decided to follow ‘the Melbourne Agreement’. This involved decreasing welfare payments, reducing the basic wage by ten percent and abandoning public works projects — all in an attempt to rein in government spending. They also agreed to increase taxation in order to raise revenue (Fisher and Kent 1999). In May/June 1931 the deflationary elements of the Melbourne Agreement formed the basis of the Premiers’ Plan, which was eventually agreed to be implemented by most state premiers and the Commonwealth government. A report by a committee of Professors Copland, Giblin, Shann and Melville in May 1931 helped lay the basis for the Plan. It also proposed reductions in interest rates, but adherence to the gold standard prevented this from occurring during 1930, and even when the gold standard was abandoned, banks had little reserves left with which to extend credit (Fischer and Kent 1999).
 - 12 The Commonwealth government suffered sharp and sustained falls in customs revenue in the Great Depression while the state governments suffered major reductions in receipts from government businesses — which were then their major source of revenue.
 - 13 Clark (1958, p. 222) noted that the Premiers’ Plan to balance Commonwealth and state budgets “[w]as certainly harmful. This action prolonged the depression and made unemployment very much worse than it would otherwise have been.”
 - 14 Clark (1958, p. 221) noted that: “In 1930, quite apart from the question of finding any money to occupy the unemployed, the budget deficit was rapidly enlarging. The Commonwealth Bank, however, declined to lend the Commonwealth or state governments any more money. Whether or not one approves of the politics of this decision, it was certainly extremely bad economics. The most abundant expenditure of loan money and the largest deficit would have been fully justified at such a time”. Much of the Federal government deficit during the early 1930s appears to have been financed by the sale of treasury bills to the Commonwealth Bank (although precise data are not readily available). Fisher and Kent (1999) note that the extent of this finance was limited by the Commonwealth Bank because of its fears regarding inflation over the longer term. The Commonwealth Bank also pressured the government to reduce the stock of outstanding Treasury bills from 1932 until the end of 1935 (Fisher and Kent 1999).
 - 15 Perkins (2008) notes that a significant proportion of both Commonwealth and state budget outlays at the time were interest payments on debt owned by UK bondholders.
 - 16 Australian government total receipts for 2008-09 were \$20 billion, or 6.5 per cent, below the estimate in the 2008 09 Budget (Treasury Final Budget Outcome 2008 09). This is the largest fall in receipts compared to the budget year forecast since 1930 31, when the shortfall was 17 per cent.
 - 17 Around half of this is Australian government gross debt, which is projected to increase from 5.2 per cent in 2007-08 to a peak of 18 per cent of GDP in 2011-12 (when Australian Government net debt is projected to be 8.9 per cent of GDP). Interestingly, the US experience is quite different in the two episodes. US Federal debt held by the public during the Great Depression rose from 15 per cent of GDP in 1929 to 44 per cent five years later. During the current crisis, it is projected to rise from 44 per cent of GDP in 2008 to 61 per cent by 2010 (CBO 2009).
 - 18 I leave to another day a discussion of the reasons why discretionary fiscal policy fell out of favour in recent decades, but was embraced in response to the global financial crisis of 2008-09, and played a crucial role.

Dr David Gruen and Colin Clark are part of the Macroeconomic Group at the Australian Treasury. Their paper was the 19th Annual Colin Clark Memorial Lecture, sponsored by the University of Queensland, the Economic Society of Australia, and Queensland Treasury, delivered by David Gruen on Wednesday 11 November 2009.

MEMOIR WITHOUT EMPATHY - JOHN MCLAREN ON VINCENT BUCKLEY

Nice taxpayer dollars – if you can get them. John McLaren, the Melbourne based academic, received a total of \$135,000 from the Australian Research Council to write a biography of the poet and academic Vincent Buckley (1925-1988). The book – titled *Journey Without Arrival: The life and writing of Vincent Buckley* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2009) – had sold a total of 130 copies as at 15 August 2009. Put it another way, every copy of *Journey Without Arrival* which has been purchased has effectively received a taxpayer subsidy of over \$1000.

There is a case for subsidising books about significant deceased Australians. Nevertheless, markets send their own messages. The prime reason why *Journey Without Arrival* has sold so poorly turns on the fact that the author lacks empathy towards his subject and writes in a dreadfully turgid style. Not only is *Journey Without Arrival* a difficult read, there is little reason why friends or admirers of the late Vincent Buckley should buy this tome.

Vincent Buckley was born in Romsey, in rural Victoria, in 1925. His family came from what is termed Irish Catholic stock – even though they were very much Australian. A relative on his mother’s side provided funding for Vincent to receive his secondary education at St Patrick’s College in East Melbourne – which was run by the Society of Jesus (or Jesuits). After leaving school, Buckley enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force but was discharged on medical grounds. He spent most of the rest of his life around the English Department at the University of Melbourne.

Vincent Buckley was – variously – an academic, a poet, an author and a Catholic intellectual. Over time, Buckley lost the faith. But he never lost his

identification with Ireland and the Catholic Irish. What's more, Buckley's time as a practising – and believing – Catholic had a life-long influence on him. Buckley was also interested in politics. Here his position is best described as anti-totalitarian. Buckley was against totalitarian communism, totalitarian nazism and totalitarian fascism. In the 1960s Buckley, with others, opposed and sought to reform the Victorian Labor State executive which was controlled by such members of the pro-communist left as Bill Hartley and George Crawford.

In time, such leading Labor identities as Gough Whitlam, Mick Young and Clyde Cameron came to recognise that reform of the Victorian ALP was central to Labor winning government at the Federal level and in Victoria itself. Whitlam won the 1972 Federal election and John Cain led Labor to victory in Victoria in 1982. Labor had been out office in Canberra since 1949 and in Melbourne since 1955.

John McLaren is a secular humanist and an unreconstructed leftist. After studying arts and education at Melbourne University, he taught in government high schools and then at the Secondary Teachers' College in Melbourne. In time, McLaren became a university academic – ending his career as Professor of Humanities at Victoria University in Melbourne. Victoria University was the administering organisation for McLaren's grant under the Australian Research Council Discovery Project. Between 1966 and 1997, McLaren was associate editor and, later, editor of the leftist *Overland* magazine. He is currently an emeritus professor at Victoria University.

The essential problem with *Journey Without Arrival* is that it consists of criticism rather than critique. As Patrick Morgan, who was both a student and friend of Buckley, pointed out his review of *Journey Without Arrival* in the May 2009 issue of *Quadrant*:

John McLaren's biography provides a competent account of the main events of his life. As much of the material in the book comes from his [Buckley's] published writings, including his autobiographical memoir *Cutting Green Hay*, it is the new material here-on his two marriages, intrigues in the Melbourne English Department, and his various sojourns overseas-which is most helpful in understanding him. The reader of the book is gripped by the unfolding of the main dramas of his life.

But there are major problems with this biography. Instead of setting out Buckley's life and writing, and letting readers judge for themselves, McLaren

constantly intrudes his own position, which is often opposed to Buckley's. The first time he mentions a Buckley poem, an unpublished one, he comments, after quoting only a few snippets: "The language of piety and pathos gets in the way of the poem's attempt to imagine Tarsisius in either his own time or ours, and therefore prevents him from opening a conversation with either time." What can the reader make of this? A biographer's role is not to engage in extended lit crit. After almost every poem or book of Buckley's is mentioned, McLaren makes a derogatory comment, or hauls in another critic to do it. To capture his subject from the inside a biographer needs to be sympathetic, without being supine.

ANTI-COMMUNISM AS AN AFFLICTION

A reading of *Journey Without Arrival* reveals that the author is not empathetic with Vincent Buckley's poetry, or his religion (when he professed religious belief) or his interest in Ireland or his politics. Take politics, for example. John McLaren regards anti-communism as if it were some kind of affliction. Yet it was the anti-communists – who, like Buckley, regarded opposition to communism as part of their anti totalitarian stance – who ultimately have been vindicated. And it was the pro-communists, and the anti-anti-communists, whose position was completely discredited when European Communism, along with the Berlin Wall, collapsed in 1989.

Yet McLaren's contempt for anti-communism is still evident two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall. At pages 73-74 McLaren refers to the Hungarian prelate Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty, whom Buckley much admired, in the following terms:

Although there can be little doubt about Mindszenty's personal faith, he represented the Church in Hungary which, unlike its Polish counterpart, identified with the old order and refused to cooperate in any way with the programs of the Communist government. Eric Hobsbawm has adjudged him "too diehard even for Rome".

This is an extraordinary statement – even for an unreconstructed leftist like McLaren. Cardinal Mindszenty was a Hungarian patriot as well as a Catholic leader. In late 1944 he was imprisoned by the Arrow Cross fascist regime in Hungary – which was an ally of Nazi Germany – and released in 1945. In 1948 Mindszenty was arrested by the Hungarian communist regime, subjected to a show trial and sent to the notorious Conti Prison in Budapest where he was tortured and spent years in solitary confinement. He was freed during the Hungarian Uprising but, following the Soviet invasion in 1956, he sought

refuge in the United States embassy in Budapest, remaining there until 1971.

McLaren attempts to discredit Mindszenty by quoting the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm against him. Between 1946 and 1956 Hobsbawm was a member of the British Communist Party's historians' group. As recently as 2002, Hobsbawm declared that he was an "unrepentant communist". Certainly Mindszenty was a stubborn man – many heroes are. But only the likes of McLaren and Hobsbawm would see the prelate's refusal to accommodate the wishes of a communist dictatorship as a personality flaw.

McLaren has little time for anti-communists – including such Australian anti-communists as the Jewish Frank Knopfelmacher and the Catholic B.A. Santamaria. McLaren grossly exaggerates the influence of the Czechoslovakian born Frank Knopfelmacher, who taught at the Melbourne University Physiology Department, on Vincent Buckley. Knopfelmacher was an influential figure at Melbourne University in the second half of the 1950s and 1960s. But Buckley was involved in campus life before Dr Knopfelmacher arrived in Australia. Knopfelmacher was erratic and possessed a crisis mentality. Even so, on the big issue of totalitarianism, Knopfelmacher was correct.

The same can be said for the Catholic political operative B.A. Santamaria, who was president of the National Civic Council. Santamaria also had a crisis mentality. Yet his occasional misjudgements did not include his anti-communism. McLaren, on the other hand has never fully acknowledged the evil of communist regimes and has never acknowledged that it was a mistake for many on the left to flirt with communist dictatorships.

Patrick Morgan has commented that John McLaren's lack of sympathy with Vincent Buckley's politics is evident in the way he throws around "labels like 'anti-Communist' and 'Cold War', which in the mind of the hard Left have derogatory connections". As Morgan puts it, McLaren "paints Buckley as an otherwise decent man with one strange and disfiguring ailment – anticommunism". Morgan comments that McLaren's leftism means that he cannot appreciate Buckley's role as someone who sought to reform Victorian Labor in the late 1950s and during the 1960s:

Buckley resolutely opposed the Bill Hartley Socialist Left clique which took over the Victorian ALP branch and ruthlessly enforced its far-Left ideology, expelling decent parliamentarians like Jack Galbally and Captain [Sam] Benson. McLaren devotes no space to explaining to the reader the tyrannical leadership of the

Victorian ALP, which Buckley and others courageously opposed, and whose overthrow eventually made possible federal and Victorian Labor governments. Buckley's political activities are made to seem trivial and inexplicable in this book because this context is never explained. To explain the context would mean condemning the Left, and that is a road down which John McLaren never goes.

Two examples, from Chapter 16, which is titled "Dialogues With The Enemy", illustrate the point.

A MAN CALLED PETE (NOT PETER)

At pages 204-205 of *Journey Without Arrival*, John McLaren wrote about the left's campaign in Melbourne University in the mid 1960s to raise funds for the North Vietnamese controlled National Liberation Front:

Supposed support for aggressive Communism became a big issue on campus at the end of 1967, when Peter Steedman, the editor of the student paper Farrago, was alleged to have collected money for the North Vietnamese National Liberation Front and the Viet Cong. Tempers ran high, and language was extreme. A group of "concerned parents, teachers and others", which turned out to be Gerard Henderson, Ray Evans and others, at various times associated with Santamaria or the DLP, campaigned to have Steedman dismissed by the Student Representative Council (SRC) from his position and by the Vice-Chancellor from the University...The campaign was joined by Patrick O'Brien and others who now controlled the ALP Club.

There were three left-of-centre political clubs on the Melbourne University campus in the mid 1960s. They were the extreme-left, pro-communist Labor Club, the centre-left Democratic Socialist Club and the anti-communist ALP Club. Vincent Buckley was a member of the ALP Club. McLaren attempts to discredit Buckley by linking him to Henderson and the DLP Club. In fact, Henderson had virtually no contact with Buckley when Henderson was a student at Melbourne University in the late 1960s. McLaren's reference in this instance is an attempt to diminish Buckley. What the DLP Club and the ALP Club had in common was a position of unrelenting opposition to communism. However, members of the DLP and ALP clubs disagreed on some aspects of domestic politics.

In correspondence with Gerard Henderson, John McLaren has not been able to support his sneering comment that Henderson was associated with a group of “concerned parents” or that Henderson ever approached the Vice-Chancellor (Sir George Paton) to have Steedman dismissed from Melbourne University itself. McLaren’s chief source for his assertion is an article in *Farrago* by Ian Robinson. McLaren does not mention that Robinson was one of Steedman’s left-wing mates and was *Farrago*’s assistant editor at the time. There was opposition to Steedman from some Melbourne University students circa 1967. In 1967 Steedman was in his mid-twenties and was not a bona-fide student. Also, he ran *Farrago* as a left-wing propaganda outlet and censored the views of many students with whom he disagreed. Steedman’s involvement with the campaign to support the NLF was but one reason why he was opposed by students who did not embrace his leftist agenda at the time.

As *Journey Without Arrival* makes clear, McLaren has scant understanding about campus politics at Melbourne University in the 1960s. For example, McLaren seems unaware that in 1967 Steedman called himself “Pete”, not “Peter”. One check of *Farrago*’s back copies would have revealed that. With \$135,000 from the taxpayer, McLaren should have been able to find time to examine the back copies of *Farrago* which are held in the Melbourne University’s Baillieu Library.

Moreover, McLaren’s reference to “supposed support for aggressive Communism” at Melbourne University in the mid-1960s overlooks the fact that many left-wing operatives did support the communist totalitarian dictatorship of Ho Chi Minh, along with North Vietnam, the Viet Cong and the National Liberation Front. Common left-wing chants at the time included “Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh”, and “One side right/One side wrong/Victory for the Viet Cong”. It is hardly surprising that the likes of Henderson, Evans, O’Brien and Vincent Buckley opposed communism in the 1960s. Except, of course, to a continuing leftist like McLaren.

MCLAREN OKAYS DIALOGUE WITH BREZHNEV

In the mid 1960s, before European Communism was completely discredited in the West as a consequence of the Soviet Union’s 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, the concept of dialogue with communism became fashionable – especially among left-wing Catholics. Following the publication of former communist Roger Garaudy’s book *From Anathema to Dialogue*, the ABC decided to do a program on the issue. Titled *This Tiny Ship in Space*,

it went to air on 9 June 1968. The former Catholic priest Michael Parer played a key role in putting the program together.

Parer was a well-known left-winger. Santamaria refused to be interviewed for the program but Vincent Buckley and Frank Knopfelmacher agreed to Parer’s request that they appear on *This Tiny Ship In Space*. Parer and Buckley were friends at the time. Santamaria’s judgment proved correct. As McLaren concedes, Buckley and Knopfelmacher – the opponents of Catholic-Communist dialogue – received a total of five minutes on air. Supporters of Catholic-Communist dialogue – Catholic, Protestant and Communist alike – were on air for a total of 20 minutes. The remainder of the 30 minute program was filled by the presenter who ran a pro-dialogue line.

Most independent observers would come to the conclusion that Buckley and Knopfelmacher had a right to be annoyed about the lack of balance in *This Tiny Ship In Space*. But not McLaren. In *Journey Without Arrival*, he criticises the response of both Buckley and Knopfelmacher to the program. McLaren lectures Buckley for “diverting attention away from the main issue, the possibility of dialogue with Communists”. And McLaren made the extraordinary point that the controversy concerning the ABC’s unbalanced treatment of Knopfelmacher was, in fact, “an example of Knopfelmacher’s ability to manipulate others to his own viewpoint”. Really.

The Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia on 20 August 1968. This reality – which dented the cause of Catholic-Communist dialogue – is not mentioned in *Journey Without Arrival*. Nor does the author make it clear that proponents of Catholic-Communism dialogue in the mid 1960s were advocating that Western democracies negotiate with the totalitarian dictatorship in the Soviet Union, which was led by the thugish Leonid Brezhnev.

JOHN MCLAREN’S (TAX-PAYER SUBSIDISED) HOWLERS

The author’s possession of a \$135,000 taxpayer research grant did not come with an obligation to be fair and balanced about his subject. However, it did entail a responsibility to double-check facts. John McLaren advised Gerard Henderson on 23 July 2009 that “all references” in *Journey Without Arrival* “were checked independently”. In which case the fact-checker did not do a very good job; even though, as McLaren has acknowledged, he alone is responsible “for any remaining errors”. Here are some – the references are to the print edition.

Page 47. According to *Journey Without Arrival*, in 1951 Brian Buckley (no relation) was present when

Vincent Buckley addressed “senior students at St Kevin’s CBC” (i.e. Christian Brothers College). This is most unlikely – since Brian Buckley attended Parade CBC as a student. In the 1950s, St Kevin’s was in Toorak and Parade in East Melbourne.

Page 57. According to *Journey Without Arrival*, the Newman Society at Melbourne University “accommodated...the Campion Society”. In fact, the Campion Society was not contained within the Newman Society. What’s more, the Campion Society preceded the Newman Society.

Page 60-61. According to *Journey Without Arrival*, when it became known that Helga Griffin “intended to marry Jim Griffin”, Vincent Buckley and some others “attempted to stop it”. The reference should be to Helga Girschik. She became Helga Griffin when she married Jim Griffin. Helga Griffin told her story in *Sing me that lovely song again* (Pandanus Books, 2006). If McLaren had a feel for Vincent Buckley’s friends and associates, he would have known this. If McLaren had fully researched his topic, he would have been aware of Helga Girschik’s maiden name.

Page 70. According to *Journey Without Arrival*, Monsignor Arthur Fox, the Vicar-General of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, was Archbishop Daniel Mannix’s “chaplain”. Fox may have been Mannix’s confessor. Mannix did not have – and did not need – a chaplain. This comment indicates the author’s lack of understanding of Catholicism and the Catholic Church.

Page 135. According to *Journey Without Arrival*, Norman Lindsay was a poet. In fact, he was an artist and a writer. A reading of this biography suggests that John McLaren has neither expertise in, nor feeling for, poetry.

Page 141. According to *Journey Without Arrival*, Paul Simpson and Brian Buckley were co-editors of *Prospect* from the end of 1959 until the end of 1961. At page 171 the *Prospect* editor at this time is referred to as Ron Simpson. Paul Simpson is correct. This is corrected in the online edition.

Page 143. According to *Journey Without Arrival*, the magazine *Prospect* had “intellectual and theological interests”. On Page 143 McLaren confuses *Prospect* with the *Catholic Worker* magazine. At different times, Buckley was on the board of both *Prospect* and the *Catholic Worker*.

Page 167. According to *Journey Without Arrival*, Frank Knopfmacher, B.A. Santamaria, James McAuley, David Armstrong, Colin Clark and others “with the support of the Congress for Cultural Freedom...established Peace With Freedom, an organisation that intended to fight Catholicism on Victorian campuses”. In fact, Peace Without Freedom

did not concentrate on Victorian universities and it was not funded by the Paris based Congress for Cultural Freedom.

Page 177. According to *Journey Without Arrival*, in Buckley’s poem *On Being an Anti-Communist Poet* “the speaker remembers how he once had hoped that [Yevgeny] Yevtushenko would bring the justice of Jerusalem to the Soviet Union when he commemorated the Jews slaughtered at Stalin’s behest”. The reference is to Yevtushenko’s poem *Babi Yar*. McLaren should know that *Babi Yar* refers to the mass murder of Jews in Kiev in September 1941 by the Nazis.

Page 195. According to *Journey Without Arrival*, Nikita Khrushchev’s secret speech to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union took place in 1953. The correct date is 1956. This has been corrected in the online edition. John McLaren indulges in considerable hyperbole when he asserts the deliberations of the Catholic Church’s Second Vatican Council (1961-1965) “occasioned the same sort of disquiet in the Church” as Khrushchev’s secret speech.

Page 214. According to *Journey Without Arrival*, “information on the Independent Labour [sic] Alliance has proved elusive”. If McLaren had bothered to make a few phone calls he could have established that the Independent Labor Alliance ran candidates in the 1969 Federal Alliance as a means of putting pressure on the ALP to reform its Victorian branch. Buckley supported the ILA which directed its preferences away from the ALP. There are a number of people around today who were involved in the ILA’s 1969 campaign. With over \$130,000 of taxpayers’ funding, the author should have been able to locate at least one to check the facts and prevent the need to rely on “the memory of the author”.

Page 272. According to *Journey Without Arrival*, at one stage Vincent Buckley “entered into a partnership with Brian Buckley and a Mrs G. Horwood to buy, train and race a horse...”. If John McLaren had made just one phone call he could have found out that Mrs G. Horwood is Geraldine Horwood (nee Phelan), who was Brian Buckley’s sister-in-law. Again, this demonstrates that the author does not have a feel for his subject’s friends and associates.

BIOGRAPHY AS LITERARY SLUDGE

Apart from McLaren’s evident hostility to Vincent Buckley’s views on a range of issues, *Journey Without Arrival* is a dreadful book because it is replete with literary sludge. Like this:

Page 93. John McLaren on Vincent Buckley’s poem *Land of No Fathers*:

Like de Quiros, Buckley remains as firmly enclosed in an imperialist mind-set as the English proconsuls who made the Irish their subjects, victims and agents. Despite its powerful evocations of the Australian landscapes, the poem relies too much on de Quiros's bringing the God he already knows to allow it to discover a God incarnate in his destination. Yet finally the emphasis of the poem is not on Quiros and his dreams, but on Buckley's anonymous forebears who will join de Quiros in his search and in the land that waits their discovery.

Page 222. John McLaren on Vincent Buckley's poem *Good Friday and the Present Crucifixion*:

Buckley's speaker stands apart as he observes his fellow communicants, and the only dialogue he enters is with himself and an absent God. As an achieved work of art, however, the poem goes beyond the self, and is in this sense both abstract and impersonal, just as the sacrifice of the Mass is goes beyond the person of the priest.

Page 282-83. John McLaren on Vincent Buckley's poem *Write*:

His writing hand takes sound and fuses it into words on the page:

... the sounds cursive, flowing
out of a hand
frozen to the sky.

The sky is as much the author of the words as is the subject's hand. Buckley never learned to type, and his poems began their written lives as they eventually left his hand, in tiny, clear, cursive script. In these lines, the physical act of writing itself becomes an extension of the material universe. Here, however, the world does not flow into the rhythm of the poem, but stills it in a moment that freezes the subject to the larger matrix of the sky – the whole that he is trying to capture.

ON SPIRITS, DRIED VEGETABLES AND CABANA SAUSAGE

John McLaren's biographies are not always unfriendly. Clearly McLaren has scant empathy for the likes of Vincent Buckley. However, there is empathy aplenty in John McLaren's *Free Radicals: Of the Left in Postwar Melbourne* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2003) – for which the author also received a grant from the Australian Research Council. John

McLaren exhibited empathy for, and understanding of, Melbourne based intellectuals Steven Murray-Smith, Ian Turner and Ken Gott – all of whom belonged for a period to the Communist Party of Australia. Yet *Free Radicals* is so turgid in style that it is almost unreadable. Turn to Page 129, for example, to learn all that you don't need to know about Stephen Murray-Smith – as told by John McLaren.

His [Murray-Smith's] passion for the High Plains country of north-eastern Victoria continued. Whenever possible at Easter he would walk through them with old mates from history, education and science. A couple of times I was fortunate enough to join them, once as quartermaster in charge of supplies. We met in Harrierville on Thursday evening, spending the night in one of Hoy's cabins before a hard climb the next day up Feathertop. From there it was easy going – along the razorback to Hotham, down to Dibbins, the oldest hut on the plains, across to Cope and then Fainter to Bogong Jack's hut, ready for an easy day's walk down to Bright on the last day. Being fond of good living but averse to hard labour, I had purchased the most compact provisions – spirits, biscuits, dried vegetables, cabana sausage - - -

That's enough, surely.

GREAT PHOTO - PITY ABOUT THE CAPTION

John McLaren knows so little about Vincent Buckley's family that he cannot distinguish between the poet's second wife (Penelope) and the first daughter from his first marriage (Brigid). The names of Penelope and Brigid are transposed in a caption in *Journey Without Arrival* which appears below a photograph of Vincent Buckley's marriage to Penelope Buckley (nee Curtis) in September 1976.

A TOWN LIKE DARRAWEIT GUIM - OR GUIN?

Journey Without Arrival is being published in small print runs. The inaugural paragraph of the book's first edition refers to a town near Romsey called Darraweit Guin. The second edition refers to Darraweit Guim – which is correct. However, as at November 2009, the online edition of *Journey Without Arrival* still contains the incorrect spelling.

ZHAO ZIYANG: A REASSESS- MENT

Chin Jin

Chin Jin is a Chinese-born Australian living in NSW Australia since 1988. He has been active in the overseas Chinese democratic movement since early 1989 and is now the president of the Federation for a Democratic China (FDC) Australia and vice president of the FDC internationally. The FDC was set up in the wake of the Tiananmen Square Incident. He is an MA graduate of the University of Western Sydney, and has written widely on Human Rights and the political structure of China. Chin Jin read the original Mandarin edition Zhao Ziyang's journal and his review has been translated into English for publication in The Sydney Institute Quarterly.



The first publication of *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Zhao Ziyang* early this year, which coincided with the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, is an event of importance. It sheds a clear light on that event and illustrated Zhao's role in the turbulent events inside China's political elite. For later generations, it serves as a convincing first-hand account which invites an appreciation of the political dynamics during that important period.

Deng Xiaoping, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang emerged as the most open-minded political leaders that the People's Republic of China has seen during the six decades of the CCP rule since 1949. However, Deng's openness was pragmatic in essence – marked by relaxed economic control with the same firm CCP political grip as always. Zhao Ziyang's leading role, as well as his predecessor Hu Yaobang's, were but a modern version of the Tong Zhi and Guang Xu reign eras of the Qing Dynasty when the Empress Dowager notoriously decided state affairs according to directives from behind the curtain. Zhao Ziyang was after all a good leader and he could never be discounted for his influence and contributions over the course of modern evolution in China.

ECONOMIC REFORM WITHOUT POLITICAL REFORM

It is widely acknowledged that Mao's death in 1976 prompted Deng's re-emergence and, under the

circumstances, he had no choice but to initiate economic reform. But this reform was simply a copy of the Westernisation Movement during the Dowager Empress' reign. Deng had advocated political reform as well. But he had never intended a form of democratic governance based on a system of checks and balances as practised in the West. Rather, it aimed at the re-structuring of the ruling party to shore up the declining one-party dictatorship. *Prisoner of the State* proves this.

Throughout *Prisoner of the State*, readers can sense a brimful of close personal feelings towards Deng, which, not surprisingly, reflects Zhao's ideological boundary and loyalty. Zhao could never detach himself from the mindset of communist doctrine. At that time, China's resurrection owed much to the open-mindedness of Zhao and Hu, the former for when he was in charge of economic development and the latter when he was in charge of ideology. After Hu's downfall, Zhao took over and Li Peng took a grip on the economy. This inevitably dealt a heavy blow to China's political and economic reform momentum when the hard left-wing, which had benefited from the change, launched comeback attacks on the nascent democratic process, foreshadowing the end of Zhao's political life in 1989. Under the pressure of the left-wing, Deng destroyed the students' pro-democratic movement and dismissed Zhao from office. From then on, China's political reform, if there was ever one, was aborted and political trends regressed.

ZHAO'S LACK OF POLITICAL FINESSE

Readers can also perceive a Zhao who had faithfully followed Deng's lead and meticulously attended to Deng's personal feelings while ignoring the interests of the nation at a critical historical point. In dealing with Deng, Zhao never knew his position whereas Deng did and did it well. Shackled to the mind-set of a puppet, acting on instructions behind the curtain and circumscribed by Communist doctrine, Zhao was unable to break through the boundary to broaden his vision and mind. As such, Zhao was destined to be a tragic figure, rather than the much needed great statesmen with the vision and strategy to open a new historical chapter. His indecisiveness attributed to the delay in China's political reform for at least a further 25 years.

Zhao did not possess the required elementary political finesse, wisdom and strategy to win over or defeat his opponents. He proved no match for his successors Jiang Zeming and Hu Jintao, let alone the wily plot-master Deng. Inevitably Zhao met his Waterloo in the 1989 clandestine court plot of the Chinese politburo.

Prisoner of the State reveals that the CCP's proposed political reform was no real reform, rather it was a

mere update of the same ruling methods. This was supported by the fact that Deng had warned Zhao repeatedly, when Zhao was drafting a political report for the 13th Party Convention, that Zhao should not involve anything like the power-checking structures of the West, not even a trace. It is clear that the regime's so-called political reform was nothing more than administrative changes or anything other than reforming the CCP dictatorship.

A LATENT DEMOCRATIC AWAKENING

Mikhail Gorbachev made a mistake when he mentioned in his memoir that Zhao advocated Western-style political reform, an impression he obtained from his meeting with Zhao in 1989. This correction is proven by *Prisoner of State*, which showed that his pro-Western democracy ideas brewed during the long hours of his house-arrest from 1989 until the time of his death in 2005. Real democratic political reform involving the separation of power and constitutional reform has never been on the CCP agenda.

Zhao also considered turning China's other small political parties into allies, headed by the Communist Party, to form part of the political consultation system – thereby quenching their thirst for power sharing in politics. Such a consideration would not pose a challenge to the CCP's ruling party position, though it would create an illusion of "democracy" in China. The West and ordinary Chinese people still have a long held great expectation that the CCP will eventually carry out political reform, and are confident this will happen. But Zhao's accounts and analysis in his memoir serves as a wake-up call. It is only wishful thinking. The CCP's version of political reform is a far cry from the Western democracy-based one – yet another "Chinese characteristics", no matter how many times CCP has chanted the mantra of political reform.

China was presented with an opportunity to steer its reform towards constitutional democracy during the reign of Zhao Ziyang and his predecessor Hu Yaobang – even though Deng still gave instructions from behind the curtain. If they had the composure and finesse to patiently bide their time for Deng to disappear, it might have been possible for them to take the Chinese people onto the long awaited democratic course. China might have rewritten its history in the year 1989 if the dissolving of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European Bloc had happened earlier than the 4 June event. That is why some academics have lamented the unfairness of God towards the Chinese people.

NO HISTORY MAKER

No doubt, Zhao was a political leader with conscience and integrity. But absolutely, he was not a statesman

of a high calibre who could create history. Because of his indecisiveness, he was doomed to house arrest during the following 16 years. Zhao deserves credit for his conscience and his humanity in political adversity. Nevertheless, he was ineffective when he could have been effective.

Prisoner of the State prompts me towards this kind of thinking. As a point of historical comparison, both the former Soviet and Chinese leaders projected entirely different images to their nations and produced equally different outcomes. In the face of the formidable Red Army, a dauntless Boris Yeltsin delivered an inspiring speech to Russian public, greatly boosting their courage. The Red Army wavered, became frightened and then shattered. Whereas millions of civilians had confronted the Peoples' Liberation Army at Beijing for days. Yet no political leader with vision, moral courage and decisiveness stood out to call for change. That might have had the leverage to change the political landscape in China. Zhao was blessed to be there in such a unique position. Regretfully he failed to seize the opportunity for lack of boldness and forethought.

There are other contributing factors to the success of the political change in the former Soviet Union: it occurred 70 years after the October Revolution when the leaders were completely cut off from the founders, thus paving the way for Gorbachev to launch the reform. In China, the presence of an entrenched camp of old revolutionary bigots remained 40 years after the Chinese Revolution had formed a dangerous conservative force against the reformist Zhao Ziyang.

The death of three Soviet leaders in a row in the early 1980s had cleared barriers for Gorbachev's reform – which, coupled with his aspiring thinking, finally spelled an end to the Soviet Communist regime. In so far as political power is concerned, Gorbachev was a loser. But his appreciation of the universal values, and his contribution to the world peace and progress by laying down arms and winding up the Cold War, is unparalleled.

But Zhao Ziyang was not so lucky as Gorbachev. Deng's long life cost China at least 25 years of political fortune. Yeltsin and Zhao were placed in a similar conflict. Yeltsin jumped onto a tank to call on people for sweeping reform. Whereas Zhao emerged at the Tiananmen Square and, as best as he could, apologised: "I am late. I am sorry. I am old and do not care anymore." As the saying goes: "One's anger either breaks out in silence or dies in silence." Yeltsin's choice was the first. Zhao's choice was the second.



BOOK REVIEWS

John McConnell

THE RIDDLE OF FATHER HACKETT:

A life in Ireland and Australia

By Brenda Niall

National Library of Australia, pb, 2009

rrp \$ 39.95

ISBN 9780642276858

Jesuit priest, Father William Hackett, would not have imagined that one day the small daughter of his friend and physician would become his biographer. He was a frequent and welcome visitor to the Niall family home in Studley Park Road in the Melbourne suburb of Kew during the 1930s and 1940s. Brenda Niall remembers him with affection: a “charming old man”, a man with an engaging and complex personality.

Just over half-a-century after his death, Niall has written a fascinating biography entitled *The Riddle of Father Hackett*. William Hackett SJ was born in Kilkenny, Ireland in 1878 and died in Melbourne in 1954. He died after being struck by a taxi one evening as he crossed Cotham Road in Kew, on the way to Genazzano Convent.

The book’s central riddle relates to why he left Ireland in 1922 during the civil war, never to return. Was the exile self-imposed? Was he ordered to leave Ireland by his Jesuit superiors?

Hackett was friendly with leaders of the Irish nationalist movement. He was a courier of intelligence. He may have acted as chaplain to individuals fighting for Irish independence. Many stories – true or not - circulated about his involvement in the struggle for an independent Ireland. Were these matters relevant to William Hackett’s departure from his beloved Ireland?

Niall found eight boxes of archives at the Jesuit archives in Hawthorn in Victoria. Father Hackett’s journals and letters to family members – particularly his almost weekly letters in the 1940s and early 1950s to his sister Florence – were there due to a quirk of fate. A younger Jesuit, Doug Boyd, had written to Florence Hackett after her brother’s death seeking material that might be useful for a biography. Boyd did not proceed with the biography, but this material was preserved in the Jesuit archives.

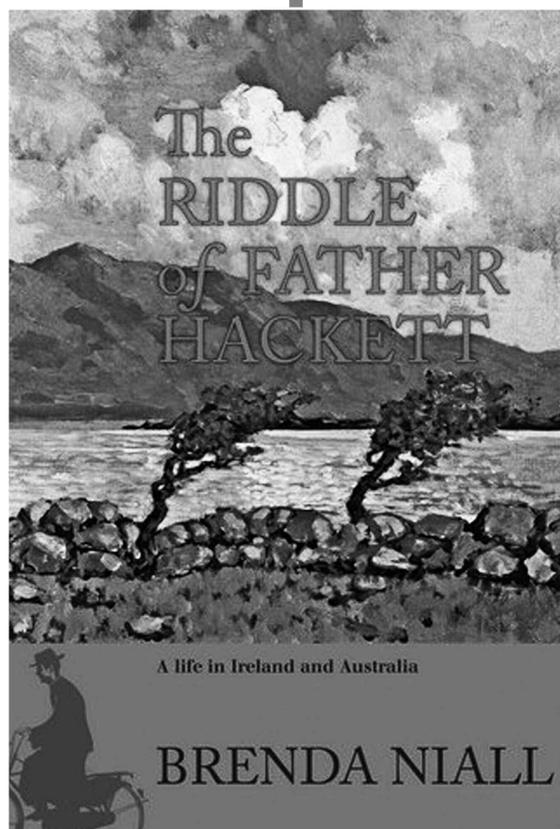
The Riddle of Father Hackett covers the priest’s early life in Ireland and the three decades he lived in Australia. William Hackett grew up in Kilkenny. He boarded at the Jesuit Clongowes school with James Joyce. Later, for financial reasons, he attended the Jesuit day school Belvedere College in Dublin. He entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1895 and was ordained in 1912.

The Hackett family valued literature and democratic politics highly. William’s father was a physician and close friend and supporter of Charles Stewart Parnell. Scandal was to destroy Parnell’s reputation and divide his supporters. The Hackett family continued to support Parnell thereby earning condemnation from many people in Kilkenny including members of the clergy.

Some members of the Hackett family subsequently developed anticlerical attitudes as a result, although this did not apply to William Hackett. William and his father shared similar beliefs and attitudes. Both were sympathetic to the plight of suffering people. Both were tolerant of differences. Both loved family and friends. They were both sociable and energetic. Both loved books and Ireland – its countryside, its language, its history.

Over time, William Hackett became enmeshed in Irish Nationalist politics. By 1915, he was a committed republican and political activist. He became a trusted friend of both Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera. He experienced the Rising of 1916 and the Terror of 1920.

While teaching in Limerick between 1914 and 1921, Hackett acted as a publicist for the Irish Republican cause. He sought to rouse shame amongst the English over the savageries committed by the Black



and Tans. He publicised the conditions under which Irish political prisoners were detained. He visited political prisoners awaiting execution. He tried to comfort their families. He carried intelligence.

One night, in November 1921, unknown intruders raided his room in Limerick. Who they were or what their intentions were is not clear. If their intention was to seize seditious material, they were notably unsuccessful. They missed correspondence with republican leaders as well as witness statements relating to British atrocities and prison conditions. They also missed a rifle concealed in the chimney.

However, the raid may well have been a warning to the Jesuit order that had tended to maintain a distance from the political struggle for independence. Hackett was transferred subsequently to Dublin, becoming assistant editor of the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart* magazine. Intended or not, there is irony in the messenger title. "Hackett's capacious greatcoat," Brenda Niall writes, "often held enough sedition to earn him a prison term or a death sentence."

During 1922, however, it became known Hackett was to be transferred to Australia. Before his departure, he travelled to Donegal. Was it a holiday, a political mission or a tour of duty, Niall asks – or "an idiosyncratic blend of all three?" Hackett then journeyed to Cork.

William Hackett and Michael Collins missed meeting each other due to a misunderstanding. The next day, Collins was killed in an ambush. The last letter that Michael Collins probably wrote was a note to Hackett expressing disappointment about the mix-up that had occurred. Questions relating to the nature of these visits to Donegal and Cork prior to leaving for Australia remain unanswered.

Shortly after his arrival in Australia, William Hackett learned of the execution of his friend, Erskine Childers. Deep loneliness and sorrow are evident in his letter to Molly Childers over the death of her husband. (pages 108-109)

In this letter, Hackett mentioned that his absence from Ireland looked cowardly. The letter goes on to state: "You know it was not cowardice that places me here (in Australia)." What did Molly Childers know? Brenda Niall suspects that William Hackett's exile was the result of a decision by the Jesuit Order.

In Melbourne, life moved to more mundane matters. William Hackett established a Catholic Library in the city of Melbourne while doing parish work in the working class suburb of Richmond at St. Ignatius' church, developed a close friendship with the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne Dr Daniel Mannix, became chaplain to the Australian National Secretariat of Catholic Action (ANSCA) and later to B

A Santamaria's Movement. He was also appointed twice to Xavier College, as a French teacher in 1923 and as Rector (Headmaster) from 1935 to 1940.

William Hackett, Rector, and Xavier College were not a comfortable fit. He resented the lack of interest in anything Irish in the college. He lacked a formality associated with positions of school leadership. He added significantly to the large school debt.

Hackett possessed an optimism in financial matters that some would prefer to describe as "financial mismanagement". Balance sheets were not among his priorities. He disagreed with the emphasis on competitive sport at the school. He upset the Old Xaverians Association, denying them the use of school sporting facilities for training purposes. He offended many parents with speeches not noted for their tact. Brenda Niall's title for this chapter ("Maverick Rector") says it all. Fr Hackett's appointment as Rector of Xavier College ended unhappily. Hackett was removed abruptly during the first term of 1940.

Former student, Eldon Hogan, while noting that discipline needed to be tightened following Hackett's departure, thoroughly enjoyed his time as a student at the school under Father Hackett's leadership. From Eldon Hogan's perspective, nothing ever quite matched those student years.

Hackett made a major contribution to Catholic intellectual life by founding the Central Catholic Library. The library led to the formation of the Campion Society, the Catholic Guild and the *Catholic Hour* program on radio.

A number of very bright young men, including B A Santamaria, were attracted to the Campion Society. Friction developed among the talented group. There were conflicting attitudes about responding to communist infiltration of the trade unions and the Labor Party. "Santamaria's way of bypassing group decisions and doing everything himself," Niall writes, "caused trouble."

The Riddle of Father Hackett explores the nature of the relationship that existed between Hackett and Archbishop Daniel Mannix. They became close friends, meeting weekly at Raheen (the Archbishop's then residence in Studley Park Road, Kew). They took annual holidays together, initially at Queenscliff and later at Portsea.

As Brenda Niall discovered when she met with the Archbishop while a research assistant to Bob Santamaria, Dr. Mannix was not an easy person to interview. The Archbishop's "inscrutable public persona," Brenda Niall declares, "has defied half a dozen biographers."

Daniel Mannix and William Hackett were not equals. Nor was the relationship based on deference. William

Hackett, Niall believes, was “diplomat, mediator, envoy, entertainer and candid friend to the Archbishop”. Hackett had a different view. He was court jester, even a poodle on a leash at Raheen.

Hackett’s letters home suggest the existence of dissent between himself and Mannix, without indicating the nature of the disagreements. Similarly, when William Hackett and Eamon de Valera stayed with Dr Mannix at Raheen, there is no record of what they discussed.

Some uncertainty exists about the nature of the relationship between William Hackett and Bob Santamaria. Niall believes that Hackett adopted “a difficult balancing act”. She believes he sought to protect the independence of the *Catholic Worker* (begun by Santamaria but now in the hands of his opponents) while providing Chaplaincy support to Catholic Action and the Movement. Santamaria, she says, sought to persuade Dr. Mannix to replace Hackett with someone more suitable. Dr Mannix, however, did not oblige this request.

In 1952, when the Archbishop invited the Jesuits to staff an adult education centre at Belloc House in Kew, Father Hackett was assigned there. It became known as the Institute of Social Order and functioned as the Movement’s training centre. Hackett referred to his role at Belloc House in typical terms; he was a “fossil” or “barnacle”. However, he did observe, without elaborating, that his work at Belloc House was much the same as the political work he had done in Limerick.

Although Hackett and Dr Mannix were very good friends, he remarked in a letter to his sister, “we differ on many points”; no details were provided. In June 1954, he wrote that Monday evenings at Raheen could not go on much longer. It is not clear why. The following month he was to die as a result of the accident.

William Hackett led a life governed by his beliefs, remaining secure and happy in the Jesuits. Apparently he died without leaving a clear statement of his political beliefs. Typically, details of discussions as well as names were omitted from his narratives.

In both Ireland and Australia, Fr Hackett moved in circles of power. Many powerful men made him welcome and befriended him. Three Australian prime ministers were among his friends, James Scullin, Joseph Lyons and Robert Menzies. In both Ireland and Australia, his natural allies often came from outside the Catholic Church. In Australia, for example, apart from Menzies, he was friendly with a Governor of Victoria (Lord Somers).

Niall weaves all of this into a fascinating story. She believes that Hackett brought the “gift of hope” to people. She concludes the biography “without any neat theory of personality” and “without a profit-and-loss statement of his work in Ireland and Australia”.

Ann Curthoys Ann McGrath



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How to write HISTORY that people want to read

by Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath

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Have you ever considered writing a history book? A family history perhaps? Knowing the best techniques to follow is a decided advantage. Imagine a sort of “GPS navigation tool” for budding history writers. You may choose the main streets. The highways. Back roads. Even side tracks.

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country of history. Their book contains many practical hints. What to do and what to avoid. Discussion is lively, informal and informative.

Ann Curthoys is ARC Professional Fellow at the University of Sydney. Ann McGrath is head of the History program in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. Both authors have written many books and articles on history. Both share a left-wing set of values. They advise aspiring authors to ask what you are planning to do and why.

There is a chapter on subject choice. Another chapter hones in on the intended audience. They discuss how to get started. Reflect as you write, they caution. Be

ready to revise your plans. Examples illustrate genres and styles. They advise how to manage notes and files, whether to use the first person, whether to organise material chronologically or thematically and how to do referencing. Look critically at documents, they recommend, be alert for coded language and possible agendas, Translate words carefully noting historical and cultural contexts.

There is a handy chapter about using libraries including overseas libraries. They recommend carrying a suitable compact camera to photograph documents, provided the library allows you to do so. There are suggestions about visual, oral and material sources, avoiding writers block and undertaking editing and revising (titled appropriately, "Tough love"). They even discuss coping with critical reviews and planning a celebratory book launch.

Some sound principles are sprinkled amongst the litany of helpful hints. Manning Clark advised historians: "let the scene speak for itself". Curthoys and McGrath recognise that it is a fiction that the past can directly speak for itself through a writer. They refer also to the temptation that confronts writers to fill in gaps when lack of historical evidence stalls an investigation.

They devote two or three pages to Kate Grenville's novel *The Secret River* (2005). Grenville moved into novelist mode while writing *The Secret River* insisting nevertheless that it amounted to historical truth. "What I was writing wasn't real," she commented "but it was as true as I could make it." Pardon? Curthoys and McGrath remind readers that there are serious limits in writing history. Do not invent, they caution, and make it clear to readers if you engage in speculation.

They quote Inga Clendinnen's advice approvingly that writers of history present "as a detective figure attempting to work out from the (incomplete and sometimes contradictory) evidence what may have happened in the past."

Historical writing, these authors argue, is a search for balance involving reporting, analysing and storytelling. It is in the writing process when we realise there are more questions to be pursued and we see the inadequacies of our material. *How to write HISTORY that people want to read* is a helpful guide delivered in a lively and entertaining style.

John McConnell is the author of senior secondary text books. He is a former staff member of Xavier College.



REVIEW OF THE REVIEWERS

Stephen Matchett

There is a strange disconnect in Australian politics between what is admired and what is accomplished. The commentariat and politicians admire readers and writers in their own ranks. And what impresses them above all else is writing about ideas and how to apply them.

"If Labor is mostly considered the 'sexy' side of politics, one reason is the overwhelming preponderance of books by Labor politicians or about them. ... The relative scarcity of books about the conservative side of politics by Liberal and National Party politicians could prompt the conclusion that we have little worth saying," Tony Abbott writes in his pamphlet on the way forward for his party, *Battlelines* (MUP). He has a point. The left writes but the right does not read is an assumption in place for a century.

There is always a market for the "here I stand" polemic in which practising and aspiring politicians explain their ideals and how they will act on them if they ever hold office. Of course they never deliver on acceding to the treasury benches, what with governing involving a good deal more than applying ideals. However, the idea of philosophising politicians transforming Australia always appeals to people who reject the reality that reforms which work are always incremental, that economic reality always trumps moral purity. And so politicians given to sweeping statements are admired while practical change-agents on both sides of the party divide are rarely honoured. Labor ran a mile from Paul Keating after 1996. The Liberals show no sign of continuing with John Howard's industrial relations reforms.

Outside the political class, the days of the political pamphlet – when politicians established reputations with the voters and shaped agendas that won elections by writing about their ideals – are long gone. The electorate is too sophisticated to fall for ethical abstractions in a world where the nuts and bolts of policy detail are on the public agenda rather than the preserve of ministers and mandarins. The debate over tax policy stopped being about making the rich pay when the evidence started appearing on

op-ed pages that this is precisely what happens. Arguments that we should spend more on schools and hospitals became easy to answer once people were able to ask why standards in schools do not rise with smaller classes or why hospitals cost ever more money with no matching increase in productivity.

And the days when a pamphlet was the only way to advance an argument are obviously over. Horrible though it is, the anonymous author of the Junius letters would go on Q&A today, albeit with face pixellated and voice digitally disguised. Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay would make the case for the US constitution on *The Daily Show* and *Fox and Friends*. And Alfred Deakin and Edmund Barton would sell federation on *Insiders* (where Andrew Bolt would worry about states rights, Fran Kelly would want to know what it would do for the environment and David Marr would simply sneer at them for not including a clause on refugee rights).

The statement of political beliefs in book form is an ancient idea, designed for a world where ideas and ideology were the currency of politics simply because information on what was actually occurring was hard to find. The strength of the case for socialism in the century after the Communist Manifesto would have collapsed if the sorts of statistics we now take for granted were available. Hard data on productivity, welfare spending, or the absence of it, who is paying how much tax and so on makes intellectual abstractions irrelevant and roots politics in the practical.

It is not that arguing over policy options has ended. Far from it. Where once academics led public policy debates, basically because they were the only ones with the time and the libraries, the internet has ended their dominance. That and the way the academic intelligentsia disengaged from practical politics during the Howard years, incapable of accepting that informed electorates would not follow their leads on everything from indigenous health to extra legal immigration.

Today policy debate is dominated by journalists, policy institutes, specialist scholars and a great many op-ed writers, independently thinking bloggers of all political persuasions. And the endless availability of the statistics and policy thinking that governments use in the policy process empowers everybody with the interest and ability to make an informed contribution to the debate.

In essence, the resources that make it possible to address utilitarian policy problems have ended the need for grand ideological narratives. Australians were never much good at them in the first place.

Socialism was always without doctrine because the objective of organised labour was less to reform society than to ensure that the cadres controlled sufficient patronage to protect and extend their own political power base. On the right, the conservatives were intent on keeping their opponents out, of ensuring that proper (generally Protestant) people ran the country. (For all Joe Lyons' belief in middle class propriety it was not until Robert Menzies' "forgotten people" speech that the ancestors of Howard's battlers found a champion). But the two sides of Australian politics never looked like coming to blows over economics or ethnicity, class or culture.

As Paul Kelly demonstrated in *The End of Certainty*, politics for the first 80 years of our national history occurred at the periphery of the Australian settlement, because nobody with any electoral support opposed the idea of a big spending state, using tariffs to shelter us from the winds of change in the global economy. And for all the ferocity of politics over the last 40 years, the struggle was always bi-partisan, with economic reformers on both sides of the party divide seeking to convince conservatives in the two major parties that globalism and its impacts was not optional for Australia. The sound and fury of the culture wars in the Howard years had less to do with the electorate's interest in indigenous health and welfare, immigration or cultural identity than the fact that having lost the economic debate the academic left and the reactionary nationalists needed issues to argue over that disguised their irrelevance.

And so we live in an age where policy debates are more important than ideological arguments and the quality of Australian engagement with the way we are governed is spectacularly good. The economics coverage in mass circulation newspapers makes the point. Other than the *Wall Street Journal* there is not a paper in the US, which addresses the economic interface between policy and society in the way *The Australian* and *Australian Financial Review* do. Comparing US media coverage of healthcare and taxation with the debates here makes Australia look like a nation of the pointiest of pointy-heads.

This drives the intellectual left nuts. The idea that our economic fate lies in reforming our own institutions rather than imposing imported ideas, be they Scandinavian welfare states, French cultural nationalism or a generalised Euro-contempt for national sovereignty, runs counter to the orthodox opinion that politicians without meta-narratives that start from the premise that capitalism is corrupt are lightweights.

POLITICIANS AS AUTHORS

And contempt for practical politics still sets the stage on which political ability is assessed. It is why Tony Abbott argues his Liberal colleagues should write more books, and acting on his own advice has written one himself, which he uses to set out his ideas on what the Liberal Party can do for Australia.

But in doing so he has fallen into a trap laid by Labor. As Tony Abbott understands, the ALP is the party of writers. Wayne Swan and Lindsay Tanner both wrote books in opposition, more to position the party as a policy powerhouse than to indicate what they would do in government. While nobody could ever accuse Mark Latham's *Civilising Global Capital* of being an entertaining read it is the most comprehensive insight into the thinking of an Australian party leader ever written. And as opposition leader and prime minister, Kevin Rudd has poured politics into moulds that suit his own ideals and ambitions in essays. They are part of a long Labor tradition of reading and writing about politics that stretches from the autodidacts of the first generation of union intellectuals through H V Evatt and Gough Whitlam to Bob Carr.

Certainly there was once a correlation between reading and writing books and a policy grasp. The 50-year intellectual vacuum among Australian conservative politicians that started with the Depression allowed the Labor intelligentsia, to present itself as the source of political ideas. And the conservatives' failure to match them was reinforced by the way the left's march through the universities, established the assumption that only Labor supporters (of the intellectual rather than union variety) had any interest in policy.

But the days when overarching ideologies were a sign of policy sophistication and political competence are over. You don't need to package an argument as an impassioned paperback to make a case. This is especially so when most of the important policy problems Australia faces are best addressed on ideology free specifics. There is not a person on the planet whose world view is changed by Productivity Commission reports, but they are enormously influential in leading debate on the specific policy issues which shape the way we are governed.

It will take a while for the absence of a Liberal tradition of writing books that place policy issues in an ideological framework to stop being seen as a sign of political incoherence.

But, rather than ignorance, what it demonstrates is the way the conservatives intuitively understand what Australian politics is all about. The Liberals are very bad at opposition for the same reason that they

are not a party of writers. They understand that in a democracy where the animosities are not ancient and agreement on the policy basics almost universal the only reason to be in politics is to hold office, that effective administration and a permanent culture of public sector improvement is the sole test of fitness to govern.

While Labor has ideas, which have often kept it out of office for decades at a time, the Liberals have little other than a will to power. Certainly Labor did not deal well with losing office in 1996 and wasted much of its first term in opposition assuming the electorate would come to its senses, but by 1998 party intellectuals were out advancing arguments in essays and opinion pieces. This did not do anything to make them more fit to govern but in a culture that takes writing as a talisman of talent it kept the party in the policy game, regardless of its opportunist rejection of the GST.

But two years into their first term of post-Howard opposition the Liberals look like they do not have clue what they believe in or why anybody should vote for them, other than because they are not Labor. This may work in the (very) long term, but waiting for the electorate to get sick of the ALP is less a strategy and more a statement of resignation that the future of the Liberal Party is not in its own hands.

And so Tony Abbott understandably advocates that the conservatives should write about what they stand for. The problem is that it is hard to make a case when what they stand for is being opposed to an immensely popular government. The irony is that the conservatives have plenty of ideas if they only hold on to the best of what John Howard offered.

It is entirely in the national interest that the conservatives stay true to the bi-partisan reform tradition represented by the great achievements of Bob Hawke, Paul Keating and John Howard. For the Liberals to return to the social conservatism and economic conservatism of the Fraser years would be a disaster. With the Rudd Government flirting with the Whitlam agenda of the big spending, union-protecting state the last thing we need is a consensus that the country's future will be found in the 1970s.

However, the commentariat wants more than a message that Liberals are better managers than Labor. Given the Howard Government's outrageous outlays in its last term this is a hard argument to make with a straight face. And a passionate defence of more micro-economic reform is not popular in a year when the government's decisive margin in the polls is due to the way the Prime Minister is spending borrowed money.

The challenge for the conservatives is to present themselves as a party of thinkers when their strength

is as administrators. It is one that will take a while for them to work as three studies of conservatives and the application of their ideas in practical politics show.

ANNABEL CRABB'S MALCOLM TURNBULL

Annabel Crabb makes the case for the established orthodoxy in her "Stop at Nothing: The Life and Adventures of Malcolm Turnbull" (*Quarterly Essay*, 34, 2009 pp1-100); Australian conservatives in politics stand for nothing other than their own ambition, care for nothing other than the pleasures of power and know nothing other than how to appease sectional interests.

Crabb is perhaps the best parliamentary sketch writer in Australia and this piece demonstrates she can draw political pictures on a much broader canvas. This is a witty essay, although occasionally burdened with jokes that fall flat due to authorial ignorance. Turnbull would "wear a howitzer to a knife fight", Crabb contends, obviously not knowing that not even the Opposition leader's ego is ample enough to accommodate an artillery piece.

Nor is there any doubt she is across the point scoring and plotting, the guile and gossip that the press gallery reports in daily detail. When it comes to the political reporter as correspondent at the court of King Kevin, Crabb is unmatched for insight and ability to interpret every Question Time triumph and every Senate Estimates slip as signifying who is in and who is out in the hall of mirrors that is parliament house. But because this is the prism through which she interprets politics it inevitably shapes the way she draws Malcolm Turnbull as an ambitious opportunist:

... a brilliant, charming, savage gun for fire. A lawyer, when all's said and done, with a considerable gift for argument combined with an unbelievable degree of persistence. His tactical abilities are all the freer for being unconstrained by excessive concern for consistency or even – in some concerns – governing principle. This is, unmistakably, a handy quality in business.

But in politics it becomes complicated. (59-60).

This reveals a great deal more about author than Opposition leader. The man is dubious because he has not nailed his theses to the doors of St Mark's, Darling Point, because he adapts his views to suit circumstances, because he is interested in winning the high ground of power rather than principle.

Perhaps Malcolm Turnbull only believes in his own ambition, but if in acting on this he proposes policy reforms that does not make him morally inferior to ideologues who beat issues into a shape that suits their own assumptions before they start searching for a solution. Ideology rarely has anything to do with politics when the people in power cannot arbitrarily impose their will on everybody else.

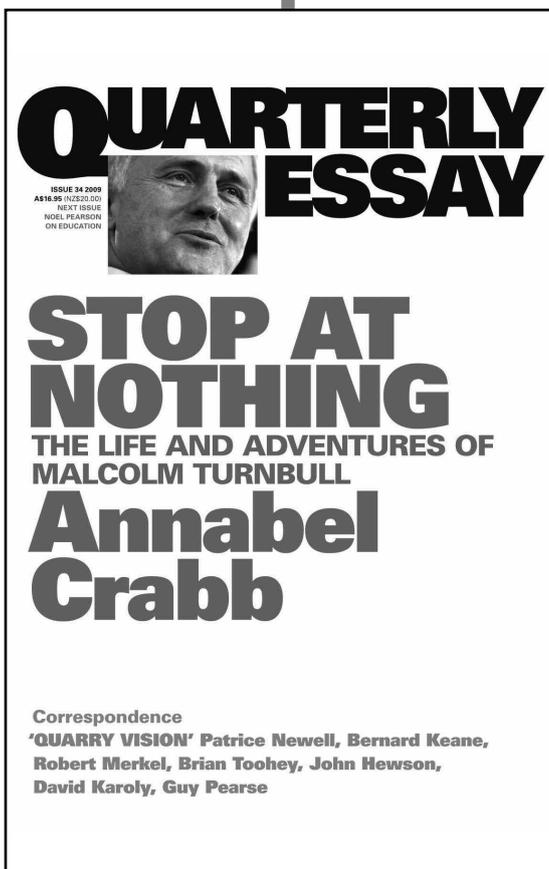
In presenting Turnbull as a chancer, as able as he is egoistic, Crabb ignores his real skills. The Opposition leader is a hopeless politician (demonstrated by his incomprehensibly inept tactical failure in the "utegate affair"). But he has the makings of a fine policy reformer – demonstrated by his work first as parliamentary

secretary then minister responsible for water reform – an immensely complex issue he worked hard to master.

If the Opposition leader is as cynical as everybody assumes, he will produce a book setting out his political principles and how they apply to policy quick smart – just as the Prime Minister has done. It will address the problem Tony Abbott points to and nobody will expect him to act on it. And it would make a break from the heritage of the Howard Government, which is blamed for its lack of coherence and consistent ideas.

PETER HARTCHER'S JOHN HOWARD

The idea that the Liberals failed in 2007 because they stood for nothing beyond prejudice and the belief that they had a right to rule shapes Howard's fall in Peter Hartcher's *To The Bitter End: The dramatic story behind the fall of John Howard and rise of Kevin Rudd* (Allen and Unwin). Hartcher is a fine political



journalist whose talent is wasted on this pedestrian study of the lead-up to the last election. Perhaps because it appeared well after a mass of other studies of the election it reads like old news, certainly there is nothing dramatic in the book that political obsessives did not know before.

This is not a bad book by any means. Hartcher does well in describing the drama of the Howard Government's dying days. His treatment of the informal meeting of ministers that discussed whether John Howard should lead them to the imminent election in September 2007 is a beautifully constructed report of a great drama. But what makes Hartcher's book interesting is its unremitting hostility to John Howard, whom he finds wanting for an absence of ideas and an ability to adjust to a changing world.

According to Hartcher, Howard was the architect of his own end due to his refusal to sign the Kyoto agreement on climate change, his refusal to revisit his unpopular Work Choices policy until it was too late and the treatment of David Hicks. Perhaps the first and third issues were important among the Labor voters Hartcher knows (and he offers a glimpse of who they are with his suggestion that John Howard had more in common ideologically with George Bush than with "Labor-voting Australians"). However, on all Hartcher's evidence it is obvious that the two issues which were responsible for Howard's end were Work Choices (which upset far more voters than David Hicks and global warming) and John Howard himself. And, in the way he explains the main reasons for Howard's defeat, Hartcher sets out the real role of ideas in Australian politics.

Hartcher dismisses Howard as an opportunist who would do anything to stay in office while making a convincing case that his obsession with industrial relations reform destroyed his government. He is scathing in his contempt for the way Howard squandered the benefits of the boom in electoral bribes, demonstrated by the grotesque give-away in the Liberal's 2007 election launch: "Unable to change his ways he went on an old-fashioned spend-a-thon," Hartcher writes.

He also makes clear the way Work Choices doomed the Liberals from the day the legislation was adopted in 2005 and the unions' explanation of what was involved convinced the electorate:

The public's first impression, via the ACTU campaign, was a lasting one, especially among Howard's battlers, who were now in the process of becoming Kevin Rudd's "working families". Both sides would escalate and intensify their campaigns over the next two years. But voters' image of Work Choices was essentially set.

By spending money solely to stay in power, Howard demonstrated he had lost the mandate of heaven, that the policy gods no longer inspired his ideas of government. It was less that he stayed too long in office than that he stayed too long for no reason other than it suited him.

And the one big idea Howard did have, industrial relations reform, was so badly sold that it was knocked off, not on its merits, but by a scare campaign. The real losers from Work Choices were union officials not workers but the Liberals never managed to make this clear, failing to explain how a globalised economy made an absolute end to the old arbitration system essential. As with John Hewson's *Fightback*, the voters decided not to trust a policy its proponents could not properly explain.

THE MARCH OF PATRIOTS

The Struggle for Modern Australia



PAUL KELLY

Bestselling author of *The End of Certainty*

PAUL KELLY AND THE PATRIOTS

The fundamental importance of enunciating policy rather than setting out grand plans in winning Australian elections is also at the core of Paul Kelly's, *The March of Patriots: The Struggle for Modern Australia*, (Melbourne University Press).

Inevitably this impressive book has faults. The thematic chapters make it impossible to understand the interplay of competing concerns that shape politics on a daily basis. Kelly never makes clear the confusion of politics and the absence of comprehensive information that are the context of every decision a government makes. He misjudges some chapters by piling on too much detail and

provides too little information in others. The last chapter, on the 2001 election, reads like the work of a man who has had enough and wants to work on another project. Given the way John Howard did so much to undo his achievements in his profligate last two terms, the only justification for leaving the story incomplete is if there is another volume in the works.

But for all its limitations, Kelly's argument and evidence will establish the context for political debate and scholarly research on the last two decades of Australian politics for a generation.

Kelly has a traditional historian's respect for the sources and determination to get the detail right. He has a contemporary commentator's ability to understand the significance of events that are in themselves ephemera in shaping the nation. He has the storyteller's ability to construct a narrative of immensely complex interplays of policy and politics. He has the political philosopher's ability to make sense of it all – to show how the political culture created under Labor, and continued under the Liberals, over 30 years transformed Australia. Above all he builds a compelling case that the reform path is the one Australia must continue to take.

In this book he continues the journey he began in *The End of Certainty* (1994), the book that made an unanswerable case for the Hawke-Keating-Howard governments' economic reforms. As Kelly makes the case;

Building upon Hawke's foundations, Keating and Howard were pioneers and rivals in devising a model defined by free trade, competitiveness in world markets, a surplus budget, an independent central bank, an enterprise-based industrial culture, an immigration ethos tied to an inclusive culture, retention of the egalitarian ethic, an Australian-made synthesis of a decent society and a strong economy.

Like the *End of Certainty*, this book will undoubtedly attract academic ire for the way a scholar working outside the academy transformed the study of national politics. But in demonstrating how the country has grown and prospered in ways unimaginable in the 1970s Kelly has charted a course for continuing reform. In *The End of Certainty* Kelly explained why Australia had to change. Now he shows how the deregulation of the economy has delivered. On the long march he describes, Kelly is one of the patriots.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspects of the book are the way Kelly demonstrates how John Howard managed the successful reform the GST was, while

seeing off the Hansonites and the Labor left who wanted a return to protectionism. Winning this argument was a major intellectual, as well as political, achievement. As Kelly shows, the hysteria over the GST was such that Australia could well have stayed stuck with an archaic tax system but for the way Howard compromised when he had to and out-argued the reactionaries when he could not. And he did it without an appeal to ideology. Ironically when Howard did rely on his own ideals, on industrial relations reforms, he failed completely.

The core message in the way John Howard sold policy reforms is that Australians are interested in applied ideas rather than all encompassing ideals, especially imported ones introduced on the assumption that we cannot do our own heavy intellectual lifting. As Kelly puts it:

Howard was comfortable with the great Australian ordinariness and had no time for writers, intellectuals and artists who bemoaned its mediocrity. Howard knew in his bones that Australia was not mediocre – he loved its values, its mateship, its sporting successes and its down-to-earth equality.

It is easy to dismiss Howard as a policy lightweight for the way he never implemented an overarching market-centred strategy. But, as Kelly points out, economic liberalism does not win elections, anywhere. Howard's achievement was to talk in terms of values not class and in the process he put Adam Smith's economics and Edmund Burke's suspicion of radical change at the centre of society. It allowed him to sound conservative while running a welfare state. Inevitably Howard failed. While Kelly's study does not extend to 2007 he explains why. In 2001 Howard became "a methodical opportunist", pragmatically plundering the budget surplus. Ultimately, in the absence of a reform framework, the voters decided he was spending money in his own, not their interests.

Howard was defeated by spending he could not justify and, in Work Choices, a policy he could not explain – which is pretty much the fate of all politicians who stay on in office after they are out of ideas. His lack of a political vision statement had nothing to do with it.

TONY ABBOTT ON THE NEED FOR VISION

Which raises the question of why Tony Abbott believes the Liberals need a vision when the first two terms of the Howard Government demonstrate that discipline and reform can win elections.

The answer is that they don't, without a practical program – as Abbott himself demonstrates in reaffirming the pragmatic values of Howard's peak years. But as Abbott also understands, the commentariat's assumption that conservatives are either too lazy or ignorant to come up with any ideas of their own makes opposition especially hard for them. That Malcolm Turnbull spent much of this year being asked about his plans for a carbon pollution reduction scheme instead of what is wrong with the government's legislation demonstrates the challenge.

Tony Abbott's answer to the problem is this book, a curious combination of personal memoir, an appeal to conservative social values from the Howard playbook and a call for radical reform to Australian federalism that could have come from Gough Whitlam's. Elements of Abbott's book demonstrate the damage political visions can do. While his argument that means testing welfare has unintended consequences is entirely correct, it is an idea for opposition where promises are not subject to scrutiny by the finance minister. When it comes to middle class welfare, Abbott wants to see more of it.

It's right that people who can't (and even a few who won't) provide for themselves receive support. But should they be the only people that government helps, especially when the means test to make this happen can so easily produce a ladder of success with a few rungs missing?

Tony Abbott is on the side of aspirational people who want to have children and lots of them. Fair enough. But in expecting the state to pay for them he imposes his own ideology on the first generations of women who have power over their own fertility and choose to use it to have fewer kids:

Having children tends to be regarded as a personal choice rather than a social good. ... As a consequence of these changing mores, government policies are no longer pitched to support families with children as a self-evident good but to households

with low incomes judged therefore to be objectively in need.

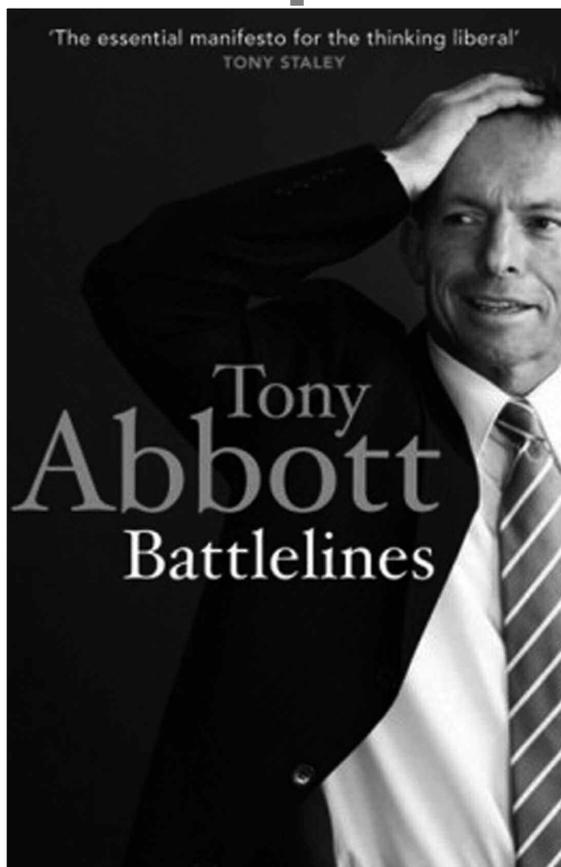
It sounds like a very expensive way to remember the forgotten people and it demonstrates the way electoral opportunism and personal beliefs can pervert the policy debate. But when Tony Abbott avoids ideology he comes up with sensible policy proposals, the sort that demonstrate a politician's fitness for office. Although his ideas on Commonwealth-state relations will not appeal to people who want politicians to re-shape society they demonstrate the sort of pragmatic thinking Australians take seriously.

Where once the Liberals were the party of state rights, suspicious of centralising Canberra, the Howard years changed conservative thinking and Tony Abbott makes a case for a new approach to federalism that will horrify conservatives who think being bossed about by a state bureaucrat is in some way superior than being administered by the national government, the one which raises the taxes:

There are few problems in contemporary Australia that a dysfunctional federation does not make worse. The state governments have legal responsibility for issues that only the national government has the political authority and financial muscle to resolve.

And he argues that having Canberra direct the states in key service delivery areas, such as health and education has nothing to do with ideology and everything to do with the service delivery Australians expect:

It's democracy, rather than politicians' hubris that exposes the national government to inexorable mission creep. Because there is no realistic prospect of the Commonwealth returning significant responsibilities to the states nor of the states agreeing to take on additional revenue-raising possibilities, the only way to sort out responsibilities in areas where the two levels of government are both



involved is to put one level of government in overall charge.

The core of the book is an overview on the way decentralised service delivery funded by Canberra would work. There is not a great deal of detail in it and Abbott ignores the way the policy focused premiers, like Steve Bracks and John Brumby, can force their bureaucrats to improve performance. But overall his are the sorts of reform proposals that serve Australia – focused on politically bold, but administratively appropriate policies. Abbott's is also the sort of strategy that both sides of politics could easily adopt – there is not an ideological abstraction in it.

Tony Abbott is right to suggest that conservative ideas are rarely sexy, but they are certainly sensible.

SOME PREDICTABLE REVIEWS

The reviewers responded predictably to the policy issues raised by these books. They all but ignored Crabb, assessed Hartcher as an expanded campaign chronicle, and while Kelly's supporters assessed his book on its merits, his critics attacked him on partisan lines. As for Abbott, there was a sense of outrage that a conservative dared to have ideas.

Michael Sexton summarised rather than analysed Hartcher's book and did nothing for its sales in a review which used a great, many words to say not much:

Most books that look at election campaigns and leadership contests have a very short shelf life. But this one provides a dramatic and highly readable account of one of the most interesting years in modern Australian political history. (Sydney Morning Herald, 27 June 2009).

Shaun Carney was obviously pleased that Hartcher's argument confirmed his opinions:

... those wondering why the Liberals in 2009 cannot find traction and cohesion need look no further than Hartcher's book to find the

explanation. Howard's intransigence on the leadership, and his inevitable defeat, sucked the sense of mission from the party. (The Age, 11 July 2009)

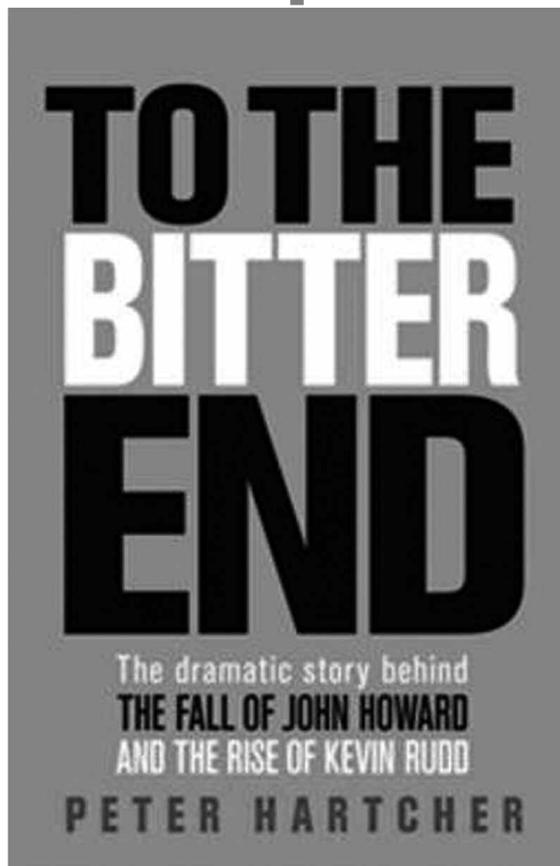
It was left to David Burchell (*The Australian*, 6 June 2009) to ask the obvious question, what did Hartcher provide other than "a laborious political autopsy of the dying moments of the Howard administration"? The answer, he suggested, was nothing all that important: "Much of what we discover out of Hartcher's book doesn't necessarily add to our understanding of the Howard years, even if it sometimes adds lustily to their entertainment value."

There was more praise for Kelly's *March of Patriots*. Dean Jaensch suggested it was a definitive history of the last 20 years in Australian politics: "Keating and Howard changed Australia. Kelly's book is the best way to find out how, when and why." (*The Advertiser*, 17 October 2009) And Geoffrey Blainey concluded it would shape understandings of its subject for generations to come:

Many readers will disagree strongly with some of Kelly's views and dispute the omission of certain episodes; but most will applaud him for his knowledge of this period of history and his skill in explaining and narrating. His book will probably be read with gain even after our own times are viewed in long-term perspective. This is one of the most revealing books so far written on contemporary history in Australia.

Kelly's critics recognised this and, realising the high stakes involved, worked hard to diminish not the quality of the work but its thesis. These were less reviews than opening salvos, signifying a new skirmish in the struggle to decide how Australians to come will understand their past.

Brian Toohey produced a clever piece, arguing on specifics and leaving readers to make their own conclusions as to the overall credibility of Kelly's case, (*Australian Financial Review*, 12 September 2009). The book, Toohey argued, "is a tremendous



achievement in the great man of history genre". But he then went on to detail cases where Keating and Howard had not made the policy running and to argue that Kelly over stated his case: "For Kelly, the fact that they each wanted a singular national identity was proof enough of policy agreement – and political progress – regardless of the heated discord over content."

Dennis Altman, (*The Australian*, 7 October 2009) less argued against Kelly's case than told us what he thought about the issues, as if his disagreement was enough to dismiss the book's thesis. Thus he referred to Kelly's claim that introducing the GST was the most important decision of Howard's prime ministership, as demonstrating a bias towards economics. It is a criticism that demonstrated a great deal more about Altman's attitudes than Kelly's. Dennis Glover obviously understood that Kelly's case is a threat to the intellectual orthodoxy that sees Labor as the party of ideas. He accordingly went in hard (*The Australian*, 14 September 2009):

This thesis is not without its merits and is argued with weight and conviction, but it is wrong while Labor's reforms were balanced by a social-democratic social agenda, a left-wing cultural agenda and an internationalist foreign policy, the Coalition's reforms were not.

What's more Keating, the Australian nationalist and Howard the lackey of American ideas, had few, if any, aspirations in common:

the economic, political, social international and cultural agendas of the Keating and Howard governments were sharply different. In the long run, of course, we're all part of a single historical continuum, but in history pointing out continuities often misrepresents the intentions of the major actors.

As a demonstration of why the left dominates the high ground of history and will not admit the conservatives ever have a good idea or act without malice it was a hard review to beat.

Some of the reviewers were also partisan in their treatment of Abbott's book, which Shaun Carney acknowledged was all but inevitable (*The Age*, 26 September 2009) in a balanced review which reported the range of his thinking, including ideas, "guaranteed to send some on the political left, who see Abbott as an unreconstructed hard right-winger, into automatic high dudgeon. But Abbott deserves more consideration than that". He did not get it from David Hetherington, (*The Australian*, 18 August 2008) who criticised Abbott for the high crime of not

agreeing with him: "Abbott fails to grasp the nettle on our biggest challenges: a new economic landscape, education investment and adaptation to climate change."

Hetherington was less interested in Abbott's ideas than his own and the result was less a review than an op-ed. It must have made Abbott wonder why he bothered – a sentiment that would have been confirmed by a reading of Paul Williams' piece (*The Courier Mail*, 14 July 2009). According to Williams, ideas are dangerously divisive in Australian politics; especially for conservatives:

From the early Free Traders and Protectionists on, there's been an uneasy co-existence between conservatism and progressivism that, while contained in government, manages to destroy Liberal oppositions. To throw a Conservative spanner in the Liberal works is now to invite a long-term Coalition bun-fight, and allow Labor to easily coast back into government election after election. The great paradox is that Abbott may ultimately dash his leadership hopes with the very device he hopes will materialise them.

As Abbott said at the start, it's only Labor that is supposed to have any ideas.

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CORRECTION

John Peter Maynes AM

In the *SIQ* Issue 35, an incorrect designation was given for the award which the late John Maynes received within the Australian System of Honours. His correct award is listed above.

CLARIFICATION

John Moore's *Churchill & Menzies At War* Documentary

John Moore at 360 Degree Films was offered space to reply to the criticism of his documentary *Menzies & Churchill At War* which appeared in Issue 35 of the *SIQ*. Mr Moore declined to take up the offer to state his case and reply to the criticism.

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*.

ALAN RAMSEY: A MATTER OF SELF-INDULGENCE

The theme for this issue is history. And who better to start with than recently retired *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist Alan Ramsey who was born in 1938. Alan Ramsey wrote each Saturday for the *Herald* from mid-1987 until the end of 2008 – with time off for annual leave, sick leave and the like. For some of the period, your man Ramsey also wrote an opinion piece each Wednesday for the *Herald*.

Lawyer Michael Sexton, who was a political staffer in the Whitlam Labor government, reviewed *A Matter of Opinion* for the *Herald* (28-29 November 2009). Sexton wrote that “in many ways Ramsey’s columns” reflected some of the Canberra Press Gallery’s “collective judgments” in that they exhibited “grudging admiration for Bob Hawke, hero kind of worship for Paul Keating and fierce hatred of John Howard”. In other words, if Ramsey criticised Labor it was invariably from a leftist perspective. Sexton also commented on Ramsey’s “very violent opinions” and wrote that those columns in *A Matter of Opinion* which have not lost their punch and which have survived have done so as a “study in vituperation”

In a lengthy interview with Philip Adams on *Late Night Live* on 29 October 2009, Ramsey declared that, in retirement, he has stopped reading newspapers and no longer follows current affairs on television and radio. What does he do, then? Well, ever the narcissist, Ramsey has taken to reading himself. On his retirement, the *Herald* presented Ramsey with a disc containing everything he had written for the paper – some 2273 pieces in all. Ramsey read them all and chose some 150 columns for publication as *A Matter of Opinion* (Allen & Unwin, 2009).

Adams visited Ramsey – whom he described as “the legendary grump and curmudgeon” – at Ramsey’s Canberra abode to record the *LNL* interview. Some of this oh-so-friendly interview has been analysed in Issue 36 of *Media Watch Dog*. But *Media Watch* (sans canine)

is particularly impressed with Mr Ramsey’s look-back-in-admiration account of his relationship with former Labor leader Mark Latham. Let’s go to the tape:

Alan Ramsey: [Mark Latham] was real... Mark Latham was always a real person. He was also somebody, I thought, in a business where there are not a lot of real people. You know they all put on a, they always, they all put on their political clothes.

Phillip Adams: Yeah.

Alan Ramsey: They all behave like they think they have to behave. And they talk like they think they have to talk. They don’t talk any more like ordinary people.

Phillip Adams: There was a time when Labor leaders did, I think. I see images of [Ben] Chifley –

Alan Ramsey: But that’s long gone.

Phillip Adams: - you know, who had authenticity –

Alan Ramsey: Exactly. Arthur Calwell had authenticity.

Phillip Adams: Yes, he did.

Alan Ramsey: There’s no question. But they’re gone. They’re gone. They’re gone. Most politicians that come here don’t bring any experience of their real life. They come straight out of universities –

Phillip Adams: So Latham was real with a capital “R”.

Alan Ramsey: Yeah, absolutely.

Phillip Adams: You were convinced he was going to win.

Alan Ramsey: Yeah. ‘Cause I knew he had a head.

Phillip Adams: Do you have regrets that you were his leading advocate?

Alan Ramsey: Never. Good heavens, no. No, no, no, no.

In fact, Mark Latham had little experience of what Ramsey terms “real life” before becoming an MP. He graduated from Sydney University, went into local government and obtained endorsement from the New South Wales Labor right-wing machine to enter Federal politics in a safe ALP seat. Not long after becoming Labor leader, Latham led his party to a crushing defeat at the 2004 election. It’s just that

Ramsey thought that Latham was real. Others regarded him as narcissistic.

So we know what Ramsey thought about Latham. But what did Latham think about Ramsey? Let's go to *The Latham Diaries* (MUP, 2005) and, in particular, Mr Latham's diary entry for Tuesday 24 August 2004 – around the time when the Labor leader was suffering from ill-health. It reads as follows:

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

Michael Danby, the Labor MP for Melbourne Ports, was an opponent of Mark Latham within the ALP. However, both Latham and Danby agreed on one matter. They both made fun of the fact that large chunks of Ramsey's column in the *Sydney Morning Herald* each Saturday consisted of very lengthy quotes from someone else. Indeed in the House of Representatives on 24 May 2004 Mr Danby dubbed the *SMH* columnist as Alan "Scissorhands" Ramsey. Danby cited one Ramsey column – 85 per cent of which consisted of direct quotes from Labor friendly pollster Rod Cameron. This is about the only matter on which Latham and Danby ever agreed.

The only fresh material in *A Matter of Opinion* is an eight page "Prologue" dated 1 June 2009. Ramsey's prime grump here is to complain about a decision by one-time *Sydney Morning Herald* editor Alan Oakley to spike a column by him which was filed for publication on 7 March 2007. This concerned the crash of a Garuda aircraft at Yogyakarta Airport in which five Australians died. It was reported that Laura Tingle wrote a similar piece for the *Australian Financial Review* – which was also spiked.

Ramsey's essential gripe was that Foreign Minister Alexander Downer had taken a Special Purpose – or VIP – aircraft to Indonesia but that Australian journalists who chose to accompany him were told that they would have to travel on local commercial flights within Indonesia.

There are not many available seats on the RAAF Special Purpose planes. Downer's personal staff, public service advisers and an ABC TV *Australian Story* crew were accommodated on the VIP flight. This meant that some Australian Embassy officials and members of the Australian Federal Police – along with two Australian journalists – were required to travel on a Garuda airline. The plane crashed, five Australians (including one journalist) died and one journalist was severely injured.

Ramsey concluded his (unpublished) column in the *Herald* by asserting that Australians had died or experienced devastating injuries "all in the name of

Downer's public relations junket that had no room for the workers". Alan Oakley spiked the column, describing it as inappropriate and insensitive. He also was concerned that Ramsey had used his column "so soon after the crash" in an attempt to score political points.

And now for some facts – which cannot be located in *A Matter of Opinion*. The largest plane in the current Special Purpose Fleet is the moderately sized twin-engine 737 Business Jet. Over the years, the Commonwealth Government – Labor and the Coalition alike – has been nervous about spending large sums of taxpayers' money on the VIP Fleet because of populist criticism in the media.

The 737 Business Jet is too small for proper overseas travel. This has led to a number of problems – including the fact that there are few, if any, seats on VIP flights for journalists reporting the overseas visits by the Prime Minister and other Cabinet ministers. Journalists travelling with the RAAF have always been required to reimburse the Commonwealth Government at commercial rates. The attraction of flying on Special Purpose flights is that it makes reporting easier.

In recent years some kind of agreement seems to have occurred between the two major parties whereby – when in opposition – neither Labor nor the Coalition attempt to score political points about the purchase of, equipping or running the VIP fleet. This has led to a situation whereby critics of VIP flights are now found primarily within the ranks of minor political parties like the Greens – along with, yes, some journalists. And who was the most vocal member of the Parliamentary Press Gallery in railing against the VIP Fleet? Step forward Alan Ramsey.

A couple of examples illustrate the point.

On 10 October 1987 Alan Ramsey criticised the past use of the VIP Fleet by Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser and Bob Hawke. He described the rationale for the existence of a VIP Fleet as "mostly...self-serving humbug". In time, Ramsey came to criticise the use of the VIP Fleet by his hero Paul Keating and, later, John Howard. Ramsey's opposition to the VIP Fleet was at its most strident when he made the following comment in his *Herald* column on 26 June 1993:

All that needs to be explained is why you need a planeload of bureaucratic and press hangers on to make the point. Not even rhetoric from the ringmaster [Paul Keating] can dress up these modern jaunts of the emperor and his court. They have a life of their own. They're part and parcel of government these days because all prime ministers see themselves as statesmen. They can't help themselves. And with the statesman's self-perceived role comes the statesman's trappings: the big plane, the big entourage, the big expense. And last, but never least, the big press party. We make it all sound and look very worthy. We make the whole business seem credible. We pay our way in more ways than one. But a junket is a junket.

So there you have it. In 1993 Ramsey opposed the presence of “a big press party” on the (then) 707 aircraft which comprised the VIP Fleet – and proclaimed such travel as a junket. In time, the large 707s were replaced by the smaller 737s. Then, in 2007, Ramsey complained that the VIP Fleet had “no room for the workers” – including journalists – and effectively, blamed the Howard Government for the death of the five Australians at Yogyakarta. The lead sentence in his spiked column was: “The Howard Government’s week crashed and burned...”. Somewhat insensitive, don’t you think?

A Matter of Opinion is a collection of Alan Ramsey’s columns – with one exception. The preface is written by *Herald* journalist David Marr. It is a reprint of a column which Marr wrote on 20 December 2008 to co-incide with Ramsey’s retirement. Marr referred in part to the *Herald* columnist’s journalistic habits:

Ramsey is a chronic late filer. He is loved by his colleagues for this alone; that he is the worst of us, the one that’s always last to finish. If once or twice in the last couple of decades you weren’t woken by the satisfying thump of the *Herald* on your doormat on Saturday morning, know that all the official excuses – the talk of paper breaks at the Chullora printing plant – were only ever a cover. Ramsey was to blame.

It’s this kind of journalism which gives journalistic self-indulgence a bad name. Never mind the truck drivers who rose early to be at the *Herald*’s Chullora plant to deliver the *Sydney Morning Herald* each Saturday. Never mind the newsagents at their small businesses who waited before dawn for the Saturday edition of the *Herald* to arrive so that it could distribute it to their customers. And never mind loyal *Herald* readers who paid their subscriptions and expected the arrival of the *Herald* on time every Saturday morning.

Just admire the fact that Ramsey was so indisCIPLINED as to be a notoriously late filer of his column – which put unnecessary pressure on editors, sub-editors, drivers, newsagents and readers alike. And just accept that the likes of Marr regard such indiscipline as admirable.

MORNING SERMONS WITH DEBORAH CAMERON

As *A Matter of Opinion* demonstrates, Alan Ramsey has some difficulty in remembering what stance he took in the past and such matters as the VIP Fleet. Deborah Cameron, on the other hand, seems unaware of the background of some of the guests she invites on to her *Mornings with Deborah Cameron* program on ABC Metropolitan Radio 702 each weekday morning.

Ms Cameron is the embodiment of the ABC inner-city luvvie. She has a bevy of fashionable opinions on a

range of issues from national security, to climate change and on to social policy. Moreover, Ms Cameron has difficulty in recognising that there are alternative views to her own position. She states a leftist orthodoxy each morning and expects that her listeners will agree.

On 27 October 2009 the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* ran with a story titled “Chang Killer Walks Free”. Janet Fife-Yeomans and Byron Kaye reported that the New South Wales Parole Board had granted Phillip Choon Tee Lim early release from prison. Kim had been sentenced to 24 years imprisonment, with a non-parole period of 18 years, for the murder of Sydney heart surgeon Victor Chang in 1991. He was one of the two men convicted for this serious crime. Dr Chang was shot during an attempted kidnap. The murderers – one of whom was Lim – had flown from Malaysia to Sydney, after reading a profile on Dr Chang as a Chinese Australian who had succeeded in his adopted country, with a view to obtaining money by extortion.

Following the stand taken against Lim’s early parole by the *Daily Telegraph*, on 28 October Deborah Cameron decided to have the kind of debate which is much practised by the ABC. You know the style – where everyone agrees with everyone else and a fine, self-righteous, ideological time is had by all. On this occasion Ms Cameron agreed with her guest. She introduced him as the former Victorian prison chaplain from Jesuit Social Services and currently a Vice-Chancellor’s fellow at the Melbourne University Law School. For the record, Peter Norden is no longer a member of the Society of Jesus (i.e. Jesuits) – and is contemplating resigning from the priesthood. Moreover, Fr Norden was chaplain of the Victorian Prison System between 1985 and 1992 – around two decades ago.

Let’s go to the audio tape, where Ms Cameron introduces Peter Norden with her own small homily:

Phillip Choon Tee Lim spent 18 years behind bars for his role in the murder of the esteemed heart surgeon Dr Victor Chang. The Parole Board signed his release papers and it has set off a storm. There’s now to be a review of that Parole Board decision. What more do you want as punishment? 18 years. Think about it. The crime has come back today like a very fresh scar. Dr Chang’s image is on the front pages of the papers, as big as it was on the day that he died. Where is the justice in this? At what point do you need to let something go, let the hate go? Accept that someone has been punished? Leave them be? Who are you torturing? Them or yourself?

Then Peter Norden commenced his own sermon:

Look, I think it’s really important to understand, and most members of the community don’t understand, the role of the Parole Board. They’re experts in this field.

And so the general population that want to take over these decisions, it's like a plumber being sent to primary school to teach kids to read or a mathematician doing surgery in a hospital, or a dancer building bridges.

The Parole Board's chaired by a Supreme Court judge and they look at the sentence that was originally imposed. It was a terrible crime – the murder of Dr Chang and no one wants to be reminded of it. And of course his family still live with that pain for the rest of their lives. But the offender, Mr Lim, was given a sentence of 24 years and the Parole Board has a right, throughout this country, in different jurisdictions, to put someone out early so that they can control that person and supervise that person. And it means they can decide where the person lives, who he or she mixes with, whether they're allowed to have any alcohol or drugs, whether they're to stay away from certain areas and certain people – extraordinary powers of the Parole Board.

And we have a choice to make in Australia. Do we want to substitute that power and the wisdom of the Parole Board with a lynch mob? And that's the tendency that we're seeing – not just in New South Wales but in different states and territories around Australia – the general public saying they know more about this than the experts in the field.

Stop the tape, for a moment. Peter Norden, speaking from his desk at the Melbourne University Law School, was completely out of his depth. The whole controversy in New South Wales about Lim turned on the fact that he is a Malaysian citizen and, consequently, will be extradited to Malaysia the moment he is released from prison. Contrary to Norden's claim, the New South Wales Parole Board has no power to control the behaviour of Malaysian citizens living in Malaysia and, consequently, cannot monitor Lim's parole once he is released from prison in New South Wales. Norden was quick to tell Cameron that the public does not understand how the Parole Board operates. However, in this instance, it was Norden who failed to comprehend the facts of the Lim case.

Needless to say, Cameron did not correct Norden's howler. Moreover, Cameron said nothing when, on three occasions, Norden referred to those opposing Lim's early release as constituting a "lynch mob". This is mere hyperbole. The debate turned on whether Lim should serve more than his minimum term for what was a very brutal crime. That's all. No one was threatening to harm – still less hang – Lim.

As the discussion continued, Cameron again weighed in with another homily:

Peter, think about that 18 years again. When you were the Victorian prison chaplain, obviously you would have come into contact with people who had also served extremely long sentences. Phillip Choon Tee Lim has obviously been told by the Parole Board that his release may be imminent. How must it feel to him, is it cruel and unusual punishment for his, the decision of the Parole Board now to be withdrawn and reflected upon?

Norden replied to Cameron by re-stating his manta about lynch mobs and all that. Then it was time for calls from listeners. Joy and Stuart called in. Joy agreed with Deborah and was treated with respect. Not so Stuart – who found himself being interrogated and hectoring by the ABC Metropolitan Radio 702 presenter:

Deborah Cameron: Stuart, your view?

Stuart: Well, first of all, the murder of Victor Chang isn't the murder of an ordinary person, it was the murder of a life-saving hero of Australia and that is why Australians are regarding the release of his murderer, one of his murderers, as unacceptable. And, secondly, that we as a society have been so badly let down by experts such as the one you've got on this morning, whom I know nothing about, but with whom I totally disagree.

Yeah, frankly these experts just aren't experts. And to say that the public are just the great unwashed and a hanging lynch mob is just an appalling insult on the intellect of us, all 20 million of us. I cannot believe that somebody would denigrate the population, who are quite well educated, who are quite well read, and have great sympathetic sympathies towards humanitarian causes, and that he would turn round and call us all for that.

Deborah Cameron: Stuart, have you ever sat on a parole board?

Stuart: No I haven't.

Deborah Cameron: Do you have any regard for the Parole Board's expertise?

Stuart: Yes I do. But I don't agree, I don't agree that it always reflect community sentiment and community intellect and the wise counsel of a lot of very, very ordinary Australians in very very ordinary jobs but...

Deborah Cameron: Thank-

Stuart: – when it comes to their [ordinary Australians], intellect, they're fantastic –

Deborah Cameron: Thanks very much Stuart.

Deborah Cameron's lecture to Stuart overlooked a couple of facts. First, Ms Cameron herself has never sat on a parole board. Second, Fr Norden has never sat on a parole board, either – although he has worked with convicted criminals. So, in this specific regard, Deborah Cameron and Peter Norden have no more expertise than Stuart. And then there is the case of Peter Norden.

Deborah Cameron did not tell her 702 listeners that Peter Norden is a controversial figure in his home state of Victoria due to his well intentioned, but sometimes ill-judged, support for the rights of prisoners and former prisoners. One recent example illustrates the point. In 2005 controversy emerged concerning the likely release on parole of a notorious convicted pedophile Brian Keith Jones, who is sometimes referred to as "Mr Baldy". Predictably, Peter Norden spoke up for Mr Baldy's rights. This angered Liberal Party MP Robin Cooper who had had a tragic involvement with Peter Norden in the mid-1970s. This is Mr Cooper's story – as reported by the *Herald-Sun* on 23 July 2005:

It all got a bit too much for state MP Robin Cooper this week. Mr Baldy. The Reverend Peter Norden. The murder of his own mother. He needed to talk to somebody. Wanted to tell a story. Wanted people to know that there are real dangers in letting dangerous criminals back into society. And he wanted to remind people about his mother, Joyes Cooper, raped and stabbed to death in September 1977 by a convicted criminal sent to her by a church organisation.

Mrs Cooper, then 72, attended, with her husband, the Immaculate Conception Church in Hawthorn, when an announcement from the pulpit asked for volunteers. "The church was looking after people they described as unemployed and homeless, and they asked if anybody in the congregation had some work they could do", Cooper recalls. "My mother was a dedicated Catholic, my father worked part-time, so he was away most days."

"They were getting their unit repainted so she thought about it and decided the walls needed to be washed down, so she rings Peter Norden and the next day this fellow (Colin George Graham) is brought around. There is no mention at all of this bloke's background, but it transpires that he has recently been released from jail after being convicted of assault and sexual assaults on women. He starts washing the walls down and at about 11.30am he says he would like some lunch. My mother offers to make a sandwich and he says he'll get something down the street."

"This guy comes back from lunch, grabbed hold of her, threw her on the kitchen floor, held a knife to her throat, raped her and then stabbed her to death. She was found by my father (Robert) when he came home several hours later. He never got over it and died seven years later. He willed himself to death and that was a tragedy because he didn't need to die. He just lost interest in life."

The night of his mother's murder, Robin Cooper drove to Peter Norden's home and confronted him. Norden was the director of the Four Apartments project, the name given to the accommodation and employment scheme set up by the Jesuits. Cooper wanted to know why nobody had been told that Colin Graham had a criminal record, especially for sexual assaults against women. "He [Norden] stood there and said nothing. Nothing. I called him all sorts of names, trying to get any sort of response, but I got nothing."

Graham was found, admitted killing Mrs Cooper, but claimed later in the trial he'd bought Mandrax tablets during the lunch break and they had affected his mind. The jury, not knowing of Graham's prior convictions, believed him. Graham was found not guilty of murder but convicted of manslaughter and was sentenced to nine years jail.

The facts surrounding the brutal killing of Mrs Cooper in 1977 are well known in Melbourne. You might have thought that a journalist like Deborah Cameron, with the assistance of a producer and access to media libraries, might have asked Fr Norden whether there are any problems with the way in which prisoners convicted of serious crimes are released back into the community. But no. Rather Cameron and Norden engaged in a holier-than-thou dialogue where they lectured ABC 702 listeners about (allegedly) hating convicted criminals, condemned so-called lynch mobs and feigned an expertise which they do not have.

Fr Norden was contacted by *Media Watch* about Mrs Cooper's death but declined to make any comments on the record. By the way, the NSW Parole Board reconsidered Lim's release. On 20 November 2009 Judge Terry Christie announced that Lim would not be paroled and that his case would be considered again in August/September next year.

HEYWARD HOAXED ON THE LATE JIM MCAULEY'S GUILT

As the calendar year ends, there is reason to correct the historical howlers of the previous twelve months.

On Tuesday 10 March 2009, Jennifer Byrne's *First Tuesday Book Club* on ABC1 was devoted to the topic

of “Hoaxes”. The panel was an all-bloke affair comprising author and publisher Michael Heyward, self-confessed hoaxer John Bailey, novelist and former literary editor Malcolm Knox and journalist and writer Jack Marx.

The topics for discussion included what has become known as the Ern Malley Affair. During the Second World War, the poets James McAuley and Harold Stewart – who were stationed in Australia – decided to take on the (then) fashionable international modernist movement. They put together a collection of modernist poetry, which was attributed to a certain deceased Ern Malley, and sent it to Max Harris, the fashionable editor of *Angry Penguins*, under the name of Ern’s supposed sister Ethel Malley. McAuley and Stewart regarded the Ern Malley poems – which were written in much haste – as drivel. However, Harris came to believe that he had discovered a brand new – albeit deceased – literary talent and published the work in *Angry Penguins* under the title “The Darkening Ecliptic”.

The story is a long – and amusing – one and is well covered in Michael Heyward’s book *The Ern Malley Affair* (UQP, 1993). However, during the discussion on the *First Tuesday Book Club*, Heyward ran the line that literary hoaxes are reprehensible – or something like that. The transcript tells the story:

Michael Heyward: Though there is a price to pay, I think, in hoaxes both for the people who’ve been taken in, as you’re saying, who feel cheated. But also, I think, hoaxes – they do a lot of damage. They do a lot of damage to the people tied up in them.

Jennifer Byrne: What sort of damage?

Michael Heyward: Well in the case of Ern Malley, Max Harris who completely believed his own press as the wunderkind of Australian literature. He was in his early twenties and had already published a couple of books of poetry and an execrably bad novel called *The Vegetative Eye* and was tied up with *Angry Penguins* and his sails were full of wind. He was very hurt by what happened. He didn’t publish another book of poems for 13 years and he adopted that cantankerous, defence posture, particularly writing for the Murdoch press. I think James McAuley always felt guilty about what he’d done – that he had fooled a fellow poet. Harold Stewart decamped to Japan and felt haunted by Ern Malley. When I went to visit him to interview him for the book I was writing, he groaned: “Don’t you want to talk to me about my own writing? Why do you want to talk to me about Ern Malley?” Well actually Harold, it’s an incredibly interesting thing that you did.

Jennifer Byrne: So, in a way, do you think that, in fact, while the hoax is meant to be directed in one sphere, what you’re saying is it can bounce all around?

Michael Heyward: Yes, it leaves a trail of bodies in its wake. I think the only person who got out of Ern Malley scott free was Sidney Nolan and he managed to use Ern Malley creatively in his art in quite remarkable ways.

This analysis surprised Gerard Henderson. He had met McAuley in 1965 and knew him until his premature death in 1976. On occasions – in both Melbourne and Hobart – Henderson discussed the Ern Malley Affair with McAuley. According to Henderson’s recall, McAuley never expressed any guilt whatsoever about his involvement. Rather, McAuley was wont to laugh at the fact that he and Stewart had comprehensively fooled not only Max Harris but other modernists as well, including Herbert Read. McAuley did express regret that Harris had been caught up in the clumsy action by South Australian Police in charging Harris for publishing immoral or indecent material in “The Darkening Ecliptic”. But this was an understandable response which fell far short of guilt.

Henderson emailed Heyward seeking information concerning his evidence for his claim on *The First Tuesday Book Club* that McAuley felt guilty about – and was harmed by – the Ern Malley Affair. On 7 April 2009, Heyward forwarded the following reply:

I believe that McAuley felt badly about the pain he had caused Harris. My memory is that when Max claimed copyright in the poems, and Harold Stewart was up in arms, James McAuley didn’t want a fuss made and told HS to back off, that Max had suffered enough. I do think he regretted the pain he has caused a fellow writer.

Michael Heyward, who was born in 1959, never spoke to McAuley. There is no mention in Heyward’s book, *The Ern Malley Affair*, that he has come across any evidence that McAuley felt guilt about the way Harris was treated by the hoaxes. A decision not to contest Harris’ claimed copyright in the poems is not evidence that McAuley felt guilt. In fact, in the decade before his death James McAuley – on request – would tell his Ern Malley stories over a glass of wine accompanied by his familiar irreverent laughter. Could Mr Heyward have hoaxed about this?

BEAUTIFUL RACHEL ON INCEST AS REDEMPTION

Someone else in public life who seems unduly sensitive to criticism is the gorgeous, pouting Rachel Ward. On 28 August 2009, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published an opinion piece by Ward in which

she whinged that some reviewers did not like the film *Beautiful Kate* which she directed. Wrote Ward:

I went to my son's rugby match last weekend. I saw myself and the recent crop of Australian filmmakers embodied in some small whippersnapper who, cradling the ball like a fragile egg, dared to duck and dive around snarling overgrown beasts on the field, almost making it to the try line, only to be laid flat by a succession of spoilsports who, one after the other, threw themselves on the lad, squashing the precious egg and all hopes of a rare victory.

As in – look reader. One paragraph. Two sentences. And six commas. In any event, the Australian thespian used the setting of her son's rugby match as a prop to declare how she is so persecuted by critics who do not like *Beautiful Kate*. Ward continued:

I am beginning to perceive a campaign, conscious or otherwise, of criticising filmmakers like me who dare to lay their fragile, singular, Aussie films and run with them into the crowded, bullying market place. I would rather not be the one responding to this campaign. I would rather not risk the response of sour grapes. But someone should put a few things in perspective and, although I know I speak for a small but very passionate sector that treasures these fragile films, I cannot a day longer hope someone else will do it for me.

Ms Ward told her *Herald* readers that *Beautiful Kate* (i) does not comply with the dictates of mass marketing, (ii) does not attempt to be so entertaining as to attract mainstream audiences, and (iii) does not try to compete with the million plus audiences turning on television for *Packed to the Rafters* and *Underbelly*.

The film director went on to defend confronting films and mock what she termed the feel good cinematic genre:

I don't know whether filmmakers from other years have suddenly felt this insidious wet blanket of negativity for making films that demand and confront and haunt an audience (which is certainly my idea of entertainment) rather than providing simple escapism and the ubiquitous "feel good" factor. Feel-good films have their value and their place. Like a big, buttery box of popcorn, they have no trouble selling themselves.

Ms Ward soon returned to her egg-and-spoon metaphor – with a pox on anyone who called *Beautiful Kate* dark:

What I did not count on was a succession of last-minute spoilsports, dumping doom and gloom and threatening to squash my precious egg before those in the audience

could make up their own minds. Well, I'm calling a penalty kick for the niche product. Reviews of any movie without Paul Hogan winking, Hugh Jackman flexing, Muriel squealing or pigs flying seem to be limited to describing them as "dark" or "bleak" – but that does not mean they are. Here are a few other adjectives with which film writers might broaden their Australian film vocabulary: enlightening, redemptive, inspiring, compassionate, beautiful, transformative, intelligent, human, engrossing, tender, confronting and, yes, entertaining....

Dark and bleak should be kept for describing the time when we did not have an industry, before the Australian film renaissance of the 1970s, or for the depressing time ahead when audiences have been scared off anything Australian that might have some guts.

Dark? Bleak? Who would ever call *Beautiful Kate* dark and bleak? Black perhaps – but not dark. Try this for a summary.

Ned (Ben Mendelsohn) returns to his rural family home from the city with his fiancée Toni. Ned's estranged father Bruce (Bryan Brown) emotionally abused his children when they were young. Oh, by the way, Bruce has a terminal illness. He is being looked after by his daughter Sally (Rachel Griffiths).

Flashback. As a teenager, Ned has incestual sex with his twin sister Kate. Ned does not want lotsa sibling sex so Kate feels rejected. She tells her other brother, Cliff. There is a fight and Cliff sustains an injury. Kate tends to Cliff. Ned comes to the view that Kate once had it off with Cliff as well as him. Cliff drives Kate home from a party. The car crashes into a tree. Ned finds Kate dead and Cliff hanging from another tree. It's a case of Dead: 2; Living: Zip.

Flashforward. Toni discovers Ned's teenage diary and dumps him. Ned makes it up with his old man. Sally tells Ned that the reason his father was unhappy with him turned on the fact that she told him many years ago about the Ned/Kate bonk and suggested that Ned was at fault. Ned and his father reconcile. Ned goes looking for Toni. Some members of the audience get the impression that the *Beautiful Kate* set all live unhappily ever after. Others, however, accept the Rachel Ward interpretation that *Beautiful Kate* is, variously, enlightening, redemptive, inspiring and so on.

Media Watch's view is that there is a lot to be said for gratuitous incestual sex in low budget films about rural Australian families. Put it this way, when incest is involved the number of sex scenes is not limited by the number of actors on the film's payroll.

THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE FORTHCOMING FUNCTIONS

PLEASE NOTE IT IS ESSENTIAL TO RSVP FOR FUNCTIONS no earlier than 2 weeks prior - NB DATES AND VENUES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. PLEASE ASK WHEN BOOKING, OR GO TO www.thesydneyinstitute.com.au

SPEAKERS: DON WATSON (former speech-writer Paul Keating; author, *Bendable Learnings: The Wisdom of Modern Management*);
EMMA TOM (Columnist, *The Australian*; author, *Attack of the 50 Foot Hormones & DAVID MALOUF* (internationally acclaimed poet and author)

TOPIC: *Bad Language*

DATE: Wednesday 27 January 2010 **Bookings from 13 Jan only** **TIME:** 5 for 5.30 pm
[PLEASE NOTE EARLY START]

VENUE: Mallesons Conference Room, Level 61, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney

**** INAUGURAL JIM AND JANETTE BAIN OCCASIONAL LECTURE ****

SPEAKER: MICHAEL BURLEIGH (Historian and author, most recently *Blood and Rage: A Cultural History of Terrorism* [Pan Macmillan, 2008] and *Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics* [HarperCollins, 2006])

TOPIC: *Fundamentalism and Secularism Today*

DATE: Tuesday 9 February 2010 **Bookings from 26 Jan only** **TIME:** 5.30 for 6 pm

VENUE: State Parliament House Theatre, Macquarie Street, Sydney

SPEAKER: GERARD HENDERSON (Executive Director, The Sydney Institute) & PROFESSOR ROSS FITZGERALD (Author & Columnist *The Australian*)

TOPIC: Launch of Ross Fitzgerald's memoirs *My Name is Ross: An Alcoholic's Journey* [UNSW Press, 2010]

DATE: Tuesday 2 February 2010 **Bookings from 21 Jan only** **TIME:** 5.30 for 6 pm

VENUE: Clayton Utz Seminar Room, Level 30, 1 O'Connell Street, Sydney

SPEAKER: RIC BATTELLINO (Deputy Governor, Reserve Bank of Australia)

DATE: Tuesday 23 February 2010 **Bookings from 9 Feb only** **TIME:** 5.30 for 6 pm

VENUE: Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Level 32, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney

FOR THE DIARY: ANNUAL DINNER LECTURE 2010

SIMON SCHAMA

New York based, internationally acclaimed author & historian, and BBC presenter, most recently 4-part BBC series *The American Future: A History* - made in the run-up to the 2008 US Presidential election

DATE: Tuesday 16 March 2010
TIME: 6.30 pm for 7 pm
VENUE: Star City Grand Harbour Ballroom, Sydney

FREE TO ASSOCIATES & ASSOCIATES' ONE GUEST / \$5 STUDENTS / \$10 OTHERS
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